



TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC INTEREST: THE WORK OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATION IN UBERLÂNDIA'S CHAMBER

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Abstract: The research had as pillars the public interest and transparency having as object of study the Municipality of Uberlândia-MG. It was carried out through the monitoring of social media and the institutional website to understand how the legislative guidelines are presented to the population. From the results, it can be seen how the Legislative Branch works on the issue of Public Communication (CP) and whether the precepts of the Access to Information Law (LAI) are respected. Methodologically, bibliographical and documentary surveys were used, followed by content analysis of Facebook and Instagram publications in the light of the concepts studied. The results show that the public interest and transparency are not effectively addressed by the institution on social media and that access to information on the website is compromised, both with regard to active and passive transparency.

Keywords: Public Communication; Access to Information Law; Uberlândia's Chamber.

1 Introduction

The article brings the results of a research on public communication, more specifically in the politics area, having as its object the City Council of Uberlândia-MG. It started from concerns about the practice exercised by the communication department in the legislative body of one of the largest cities of Minas Gerais state, as well as understanding the ways used to access information. The communication department in question, according to the institutional website, is formed by a general director and has two subdivisions, the journalism section, and the ceremonial section.

Thus, the study followed and analyzed social media and the website of the aforementioned institution for three months, between April and June 2020, observing how issues of public interest, whether legislative matters or information required by the Access to information Law. The period previously mentioned was chosen due to the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic in the country and to understand how the institution would deal with the access and dissemination of information precisely when the population most needed it, especially online, as social isolation made it impossible to monitor sessions in-person and the internet became essential

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to monitor the processes.

Considering that the matters discussed in the Legislative Branch are of public interest and most of them do not effectively reach their target audience, either through the means of dissemination or through non-accessible language, the research's guiding question sought to answer how the Uberlândia City Council works with public communication on social media and its website. To this end, the concepts of public communication and the access to information law were deepened to, later, study whether the agency meets the criteria required by the concepts and by the legislation. In addition, the official Facebook and Instagram pages, as well as the institutional website, were observed in order to find out how issues of public interest are treated and disseminated in the official communication channels, in addition to analysing legislative matter contents, the measuring of the response from users to the media posts, always emphasizing actions related to communication of public interest, also observing the language used and the media.

2 The City and Uberlândia-MG City Council

Uberlândia is a municipality in Minas Gerais state, located in the Triângulo Mineiro region. Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) show that, in 2020, the city had approximately a population of 699,097 inhabitants, which makes the municipality the second largest in terms of population in the state of Minas Gerais.

According to the official website, the Human Development Index (HDI) of Uberlândia in 2010 was 0.789, which is considered a high value by the United Nations (UN), being the third highest in Minas Gerais state and the 71st in the national rank. Uberlândia is frequently mentioned in surveys regarding quality of life and urban development: It was considered the first city in Minas Gerais and third in the country in basic sanitation, in 2019, according to Trata Brasil; it ranked 57th among the country's smartest and most connected cities in 2019, according to Connected Smart Cities; it was considered the 46th best city in the country to do business, in 2019, by Urban Systems; it was considered the 23rd best city in Brazil in 2018, according to the Municipal Management Challenges Index.

Uberlândia Legislative Branch, on its institutional website, presents a brief history of the City Council and the beginning of political activity in the city. According to the page, until 2020, when the elected representatives in 2016 are still in force, CMU had 27 city councilors: Adriano Zago, Amado Júnior, Antônio Borges (Tunico), Antônio Carrijo, Átila Carvalho, Charlie Manzi (Charlão), Cleyton César, Delfino Rodrigues, Edilson Gracioli, Ednaldo Régio, Eduardo Moraes, Gláucia Galante, Guilherme Fernandes, Heliomar Cândido (Bozó), Jussara Matsuda, Leandro Neves, Liza Prado, Marcelo Cunha, Mineia Nunes, Misac Lacerda, Neivaldo Honório (Mago), Paulo César (PC), Ronaldo Tannus, Sergimar Melo (Sérgio do Bom Preço), Thiago Fernandes, Walquir Amaral, and Wilson Pinheiro, who represent 12 different political parties (MDB, PCdoB,

PDT, PL, PMB, PP, PSC, PSD, PSDB, PSL, PT, and SD). Therefore, the the material collected and analyzed refers to this congress³.

CMU's Board of Directors is responsible for directing the legislative work in ordinary and extraordinary meetings, as well as taking care of administrative services of the City Council for a two-year period. Currently, the structure is composed of President, First, Second, and Third Vice Presidents, and First and Second Secretaries. The Work Committees that prepare the opinions of the projects along with the technical consultancy, are 17: Public Administration Committee; Mixed Commission for Legislative Popular Participation; Human Social and Consumer Rights; Education, Culture, and Science; Sports, Leisure, and Parasports; Finance, Budget, and Taxes; Industry, Commerce, Tourism, and Labour; Innovation, Technology, and Youth; Legislation, Justice, and Writing; Environment and Animal Defense; Micro and Small Enterprises; Rural Policy and District Administration; Urban Policy, Housing, and Urbanism and Public Transport; Public Policies on Drugs; Promotion of Racial Equality; Health and Basic Sanitation; and Public Safety Commission.

