

# Electoral Mobilization for European Parliament Elections – a Portuguese Quasi-Experimental Plan for the 2004/2009 Elections

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## ABSTRACT

The European Parliament (EP) elections have registered high rates of abstention and Portugal is no different from all the other EU countries. From a relational marketing paradigm, we have tried to define the concept of local proximity-based political communication, the grounds for a research program based on a quasi-experimental plan aimed at verifying a set of assumptions on the effects of local proximity-based political communication on the mobilization of Portuguese voters for the EP elections of 2004 and 2009. The results are clear: the proximity-based political communication generated significant electoral mobilization in those two elections.

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## Introduction

The research project “I vote in Europe”, whose results are the subject of this work, focused on the elections in Portugal for the EP in 2004 and 2009. This project was supported by the Portuguese Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Portuguese National Elections Commission and the Lisbon University Institute.

The elections for the EP have registered high rates of abstention. This apathy in the electorate is generally associated with a certain distance between the electors and the elected representatives of Europe, between the citizens of the European Union and its institutions. The communication that is commonly used to motivate citizens towards a greater electoral turnout and thus, to try to eliminate part of that distance, is based on generic advertising conveyed by the mass media (press, radio, television and out-doors), from a transactional-political marketing point of view, without evident concern for establishing a specific proximity-based identity to the electoral act, between the communicational content and the voters.

From a relational marketing paradigm, we have tried to define the concept of proximity-based political communication, the grounds for a research program based on a quasi-experimental plan aimed at verifying a set of assumptions on the effects of proximity-based political communication on the mobilization of Portuguese voters for the elections to the European Parliament (EP) in 2004 and 2009. The results are clear: the proximity-based political communication generated significant electoral mobilization in those two elections.

## 1. Political Marketing: Transactional, Relational or Both

The first official definition of marketing was established in 1935 by the National Association of Marketing Teachers, the predecessor of the current American Marketing Association (AMA). According to Keefe (2004), the AMA adopted this definition in 1948, kept it intact in the review made to the concept in 1960 and amended it in 1985, defining marketing as “the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives.”(AMA, 1985, 1999).

In a new definition announced in September 2004, the AMA stated that marketing” is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders” (AMA, 2004 and 2006).

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The comparison between the AMA's 1985 and 2004 definitions shows a clear concern in including the aspects of "delivering value" (which necessarily implies the study of the marketing value chain) and "customer relations management", which shifts the short-term marketing action (transactional marketing) to the medium and long-term (relational marketing).

According to Dann (2006), this new 2004 AMA definition of marketing has brought five major changes: marketing is no longer designed predominantly as an organizational process and shall be regarded as a function and a process, which requires a "marketing function" within the organization; the replacement of the explicit reference to the elements of the marketing mix in favor of an expanded conception of value to the customer where these elements are included; the focus is now on relational marketing that replaces the notions of satisfaction of individual objectives and the organization; the introduction of the idea that marketing should benefit all the stakeholders of an organization goes against the sustained dynamics in the transactional relationship between the client/consumer and the organization; the exchange is no longer explicitly at the center of marketing, although implicitly assumed, but continues to be part of the core of the concept, as a realization of a "moment of truth" of a relational complex directly or indirectly covering all stakeholders.

In order to better understand the changes introduced by the AMA to their definitions of marketing over time, we must look, *ab initio*, at classic marketing (transactional), based as written in the definition of 1985 on the concept of marketing mix, present through the explicit reference to the elements that are part of it, the 4 P's: Product, Pricing, Placement and Promotion.

From authors such as Gronroos (1994), Hedgcock (1998) and AMA (2008) it is possible to extract another set of elements of a political marketing mix more suited to relational marketing, by keeping the product and communication and introducing the management of "relationships" and "database marketing".

Recognition of the importance of service provision was a contributing factor to the growth of relationship marketing (Layton, 2011) and in a comparison between both paradigms of marketing, Sheth and Parvatiyar (2000) associated transactional marketing with the distribution of value and relational marketing with the creation of the same, integrating the customer into the value creation process itself.

In a vision that can easily be adapted to the political market, Gordon (1998) claimed that transactional marketing is very limited as to the possibility of integrated development of a customer relationship process (voters) and proposed replacing this approach by another that privileges the customers and relationships rather than the markets and products.

Gronroos (1994) defined the concept of relational marketing, writing that it aims "to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met", adding that the objective pursued by relational marketing is founded on a mutually satisfactory exchange process based on "fulfillment of promises", where trust is a factor of great importance and in which "such relationships are usually but not necessarily always long term".

After all, the contribution of relational marketing is expressed "by reducing costs and increasing revenues. That is, effective marketing relationships can contribute to the development of long-term customer loyalty and to a sustainable competitive advantage" (Williams, 2012). Kanagal (2009) confirms this point of view stating that the knowledge and application of relationship marketing helps fuel customer satisfaction, customer retention and the acquisition of new customers.

As stated by Tadajewski (2009), "relationship marketing could be a new paradigm", to be harnessed by organizations that increasingly aim at promoting closer relationships with their customers.

The question of term is distinctive among the marketing models adopted by political parties, establishing clear differences between the preference for using transactional marketing during election campaigns (short term) and relational marketing between them (medium term), contributing, in both cases to the socio-political integration of their citizens (Roskin *et al.*, 2007).

Whereas Pelset *al.* (2000) see transactional marketing as "the building foundations of marketing", to Roskin *et al.* this same model gains, in general, by being complemented by the management of relationships resulting from the activity itself.

