Digital democracy? No, infocracy! The uses of social media by the Portuguese unions in the health sector

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Abstract: Trade unions are facing a deep crisis since the 70s. The causes are multiple, including factors that are exogenous to the movement and others that are endogenous, referring to its bureaucratization. Aiming to revitalize, they have been implementing several actions, among which we may refer the adoption of ICT and the Internet. This article presents the preliminary results of a research on the adoption and uses of the Internet by the unions in the health sector in Portugal. It aimed to understand if they are allowing or not the deepening of organizational democracy, a crucial factor for the revitalization. We will conclude by stating that, given the static nature and the poor interactivity that characterize the official websites of these unions and the way the social media is used, the unions are losing an opportunity to the deepening of the democratic forms of associative government and therefore to strengthen themselves.

Keywords: Trade unions, crisis, revitalization, Internet, digital democracy.

1. Introduction

The unions are facing a deep crisis since the 70s. The causes are diverse, and the crisis manifests itself mainly by the decline in the union density, but also by the loss of social and political influence of the unions (loss of power in the collective bargaining and of influence in the political arena); by the decrease in the number of individuals willing to become union delegates or by the deactivation of union structures and the inoperability of others; etc. (Alves, 2009).

Trying to overcome the crisis, trade unions are implementing diversified actions aimed at their revitalization (Frege and Kelly, 2003). Among them, we may refer the adoption of ICT and the Internet, which can be used, for example, with the objective to de-bureaucratize and to break with the oligarchic tendencies to which the unions are not immune, what is one of the causes of the crisis for some authors. It is argued that the Internet has a set of tools that can enhance the increase of the levels of organizational transparency and the promotion of effective opportunities for the participation of the membership. These are two essential pillars that help to increase the degree of trust and the credibility of the members and potential members on the unions and to deepen internal democracy, thus contributing to the revitalization.

This article intends to present the preliminary results of a research on the adoption and uses of the Internet by the unions with jurisdiction in the health sector in Portugal. We want to understand if that use is allowing or not the deepening of organizational democracy. Are these unions using the Internet to make their governance more transparent? Are the tools that can enhance the participation used by them?

We will conclude by stating that given the static nature and the poor interactivity that characterize the official websites of these unions and the way in which the social

media are used, the Internet is not allowing the deepening of the democratic forms of associative governance and, therefore, the strengthening of the trade unionism.

2. The trade unions' crisis

In the early 1970s, the foundations of the union power began to erode, what brought the crisis. "Hard times" (Chaison, 1996) were coming for the unions.

Portugal follows the general trend. Between 1978 and 2012 union density has dropped 42.3 percentage points, with a loss of more than two thirds of the union members, what is the second most pronounced downturn in the world after the New Zealand. According to the ICTWSS data, union density in Portugal was 60.8% at the beginning of the period under analysis, remaining at 18,5% in 2012. With this union density, the Portuguese trade unions movement occupies an intermediate position in the context of the countries of southern Europe and presents a similar position to countries like Germany, the Netherlands or Japan.

The crisis has been the subject of several explanations. Some of them emphasize a set of causes that are external to the movement. For instance, the theory of economic cycles underlines that there are regular patterns of growth and decline in union density accompanying growth and economic depressions. Others assume that the decrease in the levels of unionization is the epiphenomenon of structural changes in the economy (new regime of accumulation; de-industrialization, growth of the services sector, company restructuring, internationalization of the markets, financialization of the economy, etc.); in society and the labour markets (precariousness, unemployment, changes in the composition of the working class, individualization of the labour relations, reinforcement of the employer unilateralism, impossibility of building working communities, etc.); in politics (changes in state intervention, imposition of labour legislation to promote deregulation, anti-union legislation, etc.); and in the ideological sphere (individualism, shattering of workers' culture, etc.).

3. Bureaucracy, oligarchy, democracy

Notwithstanding the external factors, that play a relevant role in the crisis, this has also causes that are endogenous to the trade unions, that is, causes that are inherent to how the unions organize themselves. According to Ebbinghaus and Visser (2000), this will be a consequence of the division/fragmentation of the trade unions movement caused by political, religious or status motivations. To this, we must add the deficit of adaptability and innovation of the trade unions and their leaders. This is reflected in the adoption of inadequate strategies for the recruitment of women and young people; in a workerist attitude that tend to alienate certain groups of workers or to induce them to form their own organizations; in the non-propensity to organize the excluded (unemployed, migrant workers, workers in the informal economy, the precarious, micro and SME workers) or in the focus given to the protection of certain groups of workers.

In France, Labbé and his colleagues (Labbé, 1994, Labbé and Croisat, 1992, among many other works), based on the finding that the French trade union movement

has sunk more deep than others, underline that this happened although it has been subjected to the same economic forces as well as to similar social and cultural changes, and have not even seen such unfavorable developments in the legal framework of the union action, as has been the case in the Anglo-Saxon countries.