According to the organizational chart available on the institutional website, the CMU's Communication sector is located in the General Secretariat and is divided into Legislative TV (Graphic and Photographic Production Section and Audio and Video Section) and in the Communication Department (Ceremonial Section and Journalism Section). The latter is the sector responsible for the press office, texts, and all material collected and analyzed in this work. According to the Transparency Portal, in November 2020, there were 4 servers in the journalism sector, 1 in the ceremonial sector, and 1 communication director. Three of these servers are journalists, whose function requires higher education in Journalism and professional registration in the area.

3 Communication, Public Interest, and Access to Information

Public Communication and Press Office

The discussion on public communication (PC) is recent and has been growing all over the world. In the Brazilian context, the concept emerged in the mid-1980s and Kovouski (2012) points out that the beginning of discussions on the subject is directly linked to two favors: The country's redemocratization and the creation of the Federal Constitution of 1988. In the latter, the author highlights that the topics of legislation that deal with freedoms of the press and speech, as well as the requirements for transparency in government actions, have strengthened the PC in the country. Perhaps because of this beginning, the term is linked to government communication. However,

³ Part of the names mentioned here are from alternate city councilors who took office in 2020 after the *Má Impressão* (Bad Impression) operation, by the Special Action Group to Fight Organized Crime (Grupo de Atuação Especial de Combate ao Crime Organizado, Gaeco), in December 2019. Altogether, 20 city councilors were later arrested and lost their mandate in impeachment actions.

leading experts in the term point out that it is a mistake to simplify PC to just that.

As Ribeiro and Mainieri (2011) state, the definition of public communication is polysemic and its study still has many ways to go. The concept still seeks consolidation and continues to follow “incipiently the changes in democratic institutionality and the demands for participation and democratization in the decision-making process of public policies” (SARDINHA, 2012, p. 2).

Other theorists agree that “public communication configures a complex concept that allows extracting multiple theoretical approaches and reflections on its practice in different perspectives of the communicational field” (KUNSCH, 2013, p. 17). For Brandão (2006), the public communication term has been used with different meanings, depending on the country and the author. For the author, this is a new field that is still under construction and as a way to contribute to theoretical conceptualization, it is possible to identify five different areas of knowledge and professional activity: PC with organizational communication, scientific communication, with state/government communication, political communication, and communication strategies of the organized civil society.

PC plays a key role in the entire social control process that must be exercised by society. Thus, we can consider that “Public Communication should be thought of as a political process of integration in which expression, interpretation, and dialogue prevail” (MATOS, 2011 *apud* KUNSCH, 2013, p.6). In its essence, PC must be not only participatory, but also inclusive, ensuring that collective wills override individual ones, in a democratic communication.

In this context, it is worth referring to Duarte, one of the names who studies PC. According to this author, the objectives of Public Communication are:

[...] to privilege public interest; to centralize the process on the citizen; to treat communication as a dialogic process; to adapt instruments to public needs, possibilities, and interests; and to take the complexity of communication, treating it as a whole. In the public service, communication plays an important role in the democratization of information, especially in city halls. (DUARTE, 2009, p. 59).

Not unlike this, it is possible to mention that PC and public institutions have similar purposes, especially regarding the functions of informing; listening; contributing to ensure the social relationship; and monitoring changes in behavior and social organizations (ZÉMOR, 2005 *apud* BRANDÃO, 2006, p. 13). The author also points out that PC is a communication of public interest.

We can briefly conclude that the intention of public communication is to transmit information of public interest to citizens, establishing transparency and the possibility of dialogue between the State and society. Having Uberlândia City Council as the object of study, but taking into account any unit of the Legislative Branch, the information that such bodies have (and that is of public interest) primarily concern the discussions and creation of legislation that may

establish rights and duties for citizens. Since the branch of government is responsible for creating the laws, city councils configure a space that should allow for public discussion and meeting the needs of a population already in the first step of creation of laws. Listening to the population during the process is a way to guarantee the exercise of democracy in its most basic form.

As the proposal of this research is to analyze materials from Uberlândia Legislative Branch, it is worth resorting to Haswani (2013), as the author works the obscure discourse of laws. As the City Council is responsible for approving the laws of community interest, we need to highlight that the legal language used in these laws is not clear and accessible to all. What is said here corresponds to

[...] a communication used mainly within the traditional model of administration, known as regulation. Examples range from certifications, verbalizations, and notifications to legal publications, official collections of acts, affixes on murals, permanent deposits of documents with public exposure, records and alike (ARENA, 1999 *apud* HASWANI, 2013, p. 33).

Thus, another way to use PC would be to seek ways to overcome these obstacles, making information available in a way that ensures an effective communication between the institution and society. Haswani (2013) also states that the communication of laws is mandatory, but the way it is carried out receives criticism from experts. They believe that the language and means used to disclose are not suited for the purpose. The researcher also adds that the use of technical terminology results in incomprehension from the majority of the public. Consequently, this obscurity ends up harming not only the applicability of laws, but also causes ambiguity, inconsistency, and irrationality (AINIS, 1997 *apud* HASWANI, 2013). Thus, "without knowing the laws, there is no way to demand that the citizen comply with them, and, on the other hand, there is no way to claim the State for the accomplishment of fundamental and social rights to which they are entitled" (HASWANI, 2013, p.34).

When explaining some of the fundamental concepts of public communication, it is important to approach the concept of press office, from its creation to the functions of professionals in this area. Dealing with PC and the press office when talking about public interest aims to show how government agencies, as in the case of this study, can apply the communication of interest to the population within institutions and take such information to the most interested, the citizens. For this purpose, press office professionals are essential, as they are responsible for the communication sector of these agencies.