The non-limitation of political campaigns to transactional marketing is also defended by Lock and Harris (1996) who criticized the political scientists for their limitations in conceiving political marketing “in the context of political communications in the immediate pre-election period”. Such a perspective is supported by Wring (1997) when defining political marketing as “the party or candidates” use of opinion research and environmental analysis to produce and promote a competitive offering which will help realize organizational aims and satisfy groups of electors in exchange for their votes.”

This comprehensive view of political marketing could already be detected in the work of Scammell (1995) where she mentions its permanent use in politics, i.e. what the author designates as a “permanent campaign”, a byproduct of the blurring of boundaries between governing and this continuous campaign, that can lead to an “engineering of consent” with the entry of political consultants “into the inner sanctum of government”.

O’Shaughnessy (2001) states that through the concept of “permanent campaign” political marketing became “the organizing principle round which policy was constructed”, whilst Smith and Hirst (2001) assume that this evolution means that political marketing has moved into the realm of strategic marketing and that, therefore, it no longer constitutes a short-term tactical expedient aimed at gathering information in preparation of the elections, but is part of long-term process that seeks to ensure governing continuity.

Reinforcing this point of view, Lees-Marshment (2001) states that the analysis of electoral behavior is no longer limited to the campaign, going from “beginning through to end of an electoral cycle (not just the election campaign) and includes the leadership, MPs (and candidates), membership, staff, symbols, constitution, activities such as party conferences and policies”.

Wring (1996) refers to the modernization of electoral campaigns as a process of professionalization, as a strategic shift on the part of political parties, that after having gone through the stages of “propaganda” and “media marketing”, would have embraced political marketing, arguing that “the adoption of marketing strategies does not necessarily mean the dilution of party ideology” (Wring, 1997).

Reflecting on political marketing, Lock and Harris (1996) suggest that sufficient attention has not been given to the significant differences between political marketing and the marketing of products or services, claiming that the increased notoriety of the first coincided with the decline of party affiliation in the United Kingdom and with an increasing distance between parties and their voters.

This finding of the authors makes us ponder on the question of why the recourse to political marketing has been used more in a depressed market than in an expanding one, and therefore, from a “healing” perspective rather than that of political market development, having an especially palliative effect on the demand side, on the lack of citizen participation.

The development of political markets and the responses from political marketing over the past decade have not altered this perspective, except by the growing use of techniques associated with relational marketing to compensate, in time, for the limited mobilization capacity that political transactional marketing has been increasingly showing.

This observation does not prevent us from concluding that for many years, the same transactional marketing techniques have been vital in electoral battles of all sorts and in the management of their own governing, which leads us to believe that transactional marketing and relational marketing complement each other, despite the differences between their perspectives, with the first favoring tactics and the second giving priority to the strategy.

With this complementarity comes the need to cross-reference the teachings from classic marketing (transactional), relational marketing, political marketing, sociology and political science, questioning the effectiveness of repeated and time-worn processes that instead of mobilizing, dispel or, at best, generate indifference and apathy.

Within the scope of the aforementioned complementarity, Bannon (2005) states that “the increased electoral volatility has made the strengthening of a stable relationship with the supporters even more attractive” to the political actors, questioning shortly afterwards: “the adoption of a relational approach can

be appealing, but what to do if the client (elector) doesn't want to establish a relationship? Can the (same) organization act based on relational and traditional marketing? Can a hybrid of the two paradigms coexist? "

There are several authors (Gronroos, 1994; Pels, 1997; Baker, 2000; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000) who answer affirmatively to these questions because they believe that there has been a change of model in marketing, which reaches all types of marketing, even mass marketing for major consumer products. In fact, as far as political marketing is concerned, the change goes from the use of traditional mass marketing (transactional) for unknown voters, to the development and management of relational marketing for specific voters that are known to the organization, that is, to those to whom the organization can address direct communication.

## **2. Political Communication and Electoral Mobilization**

Concerning the communication techniques covered by the concept of "direct marketing", Kotler (1999) says that this concept has been undergoing a gradual transformation, now being used more often on a relational marketing basis, as recognition for this model increases. This results from the fact that classic marketing theories have focused more on ways of attracting customers and generating transactions (transactional) rather than the concern for maintaining them (relational).

Election campaigns that focused on transactional marketing techniques progressively and intensely resorted to the mass media, following the preferences of vast audiences: the press, shortly after the radio, until the early 1960s when television communication became established, which has more recently been joined by the internet.

The strong media coverage of political campaigns occurred at first as a way of strengthening direct contact with voters and later, with the decline of old identity divisions and the emergence of new types of party structures, the mass media has even come, in many situations, to replace the classical forms of direct communication. In a collective work signed by Norris (2003) it is argued that political communication has met the gradual loss of direct contact with the voters for the benefit of its media coverage, which is key to the fact that today's electoral campaigns are overwhelmingly "worked" through the mass media, while the previously existing link between the elected representatives and voters is breaking down. But the importance of the mass media can be approached from various angles. Huckfeldt *et al.* (2004) have addressed the impact of interpersonal communication networks on political communication: "to the extent that individuals are open to disagreement and persuasion – not only by the candidates and media reports but also by one another – then a more genuinely deliberative process takes place within networks of political communication". These authors conclude that political communication based on face-to-face relationships leads to greater socio-political diversity than studies on compliance and social dissonance suggest, meaning that they enhance civic and electoral participation.

Another aspect of the same problem addresses the saturation generated by intense media coverage of political communication, since, in their everyday lives, citizens encounter numerous communication stimuli of which only a few are of apolitical nature and, in that continuous flood of information, citizens tend to automatically protect themselves, and not necessarily intentionally, from the avalanche of messages that hit them.

