



DIGITAL CABINETS: THE ROLE OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION IN PARLIAMENTARY ROUTINES

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Abstract

This article investigates the use of digital tools by parliamentary offices in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies. Unlike the literature of the area traditionally does, our research analyzes the point of view of the system operators. We applied a survey to the parliamentary staff working with communication in federal deputies' offices. From some questions about impact of these tools, we created two communication indexes, external and internal. Then, we propose a typology of the offices' communication. We cross the data with the political parties, to emphasize the distinctions in type of communication adopted by them. This research contributes to emphasizing the use of these tools not only to contact citizens, but in the offices' organization. Evidence suggests that these technologies affect not only office external relations (its importance as communication), but the internal work routine itself.

Keywords: Digital parliament; Social media; Legislative; Parliamentary advisory; Internet and politics.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing number of studies on the impact of digital technologies on the political representation relations and communication strategies of both the parliamentary institution and members of parliament in their relationship with the ordinary citizen and with other institutions (COLEMAN; MOSS, 2008; LESTON-BANDEIRA, 2012; LARSSON, 2014; LILLEKER *et al.*, 2012, 2013, 2014; TENSCHER, 2014; BARROS; BERNARDES; REHBEIN, 2016). This growing body of research is itself an indicator of the importance of the topic and of the possibilities for the

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internet and digital technologies to influence the nature of political representation relations between elites and citizens, as well as the daily functioning of the democratic governance of representative institutions. Several analysts have devoted themselves to the subject with different goals and methods, empirical universes and different outcomes.

In this context, many studies on the impact of digital technologies and their tools (such as website, social media, and so on) focus on the online behavior of politicians from a variety of analytical perspectives (COLEMAN, 2005; MARQUES; AQUINO; MIOLA, 2014 ; NIELSEN; VACCARI, 2014), usually from an “external” perspective of analysis, that is, focused on the effects of representatives' online activity on their relationship with ordinary citizens and other civil society actors. From this perspective, a number of issues still closer to the daily routine of parliamentary activity remains subject to analysis, including: How do the system operators themselves, those who manage parliamentary term of office, realize the role of these tools? This is our central research question, from which a number of others arise, such as: Are Brazilian parliamentary digital cabinets inserted in a new logic of political representation, or is the use of these tools still collateral and residual in the management of parliamentary term of office? In addition to external use with the electorate, are these tools also used and do they have an impact on the internal use of the offices? How do digital technologies influence parliamentary routine?

A central question in social media studies has been how to measure the use and impacts of these technologies in the process of political representation. In this article, we seek to reverse the question repeatedly asked by the literature, to check not the impact of these tools on legislative outputs, but – in rather rare perspective – on changes *within* parliamentary offices, to the organization of their *work routine*

This study proposes two central elements, which we consider to fill a gap in Brazilian research on social media and parliament: a) investigate the role of digital tools from the actors' internal logic; b) carry out this investigation from the parliamentary assistants, who are the actors who control and organize the daily routine of the mandate, rather than the parliamentary itself.

This look at the parliamentary assistance – which are the basis of the work done in the exercise of a term of office – as a unit of analysis, is an attempt to complement other studies on the chamber of deputies and the exercise of the term of office by the deputies undertaken by Brazilian political science. As a rule, they are very focused on the performance of the individual representative, to the detriment of the team that surrounds him. It is important to point out that, in the model adopted in the Brazilian federal

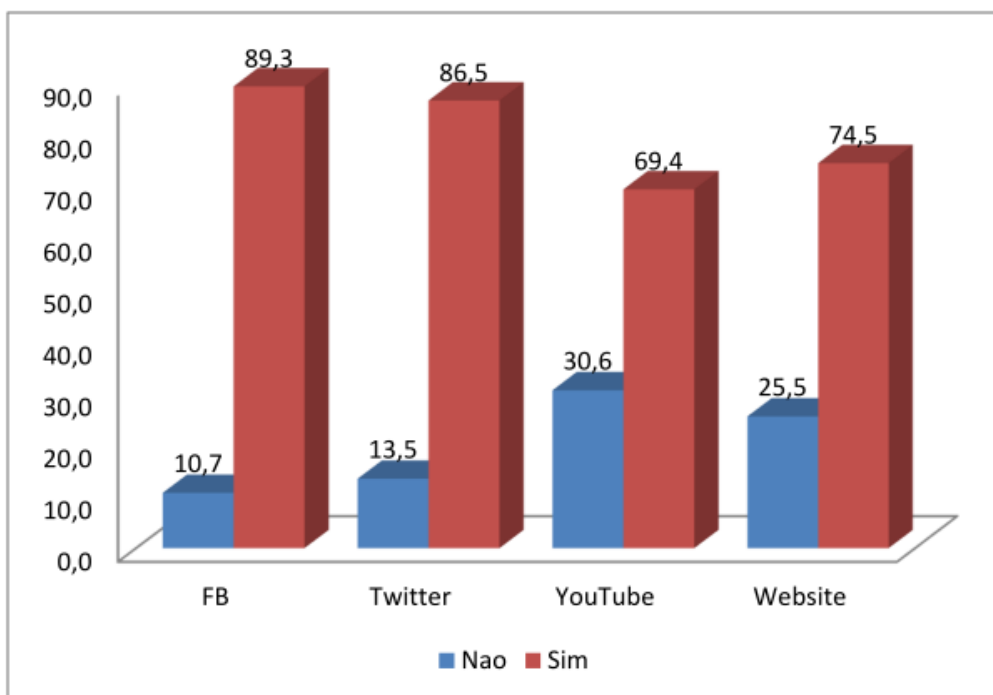
legislative term, the deputies basically have two distinct advisory structures. One is the Chamber's Permanent Advisory, which has been the subject of a recent investigation (SANTOS, 2014; SANTOS; CANELLO, 2016), composed of public servants, who provide information and analysis, when requested, essentially on topics related to the elaboration of public policies. Another is the political parliamentary assistants, who hold positions in committee, at the choice of each deputy. They work directly in the offices and advise the daily routine of parliamentary work. There are, besides these, the advisory structures linked to the party leaderships. Our choice of unit of analysis only contemplates the parliamentary assistants assigned directly to the offices of the deputies, in positions of trust. This is because they tend to deal more directly with political issues in the narrow sense, a topic on which our research on political communication by deputies is inserted.

As a method, we applied a *survey*⁴ to the parliamentary assistants of the offices of federal deputies in the Chamber of Deputies. We obtained 144 responses (28% of the universe) distributed in a representative sample of this universe, as we will detail in the section on research design.

Initially, we will present some initial data on the use of social media by Brazilian representatives, to contextualize the phenomenon that we will address and demonstrate its importance. The data refer to Brazilian federal deputies and were collected by the GEIST / *Grupo de Pesquisa em Atores, Instituições e Tecnologias Digitais* (Research Group on Actors, Institutions and Digital Technologies), before the start of the 2014 election campaign and refer to the 54th Legislative term, during which our questionnaire was applied. First, we can check the use of various types of platforms (websites, an already traditional tool, and three types of social media) by representatives.

⁴ *Survey* is the technical term for public opinion polling, which uses closed questionnaires and is sample. That is, from a sample one can get the opinion of the universe of represented.