In public institutions, the press officer focuses on prioritizing:

[...] public interest, which requires rendering of accounts, which is a legal obligation, of what is done by the organization. In this case, this requires from the press office a work that, in addition to giving visibility to organizations, has the purpose of disseminating public management information that has a direct impact on society (FLORES, 2016, p.37).

Differently from common thinking, dealing with the press office in the public sector is not linked to promoting government officials, but valuing the rendering of accounts, transparency, and an effective communication that seeks to meet the interests of the population. Thus, being accountable and transparent in actions is not dissociated from the public interest. It is quite the opposite: Acting in accordance with such precepts is not only an obligation provided for by law, but also – and here thinking about another aspect of communication consultancy – a way of dealing with the image of institutions. Transparency can add a positive image to the government agency, bringing more reliability to the public. Thus, if considered and done in this way, press office professionals are responsible for taking care of public communication in these agencies, taking the right to information to citizens.

Although press offices are often occupied by journalists, their relationship with press officers, sometimes public relations professionals, is not always harmonious, even if both professionals are from the same area of knowledge (and understand each other's work). A conflict between the two professionals is common due to the fact that the press officers hold the information and do not always facilitate its access to journalists who work in the media. When discussing the subject, Dines (2009) presents three relationships between these professionals: a) Press Office AND Press; b) Press Office OR Press; and c) Press Office VERSUS Press, with such relationships being optimistic, pessimistic, and dramatic, respectively.

In the first case, the author considers a space for collaboration in which only the press office has certain information and provides it to journalists, establishing a relationship in which everyone wins: Both works are respected, the media gains important information and materials for dissemination, and the institution gains visibility in the media. The second case corresponds to press offices that use the press to prevent certain issues from being published, exploiting infiltrations or deficiencies in the media's resources.

From both the authors consulted and the professional practice observed, it is possible to state that the relationship must be harmonious, as in the first approach presented by the author, since it is possible to establish a relationship in which both benefit from the process. However, in a realistic view, it is impossible to ignore that the other two situations exist and are frequent. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on the social role of the press officer and how they can act both taking care of the institution's image and respecting the duty to be transparent in public actions (which are obligations already provided for in the LAI).

A point of view that should not be ignored is that the institution (or public official) that acts by preventing the work of press disclosure, or even hiding data to maintain a "good image" of the agency, becomes susceptible to a series of problems, including the loss of credibility with the citizens interested in the subject, with the press, and also with the media itself. For the press office, keeping journalists and the media as "allies" can be useful, especially in crises and cases in which the institution's good image is questioned, as advisors will be sought and, thus, issues

can be resolved more easily.

Once Uberlândia City Council becomes object of research, it is necessary to make an analysis regarding the exercise of press office in public administration. Citing the insights of Moreira and Ulhôa (1996), Tavares (2016) reports that the press officer sometimes has a technicist view of the entire communication process of this organization. Among some of the professionals' perceptions, the author mentions that they can “interfere with government plans, fosterings, and even budgets, in addition to generating facts. It establishes an initial filter of disclosure because it has technical knowledge about what can and cannot be news” (TAVARES, 2016, p. 43).

In this context, it is possible to analyze how the press office can operate public communication and innovate using available technological functionalities. The need for change comes mainly from the constant evolution of the media and the speed at which information circulates. Collaborating with this constant transformation idea, Brandão (2006) discusses that political change has also brought changes in the alternative way of communicating, to the population's knowledge about the rights of access to information, transparency, and rendering of accounts to society.

4 Access to Information Law (LAI) and Accountability

In Brazil, access to public information is included in chapter I of the Federal Constitution, a space in which Individual and Collective Rights and Duties are dealt with, in item XXXIII of article 5. On the subject, it says that “everyone has the right to receive from government agencies information of their private interest, or of collective or general interest, which will be provided within the term of the law, under the penalty of liability, except for those whose secrecy is essential to the security of society and State” (BRASIL, 1988, art. 5).

In addition, access to information has been legally provided for since 2012, through Decree No. 7,724, of May 16, regulating Law No. 12,527, of November 18, 2011 – the result of debates in a body linked to the Government Accountability Office. In its text, the legislation regulates the processes that ensure the access and classification of information under restricted access, considering degree and term of secrecy. Thus, bodies and entities guarantee “to natural person and legal entity, the right of access to information, which will be provided through objective and agile procedures, in a transparent, clear, and easy-to-understand language, considering the principles of public administration and the guidelines provided for in Law No. 12,527 of 2011” (BRASIL, 2012). Once created to facilitate access to information and encourage active participation, the legislation establishes that requests can be made by filling out a form, and the applicant is not obliged to specify the reasons for requesting access to information.

Answers given to citizens that can be made by electronic means are free of charge, but in cases in which the supply entails the physical reproduction of documents, the body, in accordance with article 18 of the same law, “will make available to the applicant the Brazilian Federal

Revenue Collection Slip (GRU) or equivalent document, to pay the costs of services and materials used” (BRASIL, 2012). This reproduction, in turn, will observe a ten days period from the moment the applicant proves payment for the payment slip. In cases of a large volume of material, the deadline may be longer, as long as it is justified. LAI also establishes that if the applicant is not financially capable of paying the GRU, it is necessary to submit a “declaration of poverty,” pursuant to Law No. 7115, of 1983.