The growing electoral demobilization can, therefore, also be assigned to citizen saturation concerning the many communicational impacts to which they are subject and in respect of which the indifference and apathy may constitute, at least for some, a defensive response, as advocated by Jamieson (1992) who explicitly states that in the early 1990s American voters became disenchanted with the political campaigns, particularly with advertising and political speeches.

It is in this context that some justify resorting to negative political communication – even if attacking candidates tends to demobilize voters and to discredit the democratic system as a whole (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995) – being founded on the belief that when this "automatic" process is ongoing, the stimulus from a negative message can awaken the elector more easily than a positive message.

The reason for this increased capacity of negative communication to awaken citizens who follow on “automatic pilot” lies in what social psychologists call automatic surveillance.

Whilst it seems certain that, apart from the direct effects of political communication on voters, we need to take into account the indirect effects that can be caused by a strategic failure in the opposition campaign, i.e. forcing the attacked candidate to lose control of its agenda (Garret, 2006), this may not happen if the negative policy communication objectives for electoral mobilization do not resort to attacks on election candidates, but only target the awakening of voters who are in that state of automatic surveillance.

Continuing on the subject of electoral mobilization, if as demonstrated by Sá (2010), the propensity to abstention in Portugal is correlated with the characteristics of individuals, several authors point out that it is also associated with other situations regarding electoral contexts in which the specific social representation of the elections stands out, which might result in voters classifying them “elections of first and second order” as shown by Reif and Schmidt (1980) from the comparative analysis of the results of the first direct elections to the EP in 1979.

Differentiating between the elections which have a direct impact on the distribution of power of each European country (for example, legislative or presidential type of system) and other elections (for example the European Parliament or referenda), these two authors clarify that voters ascribe minor importance to political systems in “second-order elections” compared to “first-order queries”.

This lesser importance given to EP elections lies with the perception of greater distance between electors and elected Europeans and generates electoral demobilization which political communication derived from the transactional paradigm has not been able to overcome in the successive elections for the EP since 1979.

### **3. Local Proximity-based Political Communication**

The increased use of communication techniques that privilege direct contact with the voters in a relational marketing approach, particularly in the context of local political campaigns, has interested several authors including Maarek (2007) who addressed this subject, although noting that, at a local level, the candidates image-based communication has also been replacing the communication of ideas mainly through what the author classifies as the “spectacle” that politics has been turned into by the mass media.

Allen (2007), in a paper on local political communication, mentions that several authors have noted that Americans are turning their backs on national television news as a source of political information in favor of local news.

Graber (2001) noted that local news became one of the greatest challenges ever and has contributed towards electoral mobilization, confirming the findings of Gillian and Iyengar (2000) that the “local television news is America’s principal window on the world.”

But despite the growing importance of local media for the perception of politics, as Iyengar and Kinder (1987) remind us, we cannot forget the criticism that some voters have directed for many years now towards the mass media in general (and from which the local media does not escape), complaining of its excessive intervention when mediating between voters and candidates and accusing them of reducing political participations down to “sound bites” of the same participation in news thus taken out of context and in which the journalistic commentary sometimes exceeds, in time or space, the direct participation of the candidate.

In addition to the study of political communication carried out through the mass media, various authors have become interested in and continue to research the local effects of political communication through direct communication techniques, such as door-to-door actions (canvassing), direct mail and telephone calls (telemarketing and phone calls made by volunteers).

Nickerson (2006) confirmed the electoral mobilization generated by telephone calls made by volunteers during the U.S. presidential election of 2004. Apart from this, other empirical studies have demonstrated the

greater effectiveness of personal contact in obtaining results for those campaigns: Jason (1984), Christensen (1998), Spaccarelli(1989), Wang (1990), Reams (1993) and Green (2003).

All these studies, which targeted voter mobilization, highlight the greater effectiveness of direct contact with voters, closely followed by other political communication tools such as mail, telephone, internet, mobile phone (sms, mms), in which the style of the relationship established between the officials of the electoral-political mobilization and voters seems to weigh equally to the success of it.

It turns out, therefore, that the various forms of direct communication (which even twenty years ago carried the burden of heading "below the line") can be powerful instruments of political action, especially if communication is carried out with a "proximity" approach, i.e. resorting to elector symbolic identity elements.

To define this concept of local proximity-based communication, which we consider to be a fundamental basis for the success of political communication, in particular with regard to its ability to mobilize citizens to greater civic participation, we resorted, by analogy, to a work by Lang (2004), despite the author having focus other analysis on local political communication through the mass media and not by means of direct communication.

For Lang (2004)the "local public are neglected entities within the broad scope of communication studies", adding that "our knowledge of how people communicate politically in their local communities is limited", to complete (2004) that "there are also numerous indicators that the local as a communicative arena is being revitalized in late modern societies", with strong local communication infrastructure developments in many countries of the European Union which leads the author to believe that (p. 153) "local publics provide the ground for much of today's civic engagement and political activism."

Langalso adds (2004) "therefore, we can describe the local political public – in contrast to a geographically defined and closed unit of analysis unit– as a relatively opened space in which information flows of local origins intersect with trans locally important news, and together create a common discursive space of political activity."

Based on the reasoning developed by Lang we have produced a definition of the concept of local proximity-based communication for which we have identified the four aspects referred to by that author: cognitive, symbolic, interactive and democratic.

The cognitive aspect of proximity-based communication refers to the shared knowledge about history and different facets of the common public space. This knowledge allows communication to use cognitive shortcuts that facilitate communication and, at the same time, bring closer together sender and receiver, even allowing in certain cases, the establishment of a tacit connivance between the two.