Graph 1 - Percentage of platforms used by federal deputies (n = 513)

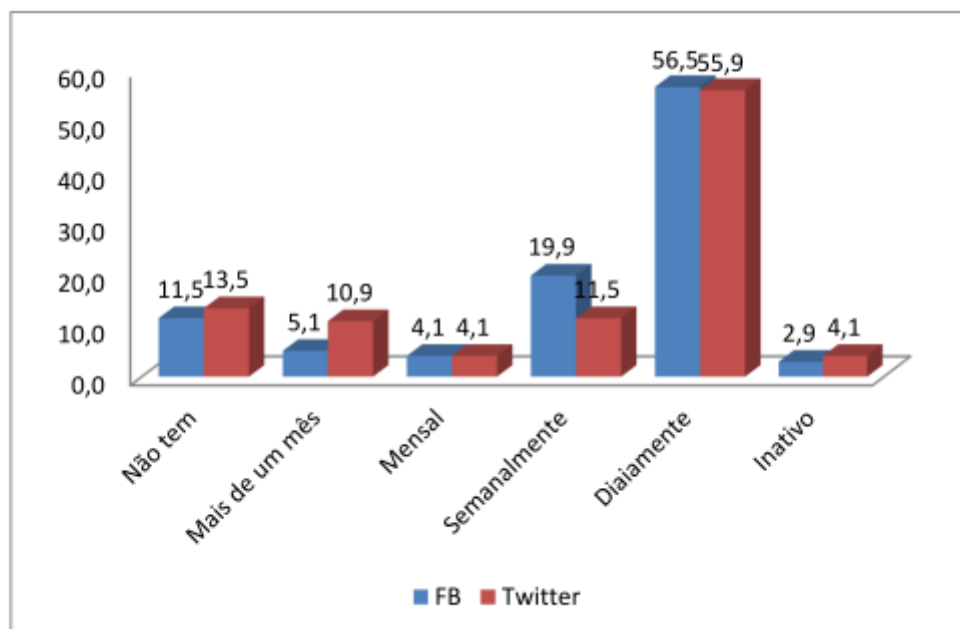


Caption: Blue: No. Red: Yes.

Source: Geist (2018). Database on the use of digital technologies by Brazilian representatives.

As can be seen, and as studies have already pointed to the case of state deputies (BRAGA; CARLOMAGNO; RODRIGUES, 2014) or the case of candidates for governor and senator (BRAGA; CARLOMAGNO, 2018), Facebook is already the most widely used digital communication vehicle by various segments of political and parliamentary elites, surpassing (narrowly) Twitter, which in the 2010 elections had been the most used digital resource by politicians (BRAGA; CARLOMAGNO, 2018). Youtube and website seem to be relegated to the background. However, it is not enough to be present on these platforms, it is necessary to nourish them. We then check how often representatives update them.

Graph 2 – Percentage of update frequency on social media (n = 513)



Caption (left to right): None; More than one month; Monthly; Weekly; Daily; Inactive.

Source: Geist (2018).

Adding the daily updates to the weekly updates, we can consider around 70% to 75% of Brazilian representatives as active in these networks and not just having a digital platform without actually using it. Thus, as pointed out by other researchers (MARQUES, 2013; BRAGA; ROCHA; VIEIRA, 2015), digital networks have already been incorporated into the daily political activity of most elected representatives of the Brazilian federal parliament. However, it is known that, with some exceptions, representatives are not directly responsible for managing these media. For this, they have a corps of parliamentary assistants in charge of managing this as well as other dimensions of the exercise of the term of office, which increasingly assumes a professional profile as democracy and the Brazilian legislative chambers become institutionalized.

Within this context, the purpose of this paper is to identify how offices use digital technology tools, both for external use (communication with citizens) and for internal use (office routine). Thus, our empirical unit of analysis is *parliamentary offices*, not deputies as isolated actors. For this, from the results of the questionnaire, we will create and present two indexes: internal communication and external communication. After this, we will aggregate these indexes into a typology of office's communication to understand how offices differently use such tools and we will crosscheck the results found with

respondents' political parties to see if this association helps explain the distinct forms found. Finally, we will present our conclusion on the associations that exist between the different types of communication developed by parliamentary assistants and the political parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies.

2. Representatives and social media

In dealing with parliament and the use of social media, we can *broadly* identify different lines and objects of research. A considerable portion of the research developed on this subject includes, especially, the use of social media in majority political campaigns. These papers analyze the candidate's patterns of use and seek to measure the communication strategies used and the interaction between candidates and voters (AGGIO, 2011, 2013; DRUCKMAN *et al.*, 2009; CERVI; MASSUCHIN, 2011; GIBSON; MCALLISTER, 2011; MARQUES & SAMPAIO, 2011; MARQUES, SILVA & MATTOS, 2013; MASSUCHIN and TAVARES, 2018; ROSSETTO *et al.*, 2012). Other research seeks to evaluate the increasing use of participation and engagement tools by parliaments and parliamentary actors outside the electoral period, during the period of the ordinary parliamentary legislative term (FARIA, 2013; LESTON-BANDEIRA & BRUM, 2017; BARROS, BERNARDES & REHBEIN, 2016).

It is becoming increasingly evident that, using channels in networks such as YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, Twitter or Facebook, for example, it is sought to stimulate engagement with the large number of users of these platforms, which occurs both individual representatives and parliamentary institutions as a whole. That is, resources that were common only among the most enthusiastic Web users are now being used in the political game to increase the visibility of an individual, party or institution (MARQUES *et al.*, 2013).

The use of these means by representatives and institutions cannot be explained without considering the strategic dimension of political communication, because even in these platforms the logic of the dispute for visibility and image management of the agent and the institution remains. These activities require specific expertise in a variety of areas including opinion polls, administration, advertising, production and creation, as well as specific updates for the different media used, whether press, radio, TV, websites, blogs and social networks. Increasingly, professionals in the area, to meet the needs of strategic political communication, are performing these works. This whole movement is part of what Wilson Gomes (2004) called the *professionalization of political communication*.

The author argued that the emergence of professional communication advisory, much investigated in electoral campaigns (in the era of the rise of “great marketers”), would not be restricted to campaigns, but also would tend to extend to the activities of the elected.

For Cristina Leston-Bandeira (2007), one of the key pieces in analyzing the impact of the internet on parliaments is parliamentary staff (or parliamentary assistants), described as the most relevant actors in the process of gatekeeping the information. This importance of parliamentary assistants in representatives' use of the internet is twofold. First, because daily term of office management decisions are made largely by staff, not representatives. This is especially true for the use of digital technologies, where there is a certain "technical" aspect. Second, because demands that arrive by the Internet require extra volumes of attention and information circulating, which are assigned to parliamentary assistants. It is worth checking your words:

The importance of parliamentary staff in the implementation of ICT is two-fold. First, although politicians may have the final say on policymaking, most of the day-to-day decisions on the management of parliament is taken by parliamentary staff. And this applies particularly to the case of ICT, a ‘new’ area, of rapid development (difficult to follow through the commonly slow political process) and where the ‘technical expert’ status contributes to make it a realm separate from the ‘political’. Secondly, because the demands brought in through these new media, in terms of dealing with high volumes of e-queries and circulation of information, require extra support given to politicians. So, ICT can make parliamentary staff all the more crucial in the process of sifting, selecting and interpreting information. As one of our interviewed support staff confirmed, they are a key ‘gate-keeper’. (LESTON-BANDEIRA, 2007b, p. 664)⁵

This same warning had already been given by France; Martins; Braga (2006), who conducted a survey with representatives from Paraná and pointed out that there were rare cases of deputies who maintained their own digital social networks, these being maintained by the office staff. At that time, most parliamentaries claimed to consider the internet as an integral part of the term of office, although they lacked the expertise to focus on maintaining these tools. The authors thus pointed to the need to investigate not only the representatives themselves, but also the offices and their assistants. In short, the structure that sustain what reaches the citizens, and what organizes the process of political representation.