LAI also proposes rules for the degree of classification of documents, namely: Top Secret, whose secrecy period is 25 years (renewable only once); Secret, with a 15-year secrecy period; and Reserved, which have a 5-year secrecy period. By law, information considered top secret is responsibility of the President of the Republic, Vice President of the Republic, State Ministers and authorities with equivalent functions, Commanders of the Navy, Army, Air Force, and Heads of Permanent Diplomatic and Consular Missions abroad (BRAZIL, 2012). In addition, as stated in article 29 of the law, information that compromises the security of the “President of the Republic, Vice President, and their spouses and children will be classified in the reserved level and will remain confidential until the end of the term in office or the last term, in case of re-election.” (BRASIL, 2012).

In addition to these aspects presented so far, LAI addresses an important point, which concerns the monitoring of law enforcement. The highest authority of each body will designate a person responsible for ensuring that access to information is guaranteed. This person may also make recommendations with to improve the procedures of the Decree that puts the Access to Information Law into force.

The Federal Government website⁴ has this and other laws available for consultation. LAI, in particular, has a portal that, in addition to requests, features infographics that make it easier for citizens to understand the legislation in various aspects: Scope and purposes of the law, how to make requests, deadlines, and also statistical reports of the Access Law. This address emphasizes that the request for information can be made within the scope of the three Branches (Judiciary, Legislative, and Executive) and in all government levels (municipal, state, district, and federal). Citizens are also informed that requests do not require motivation, and the provision of this information is free of charge, except in cases where material is reproduced.

Regarding these requests for information, the Federal Government explains that they do not fit as the requests outlined in the LAI: outbursts, suggestions, or compliments (these must be directed to the body's Ombudsman), queries on the application of the legislation (which should also be sent to the adequate channel – although this channel is not mentioned) and complaints (these, when referring to the Federal Executive Branch, must be sent to the CGU website; breaches of the law in other levels must be sent to the respective responsible bodies).

⁴ Information <https://www.gov.br/cessoainformacao/pt-br>.

In the public service, Amorim and Silva (2014) present an overview of the difficulties in applying the law, especially when it comes to public organizations. Some of these obstacles can be seen in the attachment to administrative routines, excessive hierarchy, and bureaucracy in internal processes, despite being a law that has been in force for almost eight years. This adaptation process then becomes cultural and must be worked on at all branch of government levels.

At the municipal level, Batista (2017) argues that, in order to apply the law, it is necessary to formulate a new policy. Even if this innovation happens, there are limitations and difficulties that prevent actions. One of the most emphasized impediments in the research is the lack of financial resources.

Recently, Valdiones *et al.* (2019) published reports that analyze the advances and challenges when it comes to transparency and the SICs after seven years that the LAI has been in force in the country. The authors point out that, even in force for seven years (until the article's time of publication), states present a series of improvements that need to be made.

The best result was at the Federal level, which is carried out by the CGU, but still does not meet all the criteria, reaching a 93% score. In the rank, Alagoas and Maranhão states are tied in second place, with 80%. The Minas Gerais state, to which the city of Uberlândia belongs, fulfills 67% of the criteria, representing a median result in the southeast region of the country.

Therefore, we can observe that the LAI remains a process still under construction in the country, with points to be improved throughout the national territory, including at the federal level, and is directly related to the rendering of accounts concept, which is very close to the so-called accountability.

4.1 Accountability

During the research, we could observe that dealing with communication and public management often leads to a discussion about accountability, an English term coming from the administration that, until now, does not have a translation in Brazil. When doing a bibliographical survey on the subject, we found an article in which Campos (1990) proposes ways to translate the term into Portuguese. In her study, she points out that the first mention of the term was by Mosher (1968), who defines accountability as:

[...] synonymous with strict responsibility or obligation to answer for something. While subjective responsibility comes from within the person, accountability, an objective responsibility, "carries the responsibility of a person or organization before another person, outside of itself, for something, or for some type of performance." And this author continues: "Whoever fails to comply with legitimate guidelines is considered irresponsible and subject to penalties. (MOSHER, 1968 *apud* CAMPOS, 1990, p. 33).

Campos' text was published 30 years ago, and an excerpt draws attention, especially if

associated with the previous topic about the LAI, which had not been created yet. Supported by authors who defended the full practice of democracy, the author already showed concern about who held the information in the public service and about the abuse of power, so it would not affect the citizen. Thus, Campos (1990) points out that the lack of control and punishment in public service could affect the democratic ideal – and accountability would come in precisely to help in this control. In this way,

[...] the best bureaucratic control mechanisms – including reward and punishment systems; performance appraisal practices; the strict definition of authority and responsibilities – will always be limited to traditional bureaucratic values: Efficiency, honesty, observance of the rules. (CAMPOS, 1990, p.34).

Therefore, what Campos (1990) notes, in the accountability context, are the traditional precepts of the bureaucratic system, such as efficiency, honesty, and compliance with the rules. However, she questions whether only these mechanisms will be able to guarantee that there is no abuse of power and instead, there is the fostering of social justice and that the government works for the people. The conclusion is that all these points will only be ensured if citizens are aware of their rights and duties and practice inspection.

Thirty years have passed since the author's publication and the scenario is different from what was presented in her text. When she points out that Brazil does not follow other world democracies and, at some points in the text, defends countries like the United States, placing them on a higher level, we can identify the author's mistake by comparing countries with different situations and specificities in which comparisons are not allowed. Each of them has particularities that must be considered, such as the government system, economic and social factors, and several other issues. Considering the three-world model and comparing a developed country⁵ with a developing or underdeveloped country means disregarding inequalities and establishing parameters that may even be unattainable.