In one of the researches they conducted, a survey among workers who had been members of some CFDT unions, it was concluded that in about three-quarters of the cases the causes of the exit of the unions were related to factors mainly internal to the unions: 40.0% of the workers had left the organization in disagreement with union division and politicization, while just over a third felt that the union had abandoned them (the membership fee had ceased to be collected; the organization in the workplace had disappeared; no one answered the phone or opened the door at the local union headquarters, etc.). All these things are expressions of the abandonment of a grass-roots unionism, based on a network of volunteer activists elected in the workplaces, who developed the trade union activity in the companies, in favor of the deepening of centralization and bureaucratization. With that, the emphasis is placed on the representation mechanisms and unions begin to be confused with a managerial elite composed of a small group of full-time officials, whose status is accessed through co-optation, and who maintains distancing relationships with the rank and file.

The way how associative organizations are structured, as well as the way how their leaders access to the leadership, act and perpetuated themselves in power are issues that have been addressed since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, involving authors so different from each other, such as Karl Marx, Sydney and Beatrice Webb (1977 [1894]), Max Weber (2004 [1919-1922]) or Robert Michels (1961 [1910]).

From the work of these authors, it seems that bureaucracy and oligarchy, on the one hand, and democracy, on the other, will be incompatible.

The problem of organizational democracy was introduced in the 1950s by Gouldner (1955), who argued that if in the organizations there is an iron law of the oligarchy there is also an iron law of democracy acting as countercurrent. This is based on a commitment involving the democratic control of the leadership and the possibility of member participation in the decision-making processes. However, it was only following the seminal study by Lipset and his colleagues on the International Typographical Union (Lipset *et al.*, 1956) that the debate within the social sciences really begins. Several studies were given to the print showing the existence of specific mechanisms which may counteract the trend presented as inexorable since Michels, thus concluding that the union democracy is possible. More recently Morris and Fosh (2000) detected four models of union democracy that although centered on the UK society, have heuristic value for other latitudes: liberal pluralism, grass-roots activism, consumer trade unionism, and individual accountability.

In short, the associations in general, and the unions in particular, live internally in a permanent tension between democratic principles, involving mobilization, participation and control of the leaderships, and bureaucratic and oligarchic principles, meaning apathy, estrangement, centralization of decisions, institutionalization, etc..

However, associative organizations can only be successful if their members are not excluded from the decisions and if they can exercise democratic control over the bureaucracy.

4. Adoption and uses of ICT by the unions

Given this complex situation, and with the aim of overcoming it and revitalizing themselves, by reversing the membership decline, the unions have been launching several actions. They include their strengthening through the recruitment of new members, mostly using a services strategy instead of an organizing one (Heery *et al.*, 2003); the processes of structural adjustment manifested by a wave of unprecedented mergers; the reinforcement and interconnection of the trade union action at all levels; the building of alliances with other social movements; the implementation of new agendas; the renewal of leaderships and the use of ICT and the Internet.

According to the Ad Hoc Committee on Labour and the Web (1999), trade unions only belatedly recognized the potential of ICTs. This fact certainly reflects the initial attitude of suspicion, in some cases even of rejection (Alves, 1994), of the ICTs by many union leaders, mainly those with a low level of digital literacy, who considered them one of the main causes of unemployment. In addition, we can also point out their fear about the possibility of replacement of the vertical model of communication by a network communication, about the changing of the power structures in the organizations or about the real-time action.

However, despite these resistances, the advantages offered by the ICTs, based on speed, flexibility, cost and its greater reach compared with the traditional means of communication, stimulated their use by the unions. For Fiorito *et al.* (2000), the main reasons for the adoption of these technologies were the need for rationalization and the size of the organization, as for these authors, the larger it is, the greater will be the propensity to use them.

Once the importance of ICTs has been assumed, they are now widely disseminated in the unions. However, there are significant differences in the way they are used and in the domains of trade union activity where they are applied (Fiorito *et al.*, 2002), as they can be employed in several fields and for multiple purposes. Fiorito *et al.* (2002) consider that their impact is more positive on organizational issues than on overall effectiveness.

As Fuchs states, computer networks, unlike traditional media, not only enable information (cognition) and communication, but also foster cooperative information production (Fuchs, 2014). Unions can mobilize the Internet according to these three dimensions, using both commercial platforms and other non-commercial alternatives.