⁵ In the original: “The importance of parliamentary staff in the implementation of ICT is two-fold. First, although politicians may have the final say on policymaking, most of the day-to-day decisions on the management of parliament is taken by parliamentary staff. And this applies particularly to the case of ICT, a ‘new’ area, of rapid development (difficult to follow through the commonly slow political process) and where the ‘technical expert’ status contributes to make it a realm separate from the ‘political’. Secondly, because the demands brought in through these new media, in terms of dealing with high volumes of e-queries and circulation of information, require extra support given to politicians. So, ICT can make parliamentary staff all the more crucial in the process of sifting, selecting and interpreting information. As one of our interviewed support staff confirmed, they are a key ‘gate-keeper’.”

With the exception of important studies on the professionalization of electoral campaigns (ABBE; HERRNSON, 2003; MEDVIC; LENART, 1997; NEGRINE *et al.*, 2007; PANAGOPOULOS, 2006; THURBER, 1998), little research looked at the team that coordinates the communication process, the link between representative and citizen. Gibson *et al.* (2003), analyzing US and British elections, use a survey, coupled with website content analysis, to question the importance that campaign strategists gave to the Internet at that time – at the time, noting the low relevance attributed to online tools. Dai & Norton (2007) conduct 40 semi-structured interviews with representatives and their assistants, seeking qualitative data on their online activities. On another occasion, Leston-Bandeira (2007a) presents the results of a survey with Portuguese parliamentary staff, conducted through interviews, face-to-face surveys and web-surveys, on representatives' perceptions of online activity.

Swiss Thomas Winzen, analyzing the European Parliament's technical advisers, said: “While much has been learned about the influence of representatives, little is known of the role of their unelected supporters”, that is, the parliamentary assistants (WINZEN, 2011, p. 27)⁶. Unelected, their role in shaping legislative outcomes is paramount – and this includes the communicational forms that offices can take over.

3. Research Design

As a research instrument, a face-to-face and sample survey was applied to the offices of the federal deputies of the Chamber of Deputies. The research was conducted during the month of November 2014, contemplating the 54th legislative term legislative term of the Chamber of Deputies. All questionnaires were prepared and applied by the authors of the article. The questionnaire was applied to the communications assistant responsible for social media in each office, not the representative itself. Thus, we have 513 individuals per universe, since the unit of analysis is the office and the assistant responsible for this area. The questionnaire was divided into two blocks (office staff profile and office communication), totaling 30 questions. As several questions asked multiple answers, in the end, 76 variables in the database totaled. As the application of the questionnaire was in person, the risk of favorable bias for users of digital technologies is reduced.

The sample consists of 144 answers (28% of the universe). All states and regions

⁶ In the original: “While much has been learned about the influence of representatives, little is known of the role of their unelected supporters”

are represented in the same proportion or very close to that in the Chamber. The following table presents the comparative data between our respondents, stratified by region and party, and the universe. Given the high number of respondents we obtained, this sample is distributed in a normal and representative manner⁷. Just to illustrate in comparative terms, the latest Brazilian Legislative Survey (POWER; ZUCCO JR., 2011), from 2009, coordinated by Timothy Power, had an N of 139 for the two Houses of Congress – 144 it has 144 for the Chamber only. In fact, *all* Brazilian parties present in the Chamber of Deputies are represented in our sample in almost identical ways to those found in parliament.

Table 1 – Sample descriptions and universe

| | In the universe | | In the sample | |
|----------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Region | | | | |
| North | 65 | 12.7 | 21 | 14.6 |
| Northeast | 151 | 29.4 | 42 | 29.2 |
| Midwest | 41 | 8 | 13 | 9 |
| Southeast | 179 | 34.9 | 44 | 30.6 |
| South | 77 | 15 | 24 | 16.7 |
| Total | 513 | 100 | 144 | 100 |
| Parties | | | | |
| DEM | 28 | 5.5 | 8 | 5.6 |
| PCdoB | 15 | 2.9 | 4 | 2.8 |
| PDT | 18 | 3.5 | 7 | 4.9 |
| PMDB | 71 | 13.8 | 24 | 16.7 |
| PMN | 3 | 0.6 | 1 | 0.7 |
| PP | 40 | 7.8 | 9 | 6.3 |
| PPS | 6 | 1.2 | 1 | 0.7 |
| PR | 31 | 6 | 11 | 7.6 |
| PRB | 10 | 1.9 | 4 | 2.8 |
| PROS | 20 | 3.9 | 3 | 2.1 |
| PRP | 2 | 0.4 | 1 | 0.7 |
| PSB | 25 | 4.9 | 5 | 3.5 |
| PSC | 12 | 2.3 | 4 | 2.8 |
| PSD | 45 | 8.8 | 11 | 7.6 |
| PSDB | 45 | 8.8 | 12 | 8.3 |
| PSOL | 3 | 0.6 | 2 | 1.4 |
| PT | 87 | 17 | 24 | 16.7 |
| PTB | 18 | 3.5 | 4 | 2.8 |

⁷ Error margin of 5.35% at 90% confidence level.

| | | | | |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| PTdoB | 3 | 0.6 | 1 | 0.7 |
| PV | 8 | 1.6 | 2 | 1.4 |
| SD | 22 | 4.3 | 6 | 4.2 |
| WITHOUT PARTY | 1 | 0.2 | | |
| Total | 513 | 100 | 144 | 100 |

Source: The Authors.

As can be seen, in relation to the main political parties in the Brazilian electoral arena, PT, PMDB and PSDB, while in the universe they have, respectively, 17%, 13% and 8% of the federal deputies who were active in the term of office at the time we applied, among our respondents are also distributed, respectively, 16%, 16% and 8%. That is, the sample accurately represents the universe of PSDB and PT and is only three points overestimated for PMDB (in fact, the longest distance between sample and universe between all elements and at a level that is perfectly within the limit acceptable).

In the final section of the article, we will use political parties to crosscheck the results. At this point, some parties, such as left parties and right parties, will need to be aggregated for more robust statistical results, since very low frequency crossings (such as $N < 5$) would not have statistical significance. The aggregation based on the political-ideological proximity of the parties follows the existing indications in the literature on the subject (POWER; ZUCCO JR., 2011). We kept the largest Brazilian parties disaggregated, of greater interest from the analytical point of view.

In the second part of the article, we intend to propose an index and a typology of office communication. In the questionnaire, there are four different questions about “office communication”. They all ask the respondent to assign, at scale, the importance attached to a range of communication tools, both traditional and new media. Two issues relate to external communication (contact with citizens and disclosure during the election period) and two to internal communication (source of information and term of office management). From the average of the sum of responses, we first come to two indexes – external communication and internal communication –, which potentially range from -5 (totally traditional) to 5 positive (totally digital media). With this, we can verify the degree of importance that is attributed to the tools, comparatively.

After that, we combined the two indexes into a general typology for office communication, considering the use reported by each respondent. Thus, we have nine possible types, which are presented in the table below.