With a more recent approach, Rocha (2011) also points out the responsibilities of the democratic system, both for citizens, who must know how to choose their rulers, and the rulers themselves, who need to be accountable to those who chose them to rule. In this case, as the author already considers society already formed to defend its rights, he presents new problems in the modern democratic regime linked to, "developing ways and instruments for accountability, that is, processes of evaluation and permanent liability of public agents that allow the citizen to control the practice of power granted to their representatives" (ROCHA, 2011, p.84). That is, the government needs to use the principle of publicity⁶ to show what is done, how it is done, and to

⁵ The Three-world model used during Cold War to separate allied countries and their economic power. Among the meters to classify a country as first, second, and third world are economy, technological advances, social indexes, quality of life, among others.

⁶ The five fundamental principles of Public Administration are: Legality, Impersonality, Morality, Publicity, and

provide channels so citizens can contact them to request other information that is not available. These channels, in turn, can be considered a way of filling the gaps in public administration, as not all the acts of the government are made public, making the citizen practice passive transparency.

When it comes to accountability in electronic government transparency, Cunha *et al.* (2016) point out that, over the years, Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) have boosted the process, both nationally and internationally. As a way to bring the State and the citizen closer, the use of these technologies, “aims to improve the rendering of public accounts, allowing third parties to access and monitor government actions. Better information, in turn, empowers citizens and therefore leads to more democratic and more trustworthy governments” (CUNHA *et al.*, 2016, p. 128).

Addressing positive and negative views, Cunha *et al.* (2016) state that associating transparency with accountability is directly linked to “[...] providing society with access to control institutions (accountability) so that the cycle between them is completed and, in fact, promotes substantive advances in democracy to enable that the ruled hold their rulers accountable” (CUNHA *et al.*, 2016, p. 132).

That being said, the following topic is based on what was conceptualized to show how was the analysis process and the results found in this research.

5 Methodological Procedures

Considering the issue about how the press office of the Uberlândia City Council works with public communication and for conducting what has been proposed, as well as achieving the set objectives, an applied, descriptive, documentary, and qualitative research was carried out through the selection and analysis of documents, assigning interpretation, and meaning to what was analyzed.

First, there was a bibliographical analysis of the main points explored in the research, such as the main authors and concepts of public communication, accountability, access to information law, in addition to studies on themes that include politics, citizenship and communication in the legislative context. In this way, we could achieve a theoretical apparatus to theoretically support the studied themes.

A monitoring of the Facebook and Instagram official pages was carried out, in addition to an analysis of the institutional website of the object of the research. It is important to add that analyzing the two social media brought different results because despite being increasingly unified and having similar (but not identical) functionalities, each social media has its particularity and was created with a different intention. These two social media were also chosen because they

Efficiency (BRASIL, 1988).

are among the most used worldwide. In Brazil, for example, the Digital in 2020 report⁷ (WE ARE SOCIAL, 2020), made by *We Are Social* in a partnership with *Hootsuite*, showed that there are 150.4 million internet users in Brazil and, among them, 140 million use social media – a 8.2% increase when compared to the previous year. The average daily time of these users on the internet is 9h 17min, of which 3h 31min are used on social media. The survey also showed that *Youtube* (96%), Facebook (90%), *WhatsApp* (88%), and Instagram (79%) lead the preference rank of Brazilians who use social media.

Data collection occurred through monitoring between April and June 2020 from the official Uberlândia City Council Facebook page, with the assistance of *Fanpage Karma*, which is a tool for monitoring and analyzing social media. Through it, it is possible to obtain information regarding engagement, followers, individual analysis of posts, best days and times for publication, and other data.

We collected posts in order to list the types of information disclosed on the chosen social media. The *Hype Auditor* tool was used on the Instagram page, which checks information regarding the audience, engagement and profile, and the followers interest. We also performed a manual analysis to check feelings and interactivity. In addition, we noticed that the content of the two social media mentioned is partially replicated: In the collected posts, *feed* photos and texts are the same, with few exceptions in which the Instagram content corresponded to only the first paragraph of the Facebook's *text*. Thus, as they are the same content, a comparison of the results presented in both social media was performed. On a large scale, the research objectives were the same both on Facebook and Instagram, but the data analysis considered the specificities of each social media, in addition to considering the language used and having the LAI as a basis. In the social media content analysis, in addition to the post title and publication date, the following analysis categories were established:

Table 1 – Categorization Criteria – Purpose

Categories	Purpose
Theme	Observing the most recurrent themes in posts
Interaction	Understanding how the audience reacts to published content
Language	Analyzing whether the communication is accessible and easy to understand for the public
Complementary material (CM)	Observing if the published content offers any extra material that helps deepening on the subject, since social media is for quick content and reading
Graphic piece (GP)	Knowing which graphic material is used to complement the communication

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2021.

Based on the categories, it was possible to know which themes were discussed during the

⁷ *Hootsuite* and *We are social* are two digital marketing agencies specializing in social media that operate worldwide. They annually carry out surveys about the world of digital communication.

collection period, the interaction between the institution and public, and also whether the communication was effective. This is because being present on social media and posting news is not enough to guarantee a communication of good quality. Another point analyzed was the use of graphic pieces to capture more attention of those who are seeing the *feed*. With the large number of publications, it is important that the graphics is used wisely, exploring photo, art creation, animations, and image carousel features, such as in the case of Instagram.