The symbolic aspect of proximity-based communication points to the experience of being part of a locale in which people share specific cultural, social and political practices. In some situations, the symbolic sharing may develop from etnolinguistic- based identity elements, such as local dialects, words or the pronunciation itself, which constitute another set of elements that strongly foster solidarity ties.

The interactive aspect of local proximity-based communication refers to the character of life in local communities (villages, small towns and neighborhoods of urban centers) that lead, by virtue of the frequency over time of the same places, to a large number of face-to-face interactions and interpersonal communications and even, in some cases to the triggering of phenomena that Durkheim designated as mechanical solidarity, impossible to obtain in the anonymity of the big city.

The fourth aspect of proximity-based communication relates to the inherent democratic potential of local audiences given their ease of access to political communication and local participation forums. In a democratic environment, the narrowest spatial dimension of local audiences encourages the exercise of a more intense participatory citizenship.

Together, these four aspects enable us to define what we understand by local proximity-based political communication.

Voters will be able to identify themselves more with this proximity-based communication (through one or more of these aspects) and may not identify themselves with others, but the end result will be that of obtaining the best conditions of acceptability of the messages and the consequent increased likelihood of acting in accordance with them.

#### **4. Hypotheses and Methodology**

Our central hypothesis is based on the assumption that this direct local “proximity” communication is capable of generating greater electoral mobilization in elections perceived to be “second-order” as in the case of the EP elections.

This central hypothesis divide into a further three partial ones, the first of which states that the electoral mobilization generated by local proximity-based communication is more expressive with voters residing in rural villages, where those identity elements represent a greater collective experience, following here, incidentally, the designated model of “community decline”.

Regarding the second part hypothesis, we admit that, beyond these elements of group identity, proximity communication may have an electorally mobilizing effect on voter turnout, through the use of the image of local leaders. These leaders must be local personalities, whether linked or not to political parties, but if they are, such use should provide a representation of local figures of the main competing parties in European elections.

The third partial hypothesis relates to the negative or positive tone of the proximity communication and states that the communication carried out on the basis of negative argumentation mobilizes more voters for “European” elections than if it is positive, particularly with regard to its ability to “wake up” the voters who are in a state of “automatic surveillance.”

The verification of the central hypothesis and of the three separate hypotheses is the object of this study, starting with an experimental design that culminated in the results of the voter turnout in elections to the European Parliament held in Portugal on June 13<sup>th</sup>2004 and June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

By choosing to approach the electoral abstention from a management perspective based on apolitical marketing conceptual framework and , we aimed to demonstrate the crucial importance of direct local proximity-based communication for the fight against abstention, by carrying out an (almost) experimental plan, seeking to establish a causal link between that communication and abstention.

Although we are aware of the difficulties in using the experimental method, perhaps the least often used in social science research, we had no alternative, since the experimental strategy is unique in its ability to respond to this challenge of establishing the aforementioned causal link.

Thus, as defined by Reto and Nunes (2006), we have tried to “test for the existence of causal links between independent variables (causes) and dependents (effects)”, whose fundamental principle is the “comparison between groups, one of which (the experimental) was submitted to the variation of the cause and the other is not (the control group)”. As added by the same authors, “a test of a relation of this type implies that three fundamental conditions are met: the temporal advance (the causes should always precede the effects), the co-variance (to the variation in a cause must correspond a variation in effect) and the lack of alternative explanations. The need to ensure that these three conditions are met leads to experimental studies being often carried out in artificial contexts (laboratory). In the case of field investigations it is not possible, in most situations, to guarantee all conditions which allow us to assign the variation in the effect(s) only to the root cause(s) under study, quasi-experimental designs”.

This research was supported by a communicational initiative closer to the residences of voters from a sample of Portuguese civil parishes.

In each of the elections considered (EP 2004,2009),two samples were built: one through randomization of twelve units within a set of civil parishes defined from common characteristics; for the other sample, paired with the first, the twelve civil parishes were selected on the basis of their similarity to their respective pair.

Let us start with the 2004 study, whose sampling process began with the analysis, parish by parish, of the percentages of abstention in the three European elections held in 1989, 1994 and 1999. We then selected (in 2004) all civil parishes where, in any one of those three elections, the abstention rate registered in each parish did not deviate more than 1.5% (above or below) from the national percentage of abstention in that same election. As a result of the application of this criterion 54 civil parishes were selected.

For each one of the 54 civil parishes a “Country Distance Index” (CDI) was calculated that results from the sum of the absolute values of the differences between the rate of abstention in the country and the parish, times ten, in each of the 3 elections considered.

Information on the characterization of each of the 54 civil parishes as to its population density and the number of families residing there was also collected. The civil parishes were then divided into three categories according to their density (up to 150 inhabitants/Km<sup>2</sup>, from 150 to 400 inhabitants/Km<sup>2</sup> and over 400 inhabitants/Km<sup>2</sup>) giving the following results.