In what concerns the first dimension, through their own websites or using the online news platforms or the video/photo sharing ones, as well as the online social networks, they can freely disseminate their points of view without any type of mediation or constraint (Ad Hoc Committee, 1999; Darlington, 2000); give information about their activity from a perspective of organizational transparency (Ad Hoc Committee, 1999;

Diamond and Freeman, 2002); strengthen the services already provided to the members, such as the dissemination of information relating to the collective bargaining or the legislation; or provide new services, namely in the education and training domains through e-learning platforms (Bélanger, 2006). They will also be able to research information that is need for union action (Fiorito *et al.*, 2000) and to give information that enables the recruitment of new members, while providing the membership form online, or promote unionization campaigns. They can also organize workers in companies with anti-union policies or groups of workers like those that often move from one branch of the economy to another, cases where the solution may lie in launching virtual unions (Dolvik, 2002).

In the second dimension, using the same tools, as well as blogs, a forum, chats, microblogging platforms, mailing lists or sms via mobile phone, unions can mobilize workers for collective action or win the public opinion to support workers in work conflicts (Diamond and Freeman, 2002).

In the third dimension, the use of wikis, which imply collaborative work, and of the online social networks, which may favor the formation of virtual communities, can benefit union action in several domains. Potentially, these tools allow to strengthen the bonds between all the levels of the organization, namely improving the links between the rank and file and the leaderships and enable the deepening of participation. But they will also allow to build bridges between the unions and other social movements, thus reinforcing the "external solidarity" (Lévesque and Murray, 2003). Finally, they allow to increase the coordination and the solidarity within national trade union movements or among the trade union movements on a global scale (Lee, 1997; Darlington, 2000).

Nevertheless, two problems can arise and make inefficient the unions' investment on the Internet. The first refers to the info-exclusion of the members, due to economic factors or lack of skills; the other refers to the resistance that some workers may put to their use, even though they can access to the network and have the necessary skills to do so (Lucio, 2003).

The possibility of de-bureaucratization and the deepening of union democracy through the increasing of the organizational transparency and of the membership participation is a field in which some authors see an essential contribution of the Internet (Diamond and Freeman, 2002; Greer, 2002). It is argued that it will be possible to break the iron law of the oligarchy and foster a digital democracy, through the online social networks or through the creation of websites by those who oppose to the trade unions leaderships. Therefore, there will be no alternative to the unions' leaders but to disseminate pertinent information about the governance of the union, to consult the members before making important decisions, to implement two-way communication tools, or even to introduce the electronic vote.

Some authors even argue that ICTs and the Internet have given an important contribution to a qualitative transformation of the unions. New types have emerged, which are called "cyberunions" (Shostak, 2002), "e-unions" (Darlington, 2000), "open-

source unionism" (Freeman and Rogers, 2002), or "unionism 2.0" (Gutiérrez-Rubi, 2009).

5. The adoption of ICT by the Portuguese unions

In Portugal, ICTs are also widely widespread in the trade unions movement, accompanying the widening of the diffusion of these technologies in the Portuguese society. In fact, according to Statistics Portugal data, if in 2004 only 37,2% of the Portuguese between 16 and 74 years used computers and 29,3% accessed the Internet, one decade after, in 2015, the values have risen to, respectively, 69,2% and 68,6%.

Measuring the union access to the Internet through the existence of an e-mail address, we found that in 2011 these organizations accessed to the network to a lesser degree than the companies with more than 10 employees and the public administration. As far as the presence on the Internet is concerned, the situation was somewhat different. Effectively, it was higher in the trade unions movement than in the companies with more than 10 workers, but lower in comparison with the public administration (Alves *et al.*, 2011).

Focusing the analysis on the union presence on the Internet, we may conclude by the existence of some relevant asymmetries. First, only 36,4% of the regional structures of the confederations (*uniões distritais*) had a website that year against 48,0% in the federations (branch structures), 64,1% in the individual unions and 83,3% among the confederations. Second, in the case of the individual unions, the presence varied strongly according to the branches, going from 16.7% in the agriculture and fishery till 91.7% in health.

The different social composition of the workers, their differentiated levels of digital literacy, the different profiles of the leaders and their strategies, as well as the resources of the unions, mainly the financial ones, will be the main factors that explain these asymmetries.

It is within this framework of an asymmetric diffusion of the ICTs in the Portuguese trade unions movement that the present study is carried out. It is focused on the branch where these technologies are most widespread.

6. Methodology

The choosing of the health sector was based on several criteria. Firstly, because it is the one where, as mentioned above, there is the largest proportion of unions with presence on the Internet (91.7% in 2011 and 92,9% in 2018), being that the presence is still higher among the unions with jurisdiction in the specific health professions, this is physicians, nurses, psychologists, pharmaceuticals and technicians (95,0% in both years). Secondly, because it was expected that info-exclusion was more mitigated in this branch than in the others, on the one hand, given the relative high youthfulness mainly of the nurses, the largest professional group, and, on the other, the high skills that it requires.

Regarding the first aspect, according to the Social Report of the Ministry of Health and the National Health Service (NHS), the average age of the workers was 44 years in 2017, ranging from a maximum of 48 years for the technicians and a minimum of 41 for the nurses (ACSS, 2017). In the case of the nurses, this is a professional group which has grown a lot in the last years. If, in 1999, there were 37,623 nurses enrolled in the Order of Nurses, the professional association that issue the professional card that allows the exercise of the profession, in 2014 they were 66,452 (OE, 2015).