The methodology used, in addition to the use of the above-mentioned tools, was content analysis from the perspective of concepts such as public communication, access to information law, and the work of the press office. To observe PC, four central axes that indicate prerequisites for the action of agents and institutions that deal with public interest communication were assessed: Transparency, access, interaction, and the social ombudsman. Public interest, disclosure of institutional acts and legislative matters, dialogue, participation and the possibility of interactivity/contact and transparency were also assessed. The content analysis was based on the Press Office, Access to Information Law, and Public Communication with the following subcategories:

Table 2 – Categorization Criteria and Subcategories

Categories	Subcategories		
Press Office (AI)	Disclosure of news or institutional work (DN)	Facilitating the provision of information (FP)	
Access to Information Law (LAI)	Transparency and Advertising (TP)	Freedom of Expression (LE)	
Public Communication (PC)	Public Interest (PI)	Dialogue (D)	Make the institution's work well-known (TC)

Source: Prepared by the authors based on bibliographic research, 2021.

As for the institutional website, an analysis based on the LAI was proposed, according to criteria that would help answering if the CMU follows the legislation and works with active and passive transparency, especially regarding e-Sic. The available communication channels, ease of access to information of public interest, and respect for the Access to Information Law were assessed, based on criteria described by Valdiones *et al.* (2019).

5.1 Pre-analysis Context

During monitoring, it was necessary to consider two factors regarding the analysis of the object in question. The first, with a political bias, concerns the arrest of 20 of the 27 city councilors in December 2019. The lawmakers were the target during an operation coordinated by the MP (Brazilian Public Prosecution Office) to investigate embezzlement of public funds, actions in

which office funds were used to illegally hire security, cleaning, and printing companies. Although it did not happen during the monitoring period, the social media and website, until May, heavily discussed the subject. That is because there was a reallocation of seats in the legislature after the imprisonment. Call for alternates, assuming the position, revocation proceedings, resignations, and even resumption of exercise by one of them, who appealed to higher courts. Most publications collected even refer to these processes.

Furthermore, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic reached Brazil. Uberlândia had its first case on March 17th and the first confirmed death on April 2nd. Days after the first case, the city hall decided to close local businesses as one of the measures to contain the disease transmission. Furthermore, the first idea was that the monitoring period would end when the election period would start and when, usually, social media profiles are deactivated until the elections are over. However, at the end of June 2020 it was decided that the elections would be postponed to November due for health security reasons as a result of the pandemic.

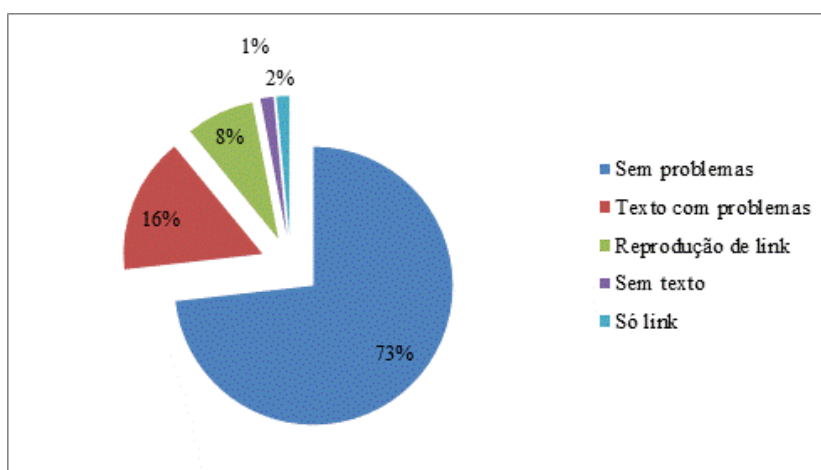
In this context, in mid-2020, the City Council was not only shaky in its credibility due to the fund embezzlement case, but also because the entire city was facing problems arising from the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, it is a period in which city councilors would need to not only be increasingly concerned regarding transparency to raise the profile of the Legislature, but also focused on proposing actions that would help Uberlândia go through this period. The solution should come with stricter inspection measures to prevent the misuse of public funds and for the purpose for which it is intended, projects that reduce the economic and social impacts on the city, and also, attention to access to information in a period when people became more connected, and services and assistance at the City Council were no longer on-site, with meetings being held remotely and activities in scales.

From the content analysis, we counted 63 posts on Facebook and 51 on Instagram, with the two social media being linked and sharing the same contents, without adaptation or with few changes. Since the contents are the same, we considered Facebook to reach the conclusion that the “Revocation” theme was the most recurrent, appearing in 24 posts. The list continues as the following: “Laws,” ten times; “Meetings” and “CPI,” six times each; “Operation of the City Council,” four times; and “Pandemic” and “Elections,” three times each. There are also eight other subjects mentioned less than three times. If combined, the numbers are greater than total posts because some posts cover more than one topic. In neither of the media there was a post without interaction. By interaction we mean likes, reactions, comments, and shares.