Table 1. Civil parishes from first habitat group

<b>Selected civil parishes from the first habitat group (up to 150 inhab./Km<sup>2</sup>)</b>					
<b>PARISH</b>	<b>MUNICIPALITY</b>	<b>CDI</b>	<b>Population Density</b>	<b>Number families</b>	<b>of</b>
Alcoentre	Azambuja	36	74	1025	
Alvega	Abrantes	14	31	657	
Andrães	Vila Real	30	74	511	
Asseiceira	Tomar	16	114	1191	
Autoguia	V. N. de Ourém	19	127	884	
Bucelas	Loures	12	142	1845	
Cabeçudo	Sertã	9	96	365	
Concavada	Abrantes	25	35	257	
Coucieto	Vila Verde	21	121	160	
Estorãos	Pt Lima	16	32	174	
Gondufe	Pt Lima	23	79	137	
Mesquitela	Mangualde	18	141	303	
Monforte	Monforte	25	6	450	
Mozelos	Paredes de Coura	21	105	129	
Pussos	Alvaiázere	23	56	513	
Santa Luzia	Ourique	27	11	159	
Santarém (São Nicolau)	Santarém	13	117	3535	
São Martinho	Seia	21	123	284	
St <sup>a</sup> Iria Ribeira de Sant.	Santarém	23	71	399	
Tropeço	Arouca	37	73	388	

Table 2. Civil parishes from second habitat group

<b>Selected civil parishes from the second habitat group (151 to 400 inhab./Km<sup>2</sup>)</b>					
<b>PARISH</b>	<b>MUNICIPALITY</b>	<b>CDI</b>	<b>Population Density</b>	<b>Number of families</b>	<b>of</b>
Almeirim	Almeirim	22	169	4335	
Alvarães	Viana do Castelo	19	296	838	
Batalha	Batalha	19	264	2617	
Boidobra	Covilhã	21	176	986	
Borralha	Águeda	19	256	717	
CasteloVigeis	Coimbra	31	237	567	
FonteArcada	PóvoaLanhoso	34	231	402	
FonteArcada	Penafiel	19	324	487	
Lagares	Penafiel	21	226	723	
Lourinhã	Lourinhã	29	228	3209	
Ovar	Ovar	30	356	5779	
Padronelo	Amarante	11	361	275	
Santiago	Seia	10	151	382	
Tabuado	Marco Canaveses	21	204	430	
Torres Novas (Santiago)	Torres Nova	22	269	988	
Vale de Santarém	Santarém	20	311	1168	
Vila de Punhe	Viana do Castelos	33	398	808	

Table 3. Civil parishes from third habitat group

<b>Selected civil parishes from the third habitat group &gt; 400 inhab./Km<sup>2</sup>)</b>					
<b>PARISH</b>	<b>MUNICIPALITY</b>	<b>CDI</b>	<b>Population Density</b>	<b>Number of families</b>	<b>of</b>
Abraveses	Viseu	20	621	2672	
Alfena	Valongo	24	2127	4466	
Arões (São Romão)	Fafe	17	608	952	
Baixa da Banheira	Moita	16	8839	8885	
Coimbra (Santa Cruz)	Coimbra	16	1235	3013	
Coimbra (São Bartolomeu)	Coimbra	28	5117	397	
Eiras	Coimbra	25	1229	4479	
Ericeira	Mafra	13	546	2576	
Ferreiros	Amares	20	1086	911	
Fornelos	Fafe	19	584	441	
Lagos (São Sebastião)	Lagos	21	559	4113	
Lavradio	Barreiro	16	4545	4890	
Miragaia	Porto	33	6588	1111	
Santa Maria Maior	Chaves	21	2383	4482	
São Nicolau	Porto	26	17726	1075	
Vandoma	Paredes	19	407	617	
Várzea	Felgueiras	21	857	713	

Using as classification variables the CDI and the number of resident households, for each of the three habitat groups' hierarchical classification analyses were carried out, based on "city block" distance measurement and the "single linkage" aggregation method (aggregation by shortest distance).

The aforementioned hypotheses led to the need to create an experimental plan based on three variables: the habitat (rural, urban and rural-urban), the presence (or not) of local leaders in the communication and the tone of the communication (positive or negative), in a set of 12 possible combinations.

The selection of locations where proximity communication activities would be carried out was then established, also distributing the 12 localities to be chosen by three groups of habitat, with four in each.

In each group, the four civil parishes were chosen randomly. To each chosen parish a control parish was assigned. The selection of each of these was made based on the "city block" distance mentioned above: every parish was randomly chosen to match the parish that, of all of them, is the closest to it.

The 2004 sample has 24 civil parishes, which actually correspond to two paired samples: one, the "case sample", with the 12 civil parishes that would receive a local proximity-based communication action appealing to the vote and another with the 12 civil parishes that we used as a control sample. The civil parishes that make up the experiment sample are Santa Luzia (Ourique), Andrães (Vila Real), Concavada (Abrantes) and Santa Iria da Ribeira (Santarém) for the first habitat – rural – group; Boidobra (Covilhã), Borralha (Águeda), Alvarães (Viana do Castelo) and Fonte Arcada (Penafiel) from the second habitat – "rural-urban" – group; Alfena (Valongo), São Nicolau (Porto), São Bartolomeu (Coimbra) and Ferreiros (Amares) the third habitat – urban – group.

Also regarding 2004, the sample which served as a control sample was comprised of Coucieiro (Vila Verde), Pussos (Alvaiázere), São Martinho (Seia) and Tropeço (Arouca) for the rural habitat group; Santiago (Torres Novas), Lagares (Penafiel), Vila de Punhe (Viana do Castelo) and Tabuado (Marco) for the "rural-urban" habitat group; Eiras (Coimbra), Miragaia (Porto), Fornelos (Fafe) Arões de São Romão (Fafe) for the urban group.

The communication was carried out in order to obtain 12 booklets, one for each of the 12 civil parishes selected for a "proximity" communication initiative: six booklets presented local leaders (L code in the results table) and the ex-libris of the locality and the other six (code wL) only had that same element of identity and another Ex-Libris; also in six civil parishes the booklet's communication was in a positive tone (code +) and the other six in a negative tone (code-). The combination of these situations was assigned, at random, to each of the civil parishes targeted for the initiative.