Regarding the second aspect, the Social Report shows that 61,6% of the staff of the Ministry of Health and the NHS has a higher education degree, with graduates representing 45,9% of the total (ACSS, 2018).

According to Greene and Kirton (2003) the biggest beneficiaries with the Internet are time-limited workers, particularly women. So, a third criterion for the choice of the health sector was its high feminization rate. In 2017 the average rate was 76,3%. In some professions it is even higher: 79.3% among the diagnostic and therapeutic technicians; 83.4% among the nurses and 86.4% in the case of the higher health technicians (ACSS, 2018).

The trade union system in the health sector is strongly balkanized according to the different professions or occupations, to which the political divisions are added. In this research, we analyzed the presence of 28 unions on the Internet. Our focus were the unions that represent dominantly workers in the public administration. Some other unions also represent workers in the health, however most of their membership is in the private sector.

We analyzed the websites of the unions according to three dimensions, based on the work of Rego *et al.* (2013): the content, ie the subjects that are addressed; interactivity, that is a complex communication process that can be embodied in a one-way communication or a two-way communication, what means the possibility of participation and intervention of the membership; and usability, which relates to the degree of ease of the navigation. Each of these dimensions comprises several sub-dimensions and dozens of indicators, such as the publication of the rule book, the identification of the members of the national executive committees, the provision of documents, the dissemination of the services provided or the useful links, in what concerns the first dimension; the availability of means of contact, the existence of online forms, the existence of chat, forum or surveys in the case of the second dimension; and the adjustment of the page, the existence of the search tool or the use of the scroll bar, regarding the third dimension.

For the present article, considering its express purpose, we have fundamentally retained the sub-dimensions organizational government, related to the content dimension, whose indicators allow us to measure the degree of organizational transparency; and the forms of contact and participation tools, related to the interactivity dimension, whose indicators allow us to evaluate the promotion of effective opportunities for the membership participation.

However, the presence on the Internet could be multidimensional. So, we also considered a whole set of platforms that emerged in the last decade and a half and which configure what some authors call social media, which characterizes the Web 2.0. (O'Reilly, 2005). In this field, we may find the social networks online (Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+); the social news services (Reddit); the video sharing platforms (You Tube, DailyMotion, Vimeo); the blogs; the microblogging platforms (Twitter); the online pin boards (Tumblr, Pinterest) and the photo sharing platforms (Instagram, Flickr). The analysis took place during the month of August 2018. In the case of Facebook, we analyzed the activity registered in the first six months of 2018.

7. The presence of the health unions on the Internet
7.1. The presence of health unions on the Internet

Twenty-six out of the twenty-eight unions that were considered in the analysis have a presence on the Internet through an official website. The exceptions are SINAPEM and STSSSS[1]. In the first case, we hypothesize that this union no longer exists, given that the latest news about it dates back to 2011. In the second case, the union usually has a website but now it is not accessible.

Most of the websites provide a connection to the online social networks, mainly Facebook, as revealed in Table 1.

Table 1 - Proportion of the websites that have a connection to online social networks (%) in August 2018

Social networks online	%
Facebook	76,9
Twitter	19,2
LinkedIn	15,4
Google+	7,7

Source: Database of the presence of the Portuguese unions on the Internet[2]

In almost all websites there is a connection for the online social networks. However, except in the case of Facebook, the institutional presence of the unions on the social media is very scarce, sometimes even non-existent, as Table 2 shows.

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[1] The abbreviations of the trade unions are decoded in the Annex.
[2] The database is in SPSS format. It contains data on all Portuguese trade unions that has a presence on the Internet, regardless the type assumed by this presence, and is composed of dozens of variables.

Table 2 - Proportion of unions with presence in the social media (%) in August 2018

Types of social media	Platforms	%
Social networks online	Facebook	84,6[1]
	Twitter	3,8
	Google+	3,8
	LinkedIn	0,0[2]
Video sharing platforms	You Tube	34,6[3]
	DailyMotion	0,0
	Vimeo	0,0
Photo sharing platforms	Instagram	15,4
	Flickr	0,0
Online pin boards	Tumblr	0,0
	Pinterest	0,0
Social news services	Reddit	0,0

Source: Database of the presence of the Portuguese unions on the Internet

Notes: 1 Of the twenty-two unions with a page on the Facebook, only thirteen keep it updated till August. In the cases of SFP and SMN, the last posts dated back to May; in the ASPAS and SINDITE to June and in the SIFAP, SNP, SNF, SINPROFARM and SITAS to July.
2 Although no union is present on LinkedIn, there are two whose presidents have an account in this online social network with a more professional character.
3 In addition to the nine unions with their own channel on You Tube, there are videos on this platform from two other organizations that were not uploaded by them.