In terms of language, 73% of the publications met criteria such as simple and clear language. For Facebook, the idea that a long text would be a problem was disregarded, since, as described above, it supports larger texts and there is the possibility of reading them on the desktop version, unlike Instagram (media more focused on images, instantaneity, and which is most accessed through the mobile app). Long texts were considered problematic only if they were used

on Instagram, as on Facebook the problems were related to the textual construction itself. As an example, we can mention the text published on April 6th, about a hearing to deal with the revocation of councilors involved in the scandals, and which presents mistakes in the text construction and in the citation of the legislation.

Graph 1 – Language Used on the Facebook Page



Source: Prepared by the author, 2021.
(No issues; Text with issues; Link reproduction; No text; Only the link)

However, 16% is a significant number considering the number of people who may have had trouble interpreting or understanding such texts. This is because the press office professional must act as a facilitator, in which their fundamental role is to collaborate, providing necessary information, from the most basic to the most developed (TAVARES, 2016).

At this point, the reproduction of the content on Instagram diverges a bit. Most of the texts published in there are short and, perhaps for this reason, they miss the problems present in the other social media analyzed. In some of them, only the original first paragraph is published and a link to access the full story on the website is shared.

Therefore, this is another problem. The idea of sharing an external link that leads to a more detailed material for those interested in a deeper reading is great, but it only works for Facebook, which allows redirection. On Instagram, what was supposed to be a *link* is a normal text and even using a URL shortener, it is still unlikely that the person will memorize or copy it and edit it in the mobile browser to gain access to the full content.

In addition, the posts are limited to photos, corresponding to 53 of the 63 posts on Facebook, specially from the board of directors in the sessions during the legislative work. Although the environment is always the same, it is possible to bring other versions and elements, according to the discussed theme, such as art, more videos and, in the case of Instagram, an art as a carousel of images. All media resources not only can but should be exploited to draw the

attention of the social media user who keeps scrolling the feed.

Regarding the work of the press office analysis, two subcategories were proposed: Disclosure of news or institutional work (DN) and Facilitating the provision of information (FP). To consider that the CMU is a press office, both criteria should be met. Thus, from the content analysis on Facebook, 85.7% of the publications meet the two main criteria proposed.

The next category concerns LAI compliance. Therefore, two categories were proposed: Transparency and Publicity (TP) and Freedom of Expression (LE). In this case, transparency and publicity concern the rendering of accounts through digital channels and the promotion of the CMU, and Freedom of Expression considers the possibility of interacting with posts and other users, as well as expressing freely. For the latter, comments were considered as a form of freedom of expression and not ready-made interactions, such as likes and reactions. The first two concepts were not separated because despite being different, it was considered that in most publications, especially on the revocation of the removed city councilors, the institution promotes itself through this transparency and the possibility for the population to know about all the steps taken by the processing commissions. Thus, 55.5% meet the criteria proposed by LAI on Facebook.

Finally, the analysis observed Public Communication considering three subcategories: Public Interest (PI), Dialogue (D), and Make the institution's work well-known (TC). The first follows the entire concept proposed so far. The second observes if there is interaction between users in the posts, whether among themselves or with the institution. Finally, the last subcategory considers any and all work done by the CMU and its city councilors. In this way, the body serves only 19.04% of all points observed on Facebook and that were directly related to PC. This point dialogues with Duarte (2009), when he points out that Public Communication is mainly based on the public interest and on the dialogue with the population, which was not effectively achieved here.

As for LAI and PC, Instagram diverges from Facebook as there is less interaction and the profile did not express itself to answer any questions from social media users in any publication, as it does in some Facebook posts. Thus, considering the same form of assessment and considering that the number of posts was smaller, the results were: AI, 96.07%; LAI, 37.25%; and PC, 0%. The results presented here, especially regarding PC and the criteria established to carry it out, indicate small differences in the criteria used, especially regarding how to identify the PC used by Kovouski (2013) and Duarte (2009). Matos (2013), on the other hand, corroborates Duarte's (2009) proposal by pointing out that Public Communication should be thought of as a political process that intends to integrate expression, interpretation, and dialogue between the citizen and the State.

Those who work with social media have at their disposal a series of tools to monitor the data from the pages they manage. From these data and metrics it is possible to improve the social media performance. *Fanpage Karma* was used to analyze data from the Facebook page. From its

use we could note that in this period, the publication with the greatest interaction (1.7%), with 33 *likes* and nine comments, was not even related to City Council issues, as it was a note of regret for the death of a former mayor. Then comes the approval of the law that makes the use of masks as a form of protection for COVID-19 mandatory; it was published on April 17, 2020 and received 18 *likes* and 15 comments (1.1% interaction and 5th highest in number of *likes*).

Another data observed was the use of words and *hashtags*. Note that there is almost no frequency and a low engagement of the used terms. The use of *hashtags* in social media can expand the brand's reach, promoting greater engagement among social media users. Even so, the number of page likes increased from 3,711 to 3,846 in that period. Analyzing it as a whole, in these three months the *fanpage* had an average interaction of 0.4% and an engagement of 0.28%.

Moving on to Instagram data, which were analyzed using the *Hype Auditor* tool, the percentage of people engaged with the content reaches only 0.92%, with 703 of the 1,900 followers at the time being considered a "quality audience," and only 6 people were considered really engaged. However, we need to highlight that in the posts analyzed we can observe that two of them are a city councilor and a server. Still regarding the audience, it was shown that interaction is low, considering both likes and comments, as observed in the content analysis.