The 2009 sample has a structure identical to that of 2004, with the case sample being made up of the 12 civil parishes that had been part of the 2004 control sample, and selecting a new control sample, in a similar way to that used in 2004. The final composition of the two 2009 paired samples is as follows, starting with the case sample: Coucieiro (Vila Verde), Pussos (Alvaiázere), São Martinho (Seia) and Tropeço (Arouca) for the rural habitat group; Santiago (Torres Novas), Lagares (Penafiel), Vila de Punhe (Viana do Castelo) and Tabuado (Marco) for the "rural-urban" habitat; Eiras (Coimbra), Miragaia (Porto), Fornelos (Fafe) and Arões de São Romão (Fafe) for the urban group.

The 2009 control sample was constituted as follows: Mesquitela (Mangualde), Mozelos (Paredes de Coura), Estorãos (Ponte de Lima) and Gondufe (Ponte de Lima) in the group of rural civil parishes; Vale de Santarém (Santarém), Almeirim (Almeirim), Fonte Arcada (Póvoa do Lanhoso) and Castelo Viegas (Coimbra) intermediate habitat; São Sebastião (Lagos), Baixa da Banheira (Moita), Abraveses (Viseu) and Ericeira (Mafra) from the urban group.

After defining the sample, contacts were initiated with local respondents, privileging firefighter organizations and postal services, to which we are grateful for their co-operation. We visited each location that was targeted for the communication initiative and there we conducted at least three interviews through which we collected (and made consensual when necessary) the information that enabled us to define the most significant identity elements of each parish (12 in 2004 and 12 in 2009), as well as the identification of the principal social leaders of the six civil parishes from whom, in each of these two years, we obtained permission to include their image in the brochures that were used for the proximity communication.

The texts appearing in the brochures cover a segmentation of the abstainers so that each voter could identify him or herself with some of the reasons that may have justified their previous absence from the ballot (Sá, 2010). The following text concerns an appeal to vote in the forthcoming EP elections at that time. Both this appeal, and the one in the title of the main page, featured two versions, one written with a positive content and another drawn up with a negative content, which is more dramatic, as you can read below.

• Version with a positive content:

[*Front*] There are many reasons that can lead us not to vote in one election or another.

In some situations we might not vote due to sickness or work or for family reasons, or due to a prolonged absence, any of which are reasons beyond our control.

In other cases, it may happen that we are unable to find our voter card or identity card on election day and we do not go and vote.

On other occasions, something comes up that we consider more “important” or more “interesting” and we put the election into the background.

But the reasons for not voting can also be of a less personal nature, for example, we may consider that the election campaign is very heated, that the candidates and parties speak but don’t motivate us or even because we think that we are under-informed.

MAY NONE OF THESE REASONS PREVENT US FROM VOTING ON JUNE 13th (JUNE 6<sup>th</sup> in the 2009 flyers), BECAUSE THE TRUTH IS THAT WITH OUR VOTE EUROPE GROWS STRONGER.

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[*Back*] Today, Europe is place of peace, progress and democracy.

With the construction of the EEC, now the European Union, we have been living the longest period of peace, prosperity and economic and social well-being, of the affirmation of democracy in Europe.

Only a strong European Union can ensure the continuity of all these achievements and only with the vote of all of us, as European citizens, will the European Union become increasingly strong.

Voting on June 13th (June 6th in 2009 flyers), is voting for peace, progress, democracy and a strong Europe, with a voice in world affairs.

-----  
• Version with a negative content:

In some situations we might not vote due to sickness or work or for family reasons, or due to a prolonged absence, any of which are reasons beyond our control.

In other cases, it may happen that we are unable to find our voter card or identity card on election day and we do not go and vote.

On other occasions, something comes up that we consider more “important” or more “interesting” and we put the election into the background.

But the reasons for not voting can also be of a less personal nature, for example, we may consider that the election campaign is very heated, that candidates and parties speak but don’t motivate us or even because we think that we are under-informed.

MAY NONE OF THESE REASONS PREVENT US FROM VOTING ON JUNE 13th (JUNE 6<sup>th</sup> in 2009 flyers), BECAUSE THE TRUTH IS THAT WITHOUT OUR VOTE EUROPE GROWS WEAKER.

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[*Back*] For centuries Europe was the stage for wars, destruction and dictatorships.

With the construction of the EEC, now the European Union, we have been living the longest period without wars in Europe, in which poverty and social and economic backwardness have declined sharply and dictatorships ended.

With a weak European Union all these achievements may be in jeopardy and without the vote of all of us, as European citizens, the European Union will become increasingly weak.

Voting on June 13th (June 6th in 2009 flyers) is voting against war, poverty, dictatorships, it is voting against a weak Europe, without a voice in world affairs.

The distribution of leaflets in each locality was carried out by the postal services (CTT) ensuring the delivery of a booklet to the mailbox of each resident family, totaling more than eleven thousand families, both in 2004 and in 2009. After an initial distribution of booklets, which occurred a week before the election, a second distribution took place five days later, with the leaflets for the latter including the phrase (“It’s already this Sunday! Don’t miss it! Go and vote!”), noting that there was not much time before the election. Of the 12 leaflets of each case sample, we present the next two examples, a pair from 2004 and the other pair from 2009.

Figures 1 to 4 – leaflets used in 2004



Há muitas razões que nos podem levar a não votar numa ou noutra eleição.