Table 2 – Office Communication Typologies

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Type 1. External Traditional; Traditional Internal | Type 2. External Traditional; Balanced Internal | Type 3. External Traditional; Digital Internal |
| Type 4. Balanced External; Internal Traditional | Type 5. External Balanced; Balanced Internal | Type 6. Balanced External; Digital Internal |
| Type 7. External Digital; Internal Traditional | Type 8. External Digital; Balanced Internal | Type 9. External Digital; Digital Internal |

Source: The Authors.

This typology will allow us to map the possible modalities of management of social media by parliamentary offices, as well as to associate these modalities with the different characteristics of the political actors represented in the Chamber of Deputies.

4. Results

4.1 The use of digital technology tools in the internal routine of offices

Table 1 summarizes the response rate for two questions: the assessment of the importance of these tools for term of office management and the perception of the impact of these tools on parliamentary routine over the past ten years⁸.

Table 1 – Self-perception about the importance and impact of digital technologies

| | Importance Technologies for Term of Office Management | Intensity Technologies Changed the Term of Office Exercise |
|----------------|--|---|
| Very low | 2.1% | 2.1% |
| Low | 1.4% | 2.8% |
| Medium | 6.9% | 11.1% |
| High | 22.9% | 29.9% |
| Very high | 63.9% | 51.4% |
| Total | 97.2% | 97.2% |
| <i>Missing</i> | 2.8% | 2.8% |

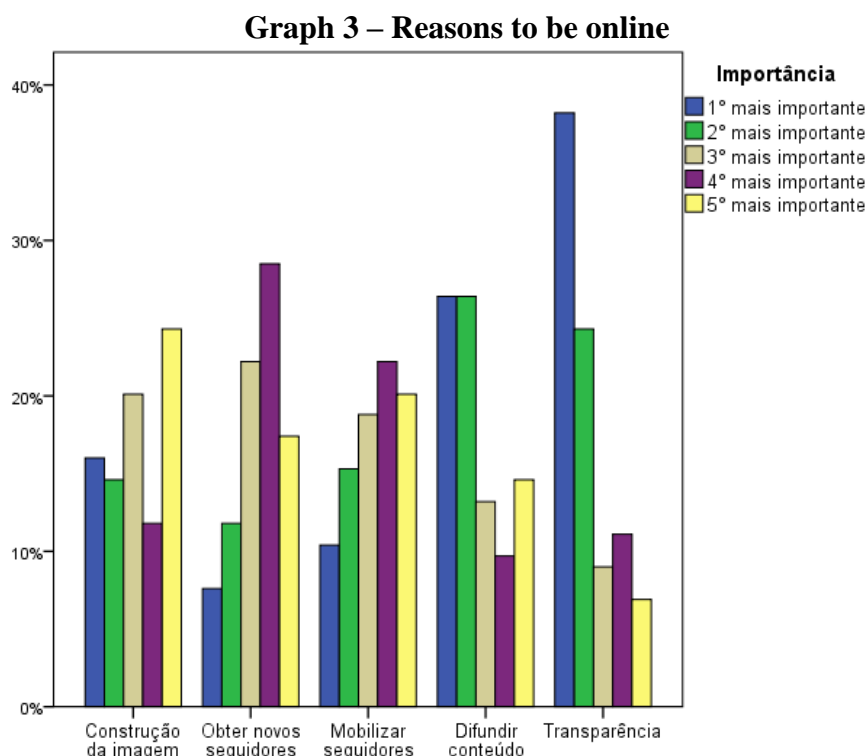
Source: Own elaboration.

This issue is important because it shows that even if the representative does not want to be accountable to his or her electoral base, and therefore does not establish communication channels on the internet with the citizen, this does not mean that digital

⁸ However, it is not in all respects that such technologies stand out. In addition, we asked about Casa's support for the use of the internet and social media (connection, training for advisors, etc.), the respondents expressed some dissatisfaction. The table with the simple frequencies is found in the appendices.

technologies and even social media has no impact on the office. The impact also exists on the aspects of the internal routine we present here. In general terms on this topic, we can see evidence that these technologies influence not only the external relations of the office (their importance as communication), but their own work routine.

The next question investigates the motivations for being online. One of the debates in the literature about digital media questions why representatives are online, which even leads most of the literature to focus on content analysis of online actors' behavior to ascertain what type of content they produce. We asked our respondents to list the order of importance of these motivations. The results are in graph 3. All values in this and the following graphs refer to the percentage, not the valid percentage. Therefore, the values may close below 100% if missing values exist (some respondents who have left one or the other item unanswered).



Caption: Right side from top to bottom: 1st most important; 2nd most important; 3rd most important; 4th most important; 5th most important. Below, from left to right: Image construction; Gain new followers; Mobilize followers; Spread content; Transparency.

Source: Own elaboration.

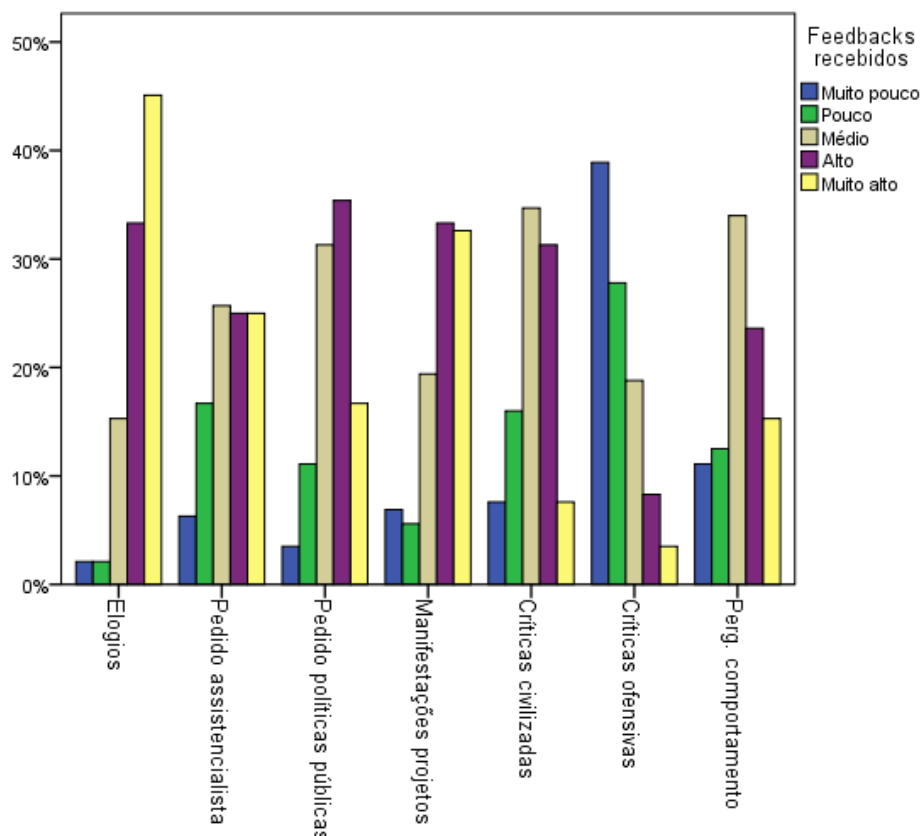
The first issue to note is that 37.9% said “generating transparency” is the main reason for being online. Added to the 24.1% who said this is the second cause, this item reaches an impressive 62.1%. In addition to demonstrating that actors consider

transparency to be an important element to be externalized – whether they believe it or not, whatever their conception of “transparency,” which we have no way of knowing with this research tool – the issue is related to generating information about the deputies and their activities, produced by their own terms of office. Once they “generate transparency” by publicizing their public positions, voting, spending, etc., they become proactive in the face of an information-hungry media universe and can disclose this information in a way that best suits them. The evidence also corroborates Coleman's (2005) thesis of “direct representation,” as parliamentary assistants seek direct contact with citizens, more independently of the media or party machines.