Therefore, the presence is broader on Facebook, reaching a very high expression, what is in line with the national trend, as Facebook is by far the social network that is most used in Portugal. In fact, according with the data available, in 2013, 98,0% of the respondents in a survey said they had a profile in this social network against 13,7% in Google+; 10,4% in Hi5; 9,0% in Twitter and 7,5% in LinkedIn (OberCom, 2014).

The twenty-two unions that currently are present on Facebook use it for different purposes. Most of them use this social network to provide relevant information on the profession they represent or in a logic of providing services. For instance, SIMAC uses Facebook exclusively for disseminating training actions and/or offers of employment. On the contrary, SEP or SERAM are examples of unions whose purposes on the Facebook are organizing and mobilizing the membership. SEP, has also as objective to denounce the working conditions in the workplaces and keep the nurses mobilized in defense of the NHS. In the page of this union we can also find publications on issues that go beyond the labour sphere.

It should also be added that if the presence in the commercial platforms is scarce, we may say that none of these organizations are present on non-commercial and alternative platforms such as Diaspora* or Riseup.

7.2. Digital democracy?

The transparency of the organizational government and the participation of the membership are two essential pillars of organizational democracy, that is intended to be broad, in the sense of being based on the exercise of a citizenship that favors the collective making of decisions.

Regarding the first pillar, we can define the concept of "organizational transparency" as consisting in the "existence of policies, standards and procedures that aim to provide the interested people with information about the organization according to general characteristics of access, use, quality of content, understanding and accountability" (Cappelli and Leite, 2008).

The Internet is an excellent channel through which trade unions can foster transparency by publicizing the rules that regulate their activity, by publicizing their rule books; provide information about the way how the government is running; or provide detailed documentation that allows members or potential members to discuss and deliberate in an informed base.

The analysis of the official websites of the unions allows us to conclude that there are very low levels of organizational transparency, which are evident in Table 3, where we can find some key aspects of the governance of the unions.

Table 3 - Proportion of websites that provide information on union governance (%) in August 2018

Information on governance	%
Publicity of the members of the governing bodies	76,9
Identification of the NEC members' roles	15,4
General information on the governance of the organization	0,0
Convocation of the General Meetings	11,5
Information on the NEC meetings	0,0

Source: Database of the presence of the Portuguese unions on the Internet

It should be noted that none of the websites provide information on how the organization is structured or on the scheduling of the NEC (National Executive Committee) meetings. In relation to the general meetings, only a small number announces their call. SINPROFARM and SEP also carry out this publicity on Facebook.

The great majority of the websites (76.9%) publicize who are the members of the unions' governing bodies. As a rule, the disclosure of this information is made only through a list of their names. Only in the three cases (SEP, SERAM and SINDEPOR) the list is accompanied by photos. More important than that is the disclosure of information on which are the functions of the members of the NEC, a relevant practice in order to know who is who within the union's board. However, this practice is extremely rare, as we observe this information only in four websites (SINPROFARM, SIFAP, STEPH and STFPSN).

We also find this tendency towards a deep opacity when we analyze the availability of documents that are relevant to the associative government, such as those shown in Table 4.

Table 4 - Proportion of websites that provide relevant documents on the governance of the union (%) in August 2018

Documents	%
Minutes of the NEC meetings	0,0
Minutes of the General Meetings	0,0
Minutes of the electoral processes	0,0
Action Programmes	3,8
Activity Reports	3,8
Budget	0,0
Annual reports and accounts	3,8
Rule Book	76,9

Source: Database of the presence of the Portuguese unions on the Internet

As can be seen, no union publicizes on its website the minutes of the general meetings, of the NEC meetings or of the electoral processes. Other strategic documents are also missing, such as the budget, the reports and accounts or the activity reports. Only one of the organizations (SMZS) make available the action programs proposed by the winning list in the last election. Surprisingly, there are unions that do not disclose the rule book, the constitution of any organization.

We may say that most of the websites have a reserved area, to which only the members have access. The existence of this reserved area suggests that we must be cautious about the conclusion we have drawn regarding organizational transparency, as we can hypothesize that these documents are hosted there. Although, we doubt that this happens, if so the potential members are deprived of their knowledge.

The second pillar of the organizational democracy is the active participation of the membership in the associative life and, namely in the decision-making processes. According to a broad concept of organizational democracy, participation is seen as an inclusion factor, covering a wide range of actions, from institutional processes (for example, participation in the elections) to formal and informal discussion and deliberation practices.

As many authors point out, as the size of the organization increases, it tends towards its bureaucratization, the professionalization of its leaderships, the delegation and centralization in decision-making processes and the increase of the distance between the leaderships and the rank and file, limiting its expression.