Nalgumas situações pode acontecer não irmos votar por doença ou então, por questões de trabalho ou de família, ou por uma ausência mais prolongada, enfim, por razões que escapam à nossa vontade.

Noutros casos, pode acontecer que, no dia da eleição, não encontremos o cartão de eleitor ou o próprio bilhete de identidade e acabamos por não ir votar.

Doutras vezes, aparece-nos alguma coisa para fazer que consideramos mais "importante" ou mais "interessante" e colocamos as eleições em segundo plano.

Mas as razões para não ir votar podem também ser de ordem menos pessoal, como por exemplo, acharmos que a campanha eleitoral está muito morna, que os candidatos e os partidos falam mas não nos entusiasмам, ou até por considerarmos que nós próprios estamos pouco esclarecidos.

**QUE NENHUMA DESTAS RAZÕES NOS IMPEÇAM DE VOTAR A 13 DE JUNHO, PORQUE O CERTO É QUE COM O NOSSO VOTO, A EUROPA FICA MAIS FORTE.**

**A Europa é hoje um espaço de paz, de progresso, de democracia.**

**Com a construção da CEE, hoje União Europeia, vivemos na Europa o mais longo período de paz, de prosperidade e de bem-estar económico e social, de afirmação da democracia.**

**Só uma União Europeia forte pode assegurar a continuidade de todas estas conquistas e, só com o voto de todos nós, cidadãos europeus, a União Europeia ficará cada vez mais forte.**

**Votar a 13 de Junho é votar pela paz, pelo progresso, pela democracia e por uma Europa forte e com voz nos assuntos mundiais.**



Há muitas razões que nos podem levar a não votar numa ou noutra eleição.

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**QUE NENHUMA DESTAS RAZÕES NOS IMPEÇAM DE VOTAR A 13 DE JUNHO, PORQUE O CERTO É QUE SEM O NOSSO VOTO, A EUROPA FICA MAIS FRACA.**

**A Europa foi durante séculos o palco de guerras, destruição e ditaduras.**

**Com a construção da CEE, hoje União Europeia, vivemos na Europa o mais longo período sem guerras, em que a pobreza e o atraso económico e social diminuíram fortemente e as ditaduras acabaram.**

**Com uma União Europeia fraca, todas estas conquistas podem estar em causa. E sem o voto de todos nós, cidadãos europeus, a União Europeia ficará cada vez mais fraca.**

**Votar a 13 de Junho é votar contra a guerra, a pobreza, as ditaduras. É votar contra uma Europa fraca e sem voz nos assuntos mundiais.**



Figures 5 to 8 – leaflets used in 2009



Há muitas razões que nos podem levar a não votar numa ou noutra eleição.

Nalgumas situações pode acontecer não irmos votar por doença ou então, por questões de trabalho ou de família, ou por uma ausência mais prolongada, enfim, por razões que escapam à nossa vontade.

Noutros casos, pode acontecer que, no dia da eleição, não encontremos o cartão de eleitor ou o próprio bilhete de identidade e acabemos por não ir votar.

Doutras vezes, aparece-nos alguma coisa para fazer que consideremos mais "importante" ou mais "interessante" e colocamos as eleições em segundo plano.

Mas as razões para não ir votar podem também ser de ordem menos pessoal, como, por exemplo, achamos que a campanha eleitoral está muito monótona, que os candidatos e os partidos falam mas não nos entusiasma ou até por considerarmos que nós próprios estamos pouco esclarecidos.



**QUE NENHUMA DESTAS RAZÕES NOS IMPEÇAM DE VOTAR A 7 DE JUNHO, PORQUE O CERTO É QUE COM O NOSSO VOTO, A EUROPA FICA MAIS FORTE.**

**A Europa é hoje um espaço de paz, de progresso, de democracia.**

**Com a construção da CEE, hoje União Europeia, vivemos na Europa o mais longo período de paz, de prosperidade e de bem-estar económico e social, de afirmação da democracia.**

**Só uma União Europeia forte pode assegurar a continuidade de todas estas conquistas e, só com o voto de todos nós, cidadãos europeus, a União Europeia ficará cada vez mais forte.**

**Votar a 7 Junho é votar pela paz, pelo progresso, pela democracia e por uma Europa forte e com voz nos assuntos mundiais.**



Há muitas razões que nos podem levar a não votar numa ou noutra eleição.

Nalgumas situações pode acontecer não irmos votar por doença ou então, por questões de trabalho ou de família, ou por uma ausência mais prolongada, enfim, por razões que escapam à nossa vontade.

Noutros casos, pode acontecer que, no dia da eleição, não encontremos o cartão de eleitor ou o próprio bilhete de identidade e acabemos por não ir votar.

Doutras vezes, aparece-nos alguma coisa para fazer que consideremos mais "importante" ou mais "interessante" e colocamos as eleições em segundo plano.

Mas as razões para não ir votar podem também ser de ordem menos pessoal, como, por exemplo, achamos que a campanha eleitoral está muito monótona, que os candidatos e os partidos falam mas não nos entusiasma ou até por considerarmos que nós próprios estamos pouco esclarecidos.