Followers, in turn, correspond to 73% of the city of Uberlândia and are defined by the tool as follows: 37.5% of real people, 0.4% of influencers (they have more than five thousand followers), 40.6% of mass followers (accounts with over 1500 followers that use automatic tools to gain followers), and 21.5% of suspicious accounts (robots or people who use specific services for *likes*, comments and followers), as defined by the analysis platform itself.

We can conclude that the responsible team needs to deepen the theoretical knowledge discussed throughout this research to focus on an effective communication plan that includes the public interest, transparency, publicity, and also act as mediators of information. We observed no publication in the period analyzed, between April and June 2020, that prioritized or encouraged the interaction and dialogue with the community.

Thus, this result, along with others collected so far on fanpages, goes against what Duarte (2009) points out by mentioning that Public Communication requires: Prioritizing the public interest; centralizing the process on the citizen; treating communication as a dialogic process; and adapting instruments to public needs, possibilities, and interests.

In social media, we conclude that the issue of transparency and, especially, public communication needs to be rethought and better worked, as well as studies regarding social media, to define the specificities of each one and the potential that they allow to work on such a relevant theme, as politics.

The analysis of the institutional website was carried out considering the LAI and e-Sic. During the analysis we found problems in the system that made it impossible to complete the analysis.

The LAI establishes that, for active transparency, legislation needs easy access and, furthermore, that tutorials on how to use the electronic system must be made available and that the reports of all requests for information must be public. Thus, the City Council meets only 50% of the stipulated criteria. It is worth recalling here what was presented in chapter 3: The numbers on requests and resources should be available, with statistics extracted daily from the e-SIC. Such data can be just consulted, or the citizen can download the reports.

However, the biggest problem lies in passive transparency. It is established that the request for information can be made either through registration or anonymously. However, the platform did not allow the request to be made either way. For anonymous information, the following message was displayed after filling in all fields: “It is not possible to create the process. Standard user not identified!”

In a second attempt, making a registration and filling in basic information, it is informed that the validation will be sent by email, but this confirmation has never arrived. Later, an attempt was made to register another address, but it is only possible to register with data, especially because they ask for CPF (Taxpayer Identification Number). The message was: “Error saving user. There is already a user for a person with the data entered. Contact the registration department.” Other people were asked to perform the procedure and the result was the same.

Another inconsistency is that the website informs that in the event of an error the registration sector must be contacted. However, there is no information on how to contact the sector, neither online nor on-site. Even if we disregarded the pandemic, the legislation establishes that requests are made by electronic means so the acts are more transparent. In addition, it serves to facilitate the information request process for those who do not have time to attend the City Council, as the institution operates during business hours, when the citizen is working.

Therefore, Uberlândia City Council meets only 9.09% of the criteria analyzed in relation to passive transparency, which concerns three main points: Receiving the request for access; registering this request, as well as delivering the protocol number with a date; and, finally, forwarding the citizen's request to the responsible sector that will provide the requested information. This result is in line with the studies by Valdiones *et. al.* (2019), carried out throughout the country, which shows the difficulties in carrying out, monitoring, and consulting requests for information, often preventing the user from making any request from the system.

We concluded that, on the website, access to information is precarious, since until the conclusion of this research it was not possible to register and request through e-Sic, which is subject to penalties. Therefore, the CMU runs away from what is established in the legislation, since the system for requesting information does not reach its main points: receiving the request for access; registering this request, as well as delivering the protocol number, with date; and, finally, forwarding the citizen's request to the responsible sector that will provide the requested information. (BRASIL, 2012). If the citizen does not even get to the first part, it becomes

irrelevant to mention here the fulfillment of deadlines.

It is worth emphasizing that, in the current scenario of pandemic and social distancing, processes should be increasingly digital, not only to guarantee the citizen's right to access to information, but also to guarantee health security by prevent applicants from having to commute to make their requests. Uberlândia City Council went through a delicate situation of arrest and revocation of most councilors, negatively affecting the institution's image. Investing in transparency and facilitating what is already provided for in the LAI is not only mandatory but would also help to restore the credibility of the agency and its agents.

6 Final Considerations

This survey monitored and analyzed Facebook and Instagram social media and the institutional website of Uberlândia City Council for three months, between April and June 2020, in order to investigate how issues of public interest are treated and disclosed in official communication channels, weighing the contents of legislative matters, measuring the response of users to social media posts and other issues.

Based on bibliographic research and the presented data, we can conclude that Uberlândia City Council still needs to go through an improvement process. Knowing the concepts of public communication and accountability are some of the initial steps. It is necessary to understand that, today, there is a significant amount of people who obtain information through social media, especially Facebook. Digital channels are potential resources that must be worked on, not only to assure that information reaches the greatest possible number of people, but doing so in a way that press officers work as knowledge facilitators, making the language clear and not letting technical terms to be an excluding factor for the practice of citizenship. In addition, it is necessary to understand the specificities of media and use them in favor of the population, especially by strengthening ties and promoting dialogue, which is indeed possible even online.

Finally, the institutional website presents major problems regarding access and makes it impossible to request information, whether through registration or anonymously, as established by law. Reports are not presented either, which affects the principle of transparency.

Responding to the initial concern about transparency and public interest, we can conclude that, based on the material and period analyzed, Uberlândia City Council does not carry out public communication in social media, since most issues inherent to the community are not even widely publicized. Another point is that there is no respect for the Access to Information Law regarding the requests made online by e-Sic, in accordance with approved legislation, which may lead to penalties if someone files a complaint.

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