To overcome this trend and promote an organizational democracy based on participation, the solution lies in the opening of spaces for the intervention of the membership that stimulate the participation. This can occur through several channels and the Internet has an enormous potential to enable these opportunities by taking advantage of the tools it provides.

Firstly, through the communication channels, namely the contact tools. In this field we find that if all websites provide a general e-mail address and 42,3% of them a form for contact with the union, for giving a suggestion, making a comment or making a

complaint regarding the working conditions, the possibility of direct contact with the union's direction or departments via e-mail or mobile phone is very reduced or even non-existent, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 - Proportion of websites that provide channels of communication with the organization and its leadership, by type of tool (%), in August 2018

Channels	%
General E-mail	92,3
E-mail of the leadership	11,5
E-mail of the union's departments	7,7
General mobile phone number	26,9
Leadership mobile phone number	0,0
Department's mobile phone number	0,0
Online form for contacting the union	42,3

Source: Database of the presence of the Portuguese unions on the Internet

We may state that an ease contact with the associative leadership represents an important contribution to the revitalization of the trade unions, by allowing to strengthen the connection with the rank and file, while if it does not exist it constitutes a discouraging factor of participation.

In what concerns digital interactivity, it should be emphasized that the situation is even more negative, apart from the fact that, as previously mentioned, most of the websites (76,9%) have a connection to at least one online social network. All other tools either do not exist (as is the case of the chat or forum) or are present in a minority number of cases (Table 6).

Table 6 - Proportion of websites that provide tools that allow interactivity, by type of tool (%) in August 2018

Tools	%
Blog	7,7
Links to social networks	76,9
Chat	0,0
Forum	0,0
Feeds/RSS	11,5

Source: Database of the presence of the Portuguese unions on the Internet

On the other hand, the provision of tools that allow to comment, to share and to evaluate the information are extremely rare, except the one that make possible to share the information, which exists in a half of the websites. Several other tools in this domain either do not exist or can be found in a very restricted number of cases. The same is true for the surveys or the electronic vote, the last one totally absent. We may find surveys only in the website of SINPROFARM. However, they do not intend to scrutinize the policies pursued by this union (Table 7).

Table 7 - Proportion of websites that provide tools that make possible to comment, to share and to evaluate the information, to make surveys and that give the possibility to the membership to publish articles (%) in August 2018

Tools	%
Comment of the information	7,7
• Directly	7,7
• Through the social networks	3,8
Evaluation of the information	0,0
Sharing information	50,0
• Through email	23,1
• Through the social networks	42,3
Evaluation of the website	0,0
Possibility of writing articles by the membership	7,7
Surveys	3,8
Electronic vote	0,0

Source: Database of the presence of the Portuguese unions on the Internet

In what concerns the use of the platforms that configure the Web 2.0, the main conclusion that we could draw from the analysis to Facebook is that the participation is – except in some cases that are exceptional – almost marginal, since the data shows, in general, a very low number of comments and shares. More relevant: the unions do not make any attempt to encourage it. For example, there are no opinion polls – not even to measure the degree of satisfaction with the content of the page – nor questions introduced that could stimulate the debate. As a rule, the unions do not react to the questions or criticisms that are formulated in the comment boxes. The comments remain invariably unanswered. It is also extremely rare for a union to like a comment. Besides that, only the pages of SERAM and SFP are open to posts from everyone.

Participation in the You Tube has also a very restricted character. The two videos of SINPROFARM, that were not uploaded by the union, were seen very few times and have only two likes and no comments. Nine unions have a channel in this platform, being that the ones of SIM and STFPSN have no subscribers while the others have a very limited number (two for the SMZS channel; three for SINDITE; eight for the SINDEPOR channel or thirty-seven for SIPE). The values rise to 108 (SEP) and 239 (SE). Despite the great number of views of the videos in the case of some unions, this has not a translation into a high participation since the number of likes, dislikes and comments are very reduced.

Briefly, to the limited interactivity provided by the Internet websites, since one-way communication prevails overwhelmingly over two-way one, we must added the very low levels of interactivity that exists on the social media platforms, what raises a serious question about the deepening of organizational democracy.

8. Conclusion

Throughout the world, with great acuity in Portugal, the unions came late into the digital age. However, ICT and the Internet are now widely spread in the Portuguese trade union movement, although the asymmetries observed. This does not fail to call up some

issues about their use, such as the strategies that underlie them, the objectives that are pursued with them or the level of their mastery by the unions.

Accompanying this broad diffusion, a trend seems to be clear: the unions are not taking full advantage of the potential of the Internet. That is clearly expressed in the websites. They are static and restricted to an official repository of the information of the organization. Simultaneously, prevails the one-way communication instead of a two-way communication that promotes participation.

Furthermore, organizational transparency is practically non-existent, since the relevant documents or decisions taken at the general meetings or the NEC meetings appear not to be disclosed. And if the membership may have access to this information by other means (for instance, paper), potential members do not have it.