Of the five options presented, the most fruitful analytically is the distinction between *mobilizing followers* or *gaining new followers*. In the meantime, we can talk to the literature that debates whether politicians use such platforms to talk only to those already converted (NORRIS, 2003) or whether they talk to them as a means to reach new supporters (VISSERS, 2009).

It is clear that the two issues are very close in importance given by politicians, although mobilizing followers is ahead, accounting for 25.5% between first and second most important functions, against 19.3% of gaining new followers in the same sum.

Next, we seek to discover the kinds of feedback politicians get from their followers online. Knowing what kind of feedback, interaction, politicians receive is analytically important. Recently, the research by Carlomagno, Braga and Sampaio (2018) sought to verify which types of messages representatives respond more or less, noting that, besides responding more via social media than via email, they tend to respond more to friendly messages, with electoral support, than messages charging issues of legislative behavior (as the deputy would have voted on a given issue). An external behavior analyst, that is, public behavior, could measure positive or negative reactions through comments on posts, but this is a limited perspective, as it does not give us the interactions that occur privately, in messages exchanged between users and the pages. These interactions are only accessible through the medium we use, the survey with the system operators. So, this is another highlight of this research.

Graph 4 – Types of Feedback Received

Caption: Right side from top to bottom: Feedback received: Very little; Little; Medium; High; Very high. Below, from left to right: Praises; Assistance request; Public policies request; Manifestations projects; Civilized criticism; Offensive criticism; Behavior.

Source: Own elaboration.

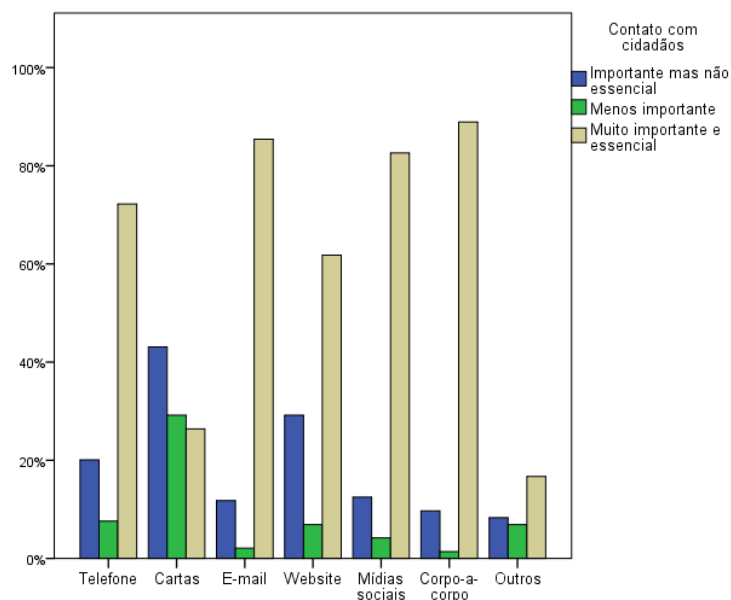
First, we must consider some aspects found, for example, the high rates for praise and low for criticism. Although this may be due to the respondent's bias (which may have occurred and we need to consider it), such a trend makes logical sense if we think that the indignant citizen willing to make offensive criticism of the deputy usually does so in public ways, in the comments, not in private, in the messages. Still, the level of civilized criticism is high. That is, respondents are not denying that they have received criticism. Another possible explanatory factor is that these are representatives, who, except in rare cases, do not attract passions and hatreds of the ordinary citizen, as usually occurs in executive positions. The low attention that citizens give to legislative representatives in Brazil is largely due to the nature of the Brazilian electoral system. Since legislative positions (with the exception of the Senate) are elected by proportional system with high magnitude, the citizen's electoral memory – and hence the possibility of accountability – is very low (CAREY, 2016). Elected by majority positions, on the other hand, tend to be more remembered and charged by citizens.

Perhaps the most fruitful distinction analytically is between public policies requests and assistance request, where the response rate of the former overlaps with the latter. Here, one must consider two factors in the explanation. First, what would be the most seductive explanation for those who believe in the transformative power of the internet is that the virtual environment is made up of a new practice of digital democracy, in which subjects are more concerned with public policies than with goods for themselves. The second explanation is more rational in terms of which stratum of society uses social media in general and which stratum tries to reach politicians. A third aspect to consider is that we were unable to access, through the questionnaire, what meaning respondents give to each term. For example, a constituency service, such as getting asphalt to a street or the improvement of a hospital, is a local policy, analogous to the pork-barrel type, but perhaps interpreted as a public policy by the respondent.

Finally, in this section, we look at the importance attached to communication tools, which can be used both externally – for contact with citizens – and internally. In this topic, we examine the importance attached by parliamentary assistants to a range of tools in four distinct spheres: a) in contact with citizens; b) as disclosure of actions to the electoral base (electoral perspective); c) as a source of office' information; d) the importance of term of office' management.

The first two concern external communication with citizens, while the last two concern internal communication within the office. First, we present the overall results of each tool, in graphs 5-8. In the next section, we will use these responses to create an index to give greater comprehensibility and conciseness to the results.

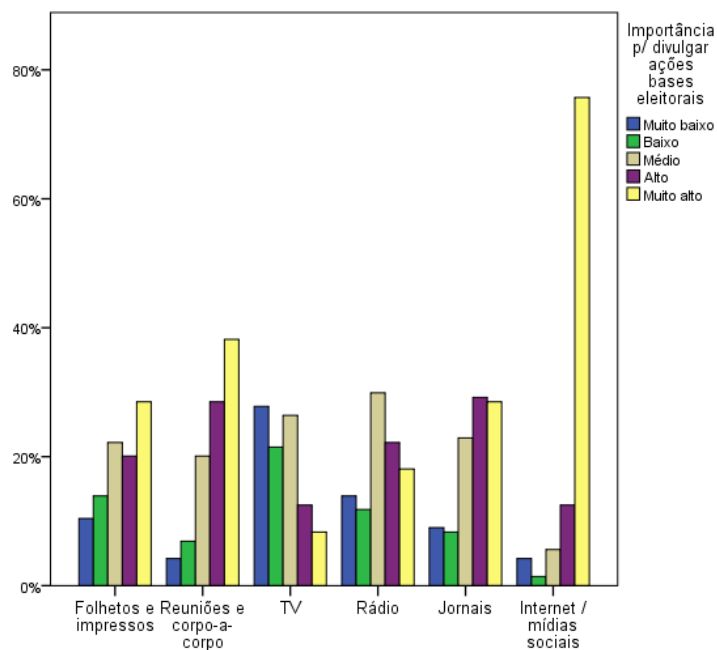
Graph 5 – Importance of tools in contact with citizens



Caption: Right side from top to bottom: Contact with citizens: Important but not essential; Less important; Very important and essential. Below, from left to right: Telephone; Letters; Email; Web site; Social media; Face-to-face; Others.

Source: Own elaboration.