On the other hand, in the case of the online social networks, mainly Facebook, participation is not fostered. Consequently, it is very limited, as has been shown. And the logic with which this social network is used by some unions obeys to what Dijk (2000) calls the "marketing model", that is, some organizations use it only to publicizing the services they offer or providing information that is considered useful to the profession in which they have jurisdiction, instead of organizing and mobilizing the membership.

What the websites and the use of other platforms prove is that the bureaucratic model of organization was extended to the virtual world, giving rise to an infocracy (Zuurmond, 1994 cited by Dijk, 2000), based on the strengthening of the existing communication standards, only changing the way the information is transmitted. This is of a limited nature and is not related to aspects concerning the government of the trade unions. At the same time, there is no increase in the opportunities for debate or in the number of active participants, the electronic vote is not implemented, etc.

Thus, the presence of these unions on the Internet is not giving a contribution to a deepening of the organizational transparency and membership participation, the two essential pillars of organizational democracy. The way the network is being used, instead of helping to open the organizations, on the contrary is contributing to the perpetuation of its closure.

This refutes the technological determinism that underlies the theses of the authors who, imbued with a "techno-euphoria" (Fuchs, 2014), emphasize that the broad dissemination of information the Internet allows, increases the accountability of the leaders, while at the same time it deepens the democratic deliberation; that the two-way communication provided by tools such as e-mail, mailing lists, chat rooms or forum, makes it possible to increase the participation; and that the constitution of virtual communities favors the increase of discussion and mobilization, as was strongly emphasized by Castells (2013 [2012]) when analyzing a set of protest movements ranging from the Arab Spring to the Movement of the Indignados in Spain, passing by Occupy Wall Street. In the case we studied, as in Hindman's study, digital democracy seems to be nothing more than a myth (Hindman, 2008).

If the Internet provides tools that could foster the deepening of organizational democracy, this will only really happen if the leaders of the organizations wish so, defining for this purpose the appropriate strategies, since this deepening represents a challenge for the installed power structures, as noted by Darlington (2000). Underlying the implementation of the presence of the unions on the Internet are social processes that many forget, which influence how websites are built or how online social networks are used. Put in another way, the use of the Internet will be what the leaders of the organizations want it to be.

It should be emphasized that, in the context of the trade union crisis, ICT in general and the Internet are not in themselves a panacea for overcoming the situation. The potential that these technologies demonstrate can only materialize, and they can only give a contribution to the revitalization of the trade unions if the investment made is creative and if it is an element of a strategy to strengthen the trade union organization. This should involve the promotion of inclusion, participation and transparency; the increase of the capacity of representation; the intensification of the recruitment of new members and the presence of the trade unions in the workplace; the deepening of the link between the membership and the organizations; the mobilization of the workers or new agendas composed of matters that go beyond the strict labour domain, in a perspective of social capital unionism (Johnson and Jarley, 2005). Basically, this means that the technologies should be adopted in the framework of an "organizing" strategy, a crucial factor for the revitalization of the unions and not in the framework of the "services" strategy that is currently dominant.

If the adoption of these technologies is not framed by this model, this can even lead to a disinvestment of the physical presence of the unions in the workplaces, what will certainly cause more damage than the problems Internet will apparently solve.

This is an issue not even mentioned, much less discussed, by the advocates of the cyber-unionism who, in an uncritical perspective, and fascinated by the admirable new world of ICTs, consider that it can effectively replace the presence of trade unions in the workplaces. The technologies, assuming a great relevance and opening an important window of opportunity for the revitalization of the trade union movement, can in no way replace the union organization in the workplaces. The union is the workers. A union does not make sense if it is not anchored in the workplaces and if workers can not directly and openly contact it through their grassroot militants, the union delegates. If computer-mediated communication is important, face-to-face communication remains essential, as shown by Labbé's studies on the crisis of the French trade unionism.

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Statistical Sources

ICTWSS (http://uva-aias.net/en/ictwss)
INE – Instituto Nacional de Estatística (www.ine.pt)