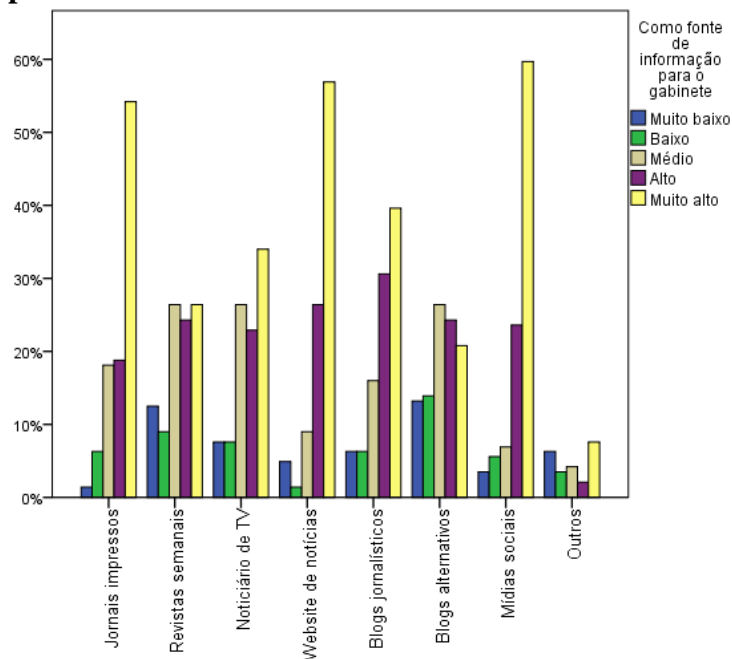
Graph 6 – Use of tools to disseminate actions to voter bases



Caption: Right side from top to bottom: Importance for publicizing actions, constituencies: Very low; Low; Medium, High, Very High. Below, from left to right: Printed leaflets; Face-to-face meetings; TV; Radio; Newspapers; Internet / social media.

Source: Own elaboration.

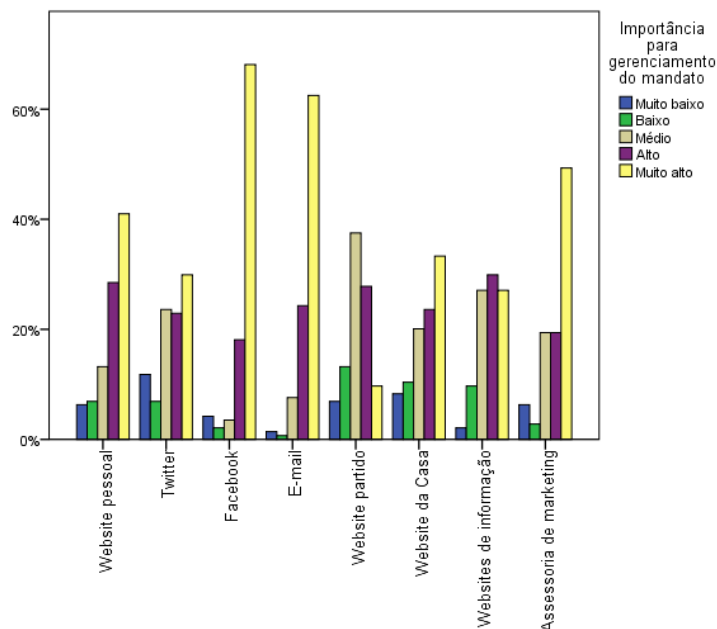
Graph 7 – Role of tools as a source of information for the office



Caption: Right side from top to bottom: As a source of information for the office: Very low; Low; Medium, High, Very High. Below, from left to right: Printed newspapers; Weekly magazines; TV news; News website; Journalistic blogs; Alternative blogs; Social media; Others.

Source: Own elaboration.

Graph 8 – Importance of tools for term of office management



Caption: Right side from top to bottom: Importance of tools for term of office management: Very low; Low; Medium, High, Very High. Below, from left to right: Personal website; Twitter; Facebook; E-mail; Party’s website; Chamber’s website; Information’ website; Marketing Advisory.

Source: Own elaboration.

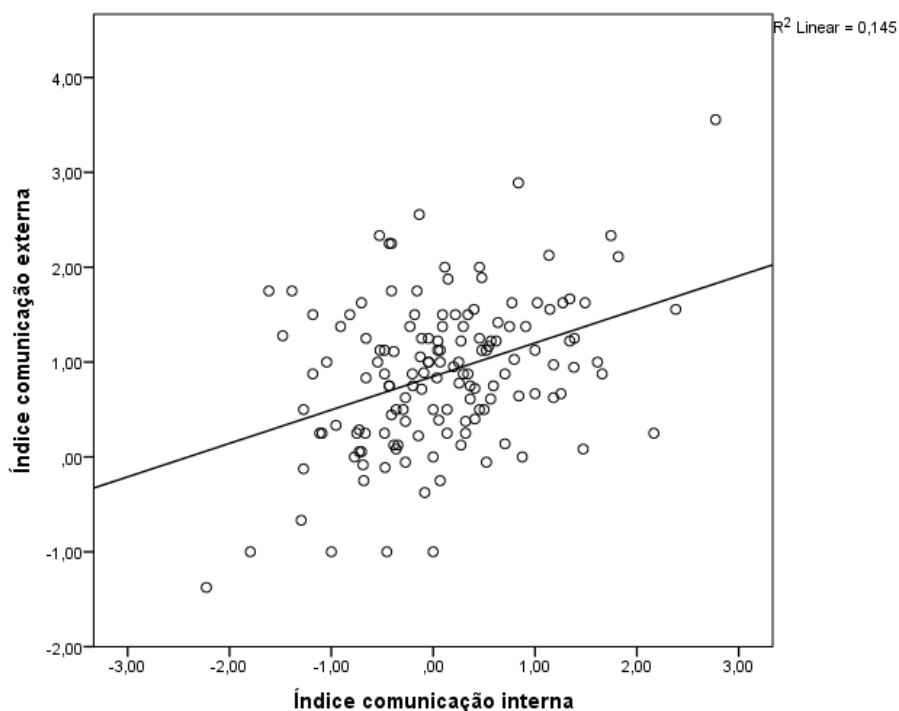
As can be seen, in all categories social media play a very high role, according to the perception of respondents. In the graph on the management of the term of office, it is clear that the websites of representatives are still considered very important – information that goes in the opposite direction to that shown in the recent literature, which points to their diminishing use. This is interesting evidence further to the personalized character of political representation in Brazil, as partisan and institutional websites are placed in the background. However, when asked about contact with citizens, only 63% consider the website essential, compared to 86% who consider the e-mail essential, and 83%, social media – face-to-face contact, it is still considered the most important mean by 89% of respondents.

In the following section, we will use this information to synthesize an index that will make the communicative practices of offices more intelligible.

4.2 External and Internal Communication Index

From the four questions in our questionnaire concerning the assessment of digital technology tools, we propose two indexes, one for internal communication and one for external communication, as explained in the research design section. In both indexes (external communication and internal communication), we aggregate the value attributed to each tool between traditional (or non-digital) and online communication. Negative values refer to non-digital tools and positive ones to digital ones; values near zero show equilibrium. Graph 9 shows the intersection of the two indexes.

Graph 9 – Relationship between internal and external communication indexes



Caption: Left side: Index of external communication. Underside: Index of internal communication.

Source: Own elaboration.

Pearson's correlation between the two indexes is 0.381 (sig = 0.000). This indicates that there is only a moderate correlation between the two types of communication. That is, the logical relationship that could be expected between those who use technology more externally and those who use it more internally and *vice-versa* does not usually occur. The two points at the top right and bottom left are examples of what this logical relationship would be like: the first case uses digital technologies a lot in both spheres and the second uses traditional media in both types of communication. However, cases in the upper left quadrant use external digital communication, but traditional internal. Like the cases in the lower right quadrant, interestingly, they use technology a lot in internal communication, but they do not consider these tools as important in external communication. This in itself already shows the relevance of the framework (analytical model) proposed by this article. Since there is no perfect relationship between the two types of communication, one cannot serve as a proxy (indirect indicator) of the other. Therefore, research into the internal aspects of parliamentary routine is urgent.

4.3 Association with political parties and type of communication

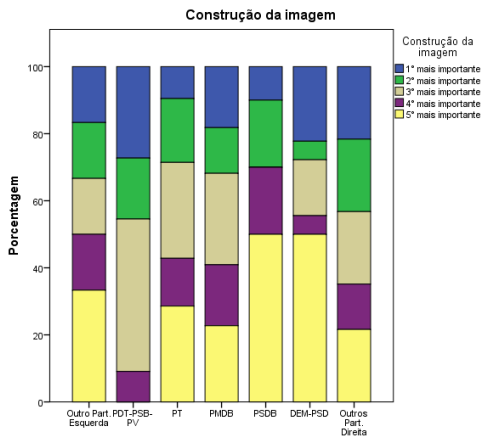
We checked in the previous sections the general distribution of the data. In this section, we will look at whether the detected patterns are related to any external factor that serves as an explanatory variable, that is, to help explain the differences in the political behavior of each of these actors.

Although political science may offer a long list of explanatory variables, we opted here to cross with the political party of the representatives responsible for the office, as this is a classic variable that helps to understand, at least in part, the distinctions between parliamentary behaviors. And, in theory, may help to explain the distinctions between the various modes of organization of offices and their communicative practices.

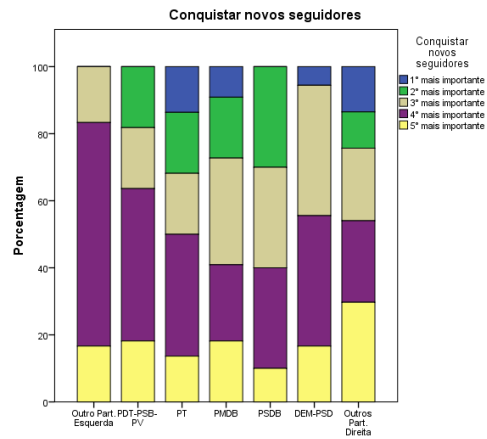
Also in this section, we will present the typology regarding the communication of the offices, as already presented in the research design section, formed from the internal and external communication indexes.

In the previous section, we investigated respondents' motivations for being online. However, is this attribution equal to all parties? The literature teaches us that historically there have been partisan distinctions regarding their behavior in the electoral arena and in ways used to capture their supporters. Therefore, it would be logical that there were also distinctions in both online behavior and in these motivations. Next, we present in graph 10, divided into parts, the values of the responses by parties.

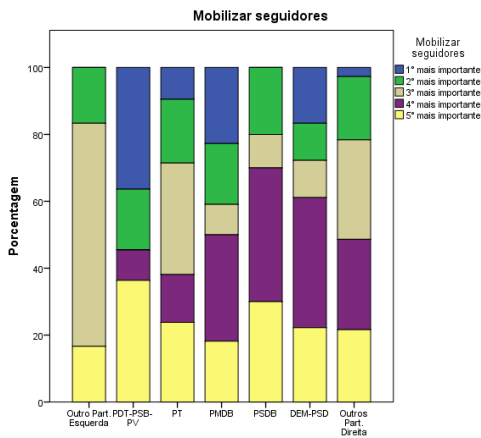
Graph 10 - Reasons to be online by party



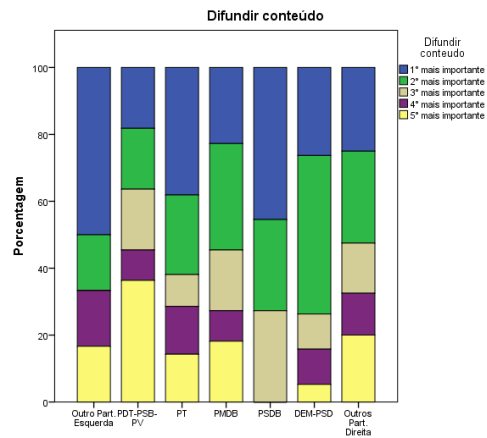
Title: Image Construction.



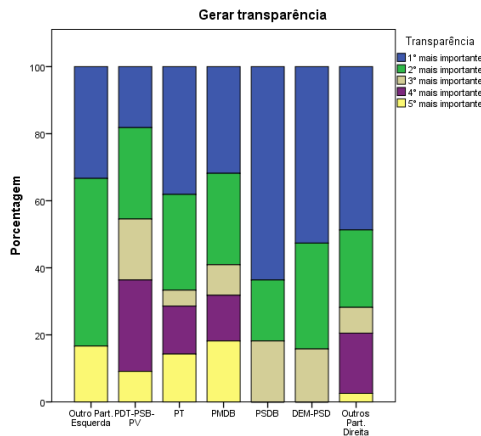
Title: Gain new followers.



Title: Mobilize followers.



Title: Broadcast Content.



Title: Generate transparency.

Tables caption: Right, top to bottom: 1st most important; 2nd most important; 3rd most important; 4th most important; 5th most important. On the left: Percentage. Below, from left to right: Other leftist parties; PDT-PSD-PV; PT; PMDB; PSDB; DEM. Other right parties.

Source: Own elaboration.

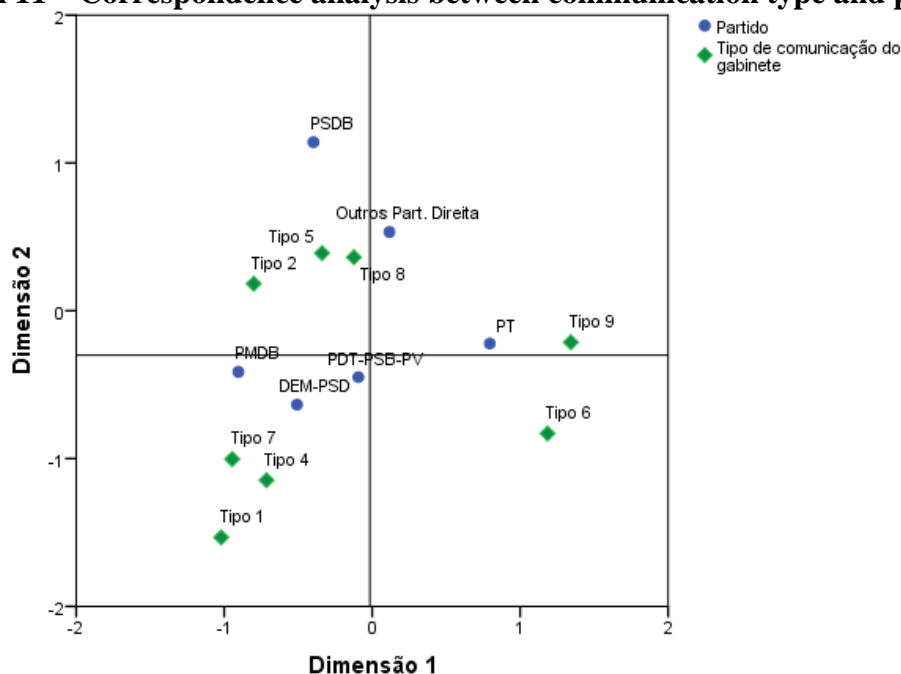
We can verify in the party framework the issue between mobilization of supporters *versus* attracting new sympathizers. In this topic, we realize that for PT, gaining new followers is slightly more important than mobilizing current ones. Compared to the PSDB

and practically every other party, the two issues regarding followers are much more important to the PT and PMDB. Interestingly, even the other leftist parties – whose audience is theoretically made up mostly of their affiliates because they are not big parties – the issue of mobilizing followers only appears in the third most important place.