Annex - Trade unions in the health sector in Portugal

Union	Type of union	Foundation Year	Affiliation	Presence on the Internet
SMZS – Sindicato dos Médicos da Zona Sul Union of Physicians of Southern Portugal	Professional	1975	Not affiliated*	Website; Facebook; Instagram
SMZC – Sindicato dos Médicos da Zona Centro Union of Physicians of Central Portugal	Professional	1979	Not affiliated*	Website; Facebook; Instagram
SMN – Sindicato dos Médicos do Norte Union of Physicians of Northern Portugal	Professional	1982	Not affiliated*	Website; Facebook
SIM – Sindicato Independente dos Médicos Independent Union of Physicians	Professional	1979	Not affiliated	Website; Facebook; You Tube
SEP – Sindicato dos Enfermeiros Portugueses Union of Portuguese Nurses	Professional	1975 [1945]	CGTP-IN	Website; Facebook; Google+; You Tube
SERAM – Sindicato dos Enfermeiros da Região Autónoma da Madeira Union of Nurses of the Autonomous Region of Madeira	Professional	1975 [1959]	Not affiliated*	Website; Facebook; Instagram
SE – Sindicato dos Enfermeiros Union of Nurses	Professional	1975 [1957]	UGT	Website; Facebook; You Tube; Instagram
SIPE – Sindicato Independente dos Profissionais de Enfermagem Independent Union of Nursing Professionals	Professional	1975 [1959]	Not affiliated	Website; Facebook; Twitter; You Tube
ASPE – Associação Sindical Portuguesa dos Enfermeiros Union Association of Portuguese Nurses	Professional	2017	Not affiliated	Website; Facebook
SINDEPOR – Sindicato Democrático dos Enfermeiros de Portugal Democratic Union of Nurses of Portugal	Professional	2017	UGT	Website; Facebook; You Tube
SFP – Sindicato dos Fisioterapeutas Portugueses Union of Portuguese Physiotherapists	Professional	1997	Not affiliated*	Website; Facebook
SNP – Sindicato Nacional dos Psicólogos National Union of Psychologists	Professional	1975 [1972]	Not affiliated*	Website; Facebook
SNF – Sindicato Nacional dos Farmacêuticos National Union of Pharmaceuticals	Professional	1975	Not affiliated	Website; Facebook

Annex (Continuation)

Union	Type of union	Foundation Year	Affiliation	Presence on the Internet
SIMAC – Sindicato Nacional de Massagistas de Recuperação e Cinesioterapeutas National Union of Recovery Masseurs and Kinesiotherapists	Professional	1986	Not affiliated	Website; Facebook
SINDITE – Sindicato dos Técnicos Superiores de Diagnóstico e Terapêutica Diagnostic and Therapeutic Professionals Union	Professional	1979	UGT	Website; Facebook; You Tube
STSS – Sindicato Nacional dos Técnicos Superiores de Saúde das Áreas de Diagnóstico e Terapêutica National Union of High Technicians in Diagnostic and Therapy	Professional	1975	Not affiliated*	Website
SIFAP – Sindicato Nacional dos Profissionais de Farmácia e Paramédicos National Union of Pharmacy and Paramedical Professionals	Occupational	1975 [1934]	Not affiliated*	Website; Facebook
SINPROFARM – Sindicato Nacional dos Profissionais de Farmácia National Union of Pharmacy Professionals	Occupational	1975 [1935]	Not affiliated	Website; Facebook
STEPH – Sindicato dos Técnicos de Emergência Pré-Hospitalar Union of Pre-Hospital Emergency Technicians	Professional	2007	Not affiliated	Website; Facebook
SINAPEM – Sindicato Nacional dos Profissionais de Emergência Médica National Union of Medical Emergency Professionals	Professional	2010	Not affiliated	----
ASPAS – Associação Sindical do Pessoal Administrativo da Saúde Union Association of Health Administrative Personnel	Occupational	1992	USI	Website; Facebook; Instagram
SITAS - Sindicato Independente dos Técnicos Auxiliares de Saúde Independent Union of Auxiliary Health Technicians	Occupational	2017	USI	Website; Facebook

Annex (Continuation)

Union	Type of union	Foundation Year	Affiliation	Presence on the Internet
STFPSSRA – Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Funções Públicas e Sociais do Sul e Regiões Autónomas Union of Workers in Public and Social Functions of the Southern Portugal and Autonomous Regions	All grades union	1976	CGTP-IN	Website
STFPSN - Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Funções Públicas e Sociais do Norte Union of Workers in Public and Social Functions of the Northern Portugal	All grades union	1976	CGTP-IN	Website; Facebook; You Tube
STFPSC - Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Funções Públicas e Sociais do Centro Union of Workers in Public and Social Functions of the Central Portugal	All grades union	1977	CGTP-IN	Website; Facebook
SINTAP – Sindicato dos Trabalhadores da Administração Pública e de Entidades com Fins Públicos Union of Workers of the Public Administration and Entities with Public Purposes	All grades union	1979	UGT	Website; Facebook; You Tube
STFP-RAM - Sindicato dos Trabalhadores da Função Pública da Região Autónoma da Madeira Union of Workers of the Public Administration of the Autonomous Region of Madeira	All grades union	1976	Not affiliated*	Website
STSSSS – Sindicato dos Trabalhadores da Saúde, Solidariedade e Segurança Social Union of Workers of Health, Solidarity and Social Security	All grades union	1977	Not affiliated*	----

* Unions not affiliated, but that are members of the Common Front of Public Administration Unions and/or of sectoral or regional structures of the CGTP-IN.