There is an important distinction. PT and PSDB are the only parties – considering the first two places in importance - where “gain new followers” outweighs “mobilizing followers”. We may consider, then, that for the central parties in the national electoral arena it is more important to reach new voters, while the peripheral parties prefer to preach to those already converted. A rational logic, not ideological, governs the behavior of the actors.

Next, with the combination of these two indexes, we present the proposed office communication typology, as shown in Table 2, present in the research design section. We will make the relationship with the political parties. In this graphic, due to the space limit in the image, we designate the communication types by the type number.

Graph 11 – Correspondence analysis between communication type and parties



Caption: Left side: Dimension 2. Right side: Party; Office Communication Types. Underside: Dimension 1.

Source: Own elaboration, the authors.

We can see that the PT is closer to types 6 and 9. That is, the Brazilian party closest to a digital communication model. As well as the other left parties are very close to type 9, totally digitized. The center-left block is between types 1, 4 and 5, that is, from traditional to a middle ground – similar to what happens with the center-right block.

Although PSDB is more closely related to type 8 (identified by the standardized residuals test), that is, also digitalized, in all categories its values are very close to the normal distribution.

In short, the use of political parties seems fruitful, at least in part, to help distinguish the types of communication adopted by parliamentary offices.

5. Final Considerations

This article investigated the use of digital tools by parliamentary offices in the Chamber of Deputies, from the point of view of those who actually operate these tools, that is, parliamentary assistants working with communication in the offices of federal deputies, an approach little explored in the Brazilian literature about internet and politics. The assumption of this analysis is that the term of office should not be understood as something exercised by the deputy alone. It is a political action developed as a team, as it requires coordinated action by a staff that provides a support structure for parliamentary action, which, of course, is the central actor in this process and, ultimately, has the formal prerogative to deliberate on the course of his actions. As Cristina Leston-Bandeira, among others, had already pointed out, the analysis showed clear yield and analytical potential.

From the measurement performed in the interviews with the parliamentary assistants, we proposed and presented the internal and external communication index, in which we inferred the characteristics of using the most traditional means to the use of the most digitized tools. We also present a typology, created from this index. Index and typology may be the subject of further research in other contexts to test their effectiveness and eventual improvement. Among the contributions of this research, we highlight the use of the tools evaluated not only in contact with citizens, but also in the internal routine of the offices. Evidences suggest that these technologies affect not only on external relations at the office - their importance as social communication - but also on the internal work routine itself.

Although it exists, as stated by Marques *et al.* (2013), a clear increase in the appropriation of digital communication tools by parliamentary offices, the party analysis shows that there is considerable variation in the pattern of use among political groups. Different factors may explain the different ways of use, one of them can be, as demonstrated in the survey, the very perception that offices have of communication platforms as a determinant for a more assiduous appropriation of a given communication strategy.

The findings presented here need to be deepened with further comparative analysis, both at the subnational level and involving other legislative terms of the Brazilian parliament, to verify whether the data analyzed here constitute any long-term trend towards greater professionalization in the use of digital media by parliamentary assistants. While in the United States parliamentary staff has been paying attention since the 1980s (HAMMOND, 1984), such a research object has only recently gained ground within legislative research. We believe that this object is essential both for understanding the dynamics of the specific focus on the use of digital tools by the political elite and, in broader terms, for other themes and aspects within the field of legislative studies.

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ANEXES

Table 2 – Reasons to be online, by party

| | | Image constructio n | Mobilize followers | Gain new followers | Spread content | Transparency |
|--------------------------------|----|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Other Left parties | 1° | 16.70% | | | 50.00% | 33.30% |
| | 2° | 16.70% | 16.70% | | 16.70% | 50.00% |
| | 3° | 16.70% | 66.70% | 16.70% | | |
| | 4° | 16.70% | | 66.70% | 16.70% | |
| | 5° | 33.30% | 16.70% | 16.70% | 16.70% | 16.70% |
| PDT-PSB- PV | 1° | 21.40% | 28.60% | | 14.30% | 14.30% |
| | 2° | 14.30% | 14.30% | 14.30% | 14.30% | 21.40% |
| | 3° | 35.70% | | 14.30% | 14.30% | 14.30% |
| | 4° | 7.10% | 7.10% | 35.70% | 7.10% | 21.40% |
| | 5° | | 28.60% | 14.30% | 28.60% | 7.10% |
| PT | 1° | 8.30% | 8.30% | 12.50% | 33.30% | 33.30% |
| | 2° | 16.70% | 16.70% | 16.70% | 20.80% | 25.00% |
| | 3° | 25.00% | 29.20% | 16.70% | 8.30% | 4.20% |
| | 4° | 12.50% | 12.50% | 33.30% | 12.50% | 12.50% |
| | 5° | 25.00% | 20.80% | 12.50% | 12.50% | 12.50% |
| PMDB | 1° | 16.70% | 20.80% | 8.30% | 20.80% | 29.20% |
| | 2° | 12.50% | 16.70% | 16.70% | 29.20% | 25.00% |
| | 3° | 25.00% | 8.30% | 29.20% | 16.70% | 8.30% |
| | 4° | 16.70% | 29.20% | 20.80% | 8.30% | 12.50% |
| | 5° | 20.80% | 16.70% | 16.70% | 16.70% | 16.70% |
| PSDB | 1° | 8.30% | | | 41.70% | 58.30% |
| | 2° | 16.70% | 16.70% | 25.00% | 25.00% | 16.70% |
| | 3° | | 8.30% | 25.00% | 25.00% | 16.70% |
| | 4° | 16.70% | 33.30% | 25.00% | | |
| | 5° | 41.70% | 25.00% | 8.30% | | |
| DEM-PSD | 1° | 21.10% | 15.80% | 5.30% | 26.30% | 52.60% |
| | 2° | 5.30% | 10.50% | | 47.40% | 31.60% |
| | 3° | 15.80% | 10.50% | 36.80% | 10.50% | 15.80% |
| | 4° | 5.30% | 36.80% | 36.80% | 10.50% | |
| | 5° | 47.40% | 21.10% | 15.80% | 5.30% | |
| Other Right parties | 1° | 17.80% | 2.20% | 11.10% | 22.20% | 42.20% |
| | 2° | 17.80% | 15.60% | 8.90% | 24.40% | 20.00% |
| | 3° | 17.80% | 24.40% | 17.80% | 13.30% | 6.70% |
| | 4° | 11.10% | 22.20% | 20.00% | 11.10% | 15.60% |
| | 5° | 17.80% | 17.80% | 24.40% | 17.80% | 2.20% |

Source: Own elaboration.

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