**QUE NENHUMA DESTAS RAZÕES NOS IMPEÇAM DE VOTAR A 7 DE JUNHO, PORQUE O CERTO É QUE SEM O NOSSO VOTO, A EUROPA FICA MAIS FRACA.**

**A Europa foi durante séculos o palco de guerras, destruição e ditaduras.**

**Com a construção da CEE, hoje União Europeia, vivemos na Europa o mais longo período sem guerras, em que a pobreza e o atraso económico e social diminuíram fortemente e as ditaduras acabaram.**

**Com uma União Europeia fraca, todas estas conquistas podem estar em causa. E sem o voto de todos nós, cidadãos europeus, a União Europeia ficará cada vez mais fraca.**

**Votar a 7 Junho é votar contra a guerra, a pobreza, as ditaduras. É votar contra uma Europa fraca e sem voz nos assuntos mundiais.**



**5. Analysis and Results**

In the following two tables the abstention rates are listed relating to elections in Portugal for the European Parliament on June 13th, 2004 and June 7th, 2009 in several civil parishes within the respective samples.

Table 4. Abstention rates for 2004

CASE SAMPLE		2004Codes	CONTROL SAMPLE	
Parish	% Abst		Parish	% Abst
Santa Luzia	54,65	L+	Coucieiro	60,13
Andrães	63,64	wL+	Pussos	68,34
Concavada	59,80	L-	São Martinho	61,76
Stalria da Ribeira	61,35	wL-	Tropeço	73,65
Boidobra	60,07	L+	TN Santiago	59,47
Borralha	61,81	wL+	Lagares	61,62
Alvarães	59,35	L-	Vila de Punhe	63,21
FonteArcada	60,89	wL-	Tabuado	60,29
Alfena	61,42	L+	Eiras	61,77
S. Nicolau	59,83	wL+	Miragaia	57,54
S. Bartolomeu	55,84	L-	Fornelos	61,81
Ferreiros	62,73	wL-	Arões (São Romão)	59,99

Codes of communication: L= with Leaders; wL= without Leaders; +: positive; -: negative

Table 5. Abstention rates for 2009

CASE SAMPLE		2009Codes	CONTROL SAMPLE	
Parish	% Abst		Parish	% Abst
Coucieiro	54,69	L+	Mesquitela	60,76
Pussos	61,96	wL+	Mozelos	68,35
São Martinho	59,80	L-	Estorãos	64,57
Tropeço	66,23	wL-	Gondufe	76,67
TN Santiago	63,38	L+	Vale de Santarém	64,66
Lagares	53,24	wL+	Almeirim	64,03
Vila de Punhe	67,28	L-	FonteArcada	71,86
Tabuado	60,65	wL-	CasteloViegas	57,81
Eiras	62,64	L+	Lagos (São Sebast.)	64,90
Miragaia	65,24	wL+	BaixaBanheira	60,05
Fornelos	54,13	L-	Abraveses	63,23
Arões (São Romão)	59,83	wL-	Ericeira	62,36

Codes of communication: L= with Leaders; wL= without Leaders; +: positive; -: negative

To confirm or rule out the central hypothesis presented and the three separate hypotheses it entails, we have calculated a variable t of “student” whose results can be viewed in the following table. The values for this variable were obtained from the calculation of abstention rates differences that are present in the previous table. In the tests conducted, the null hypothesis is that the initiative caused a decrease in abstention, i.e. that the average of the differences of the rates of abstention between paired civil parishes is less than zero.

Table 6. Statistical significance test on paired samples

Statistical tests (2004 e 2009)	2004			2009		
	Number o parishes	tvalue	Signi- ficant at 95%	Number o parishes	tvalue	Signi- ficant at 95%
<b>SAMPLE TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>-1,885</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>-2,936</b>	<b>YES</b>
WITH LEADERS (L)	6	-2,566	YES	6	-4,107	YES
WITHOUT LEADERS (wL)	6	-0,793	NO	6	-1,344	NO
POSITIVE COMMUNICATION (+)	6	-0,975	NO	6	-1,610	NO
NEGATIVE COMMUNICATION (-)	6	-1,591	NO	6	-2,446	YES
RURAL	4	-2,781	YES	4	-5,649	YES
RURAL-URBAN	4	-0,568	NO	4	-1,199	NO
URBAN	4	-0,161	NO	4	-0,745	NO
Leaders + Positive Communication	3	-0,995	NO	3	2,190	NO
Leaders + Negative Communication	3	-3,389	YES	3	4,170	YES
Without Leaders + Positive Communication	3	-0,357	NO	3	0,839	NO
Without Leaders + Negative Communication	3	-0,444	NO	3	0,876	NO

The results confirm the central hypothesis, i.e. directs local proximity-based communication carried out during the EP elections, both in 2004 and in 2009, enabled greater and significant electoral citizen mobilization.

The compartmental hypothesis concerning the size of localities was also confirmed, with the effect of local proximity-based communication being particularly strong in rural localities.

The second hypothesis was also confirmed, with the cases that used the image of local social leaders in the communication noting the largest electoral mobilization.

With regards to the third compartmental hypothesis, it can be seen that the tone of the communication influenced the electoral mobilization, although a specific way in each of the elections. In 2004, considered in isolation, communication performed in a negative tone did not create a significant impact on mobilization, but in the 2009 elections for the EP this impact already sparked significant electoral mobilization.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

In both elections to the EP, in 2004 and 2009, in all the civil parishes studied, “local and proximity-based” communication generated a mobilization of the electors to vote in the European elections.

The challenge of fighting electoral abstention, which, as it passes from occasional to chronic, undermines the foundations of the rule of law, gains in being regarded as an objective of political marketing, which implies its full integration into the construction of suitable solutions, built on three marketing pillars, in mutual solidarity, comprised of research, strategy and action.

The first of these pillars is the in-depth study of abstention, followed by the second pillar, the search for the best strategic approach to the problem, in particular through the segmentation of abstainers (Reto&Sá, 2000; Sá, 2009).

The third pillar is part of the action itself, having been shown through the research presented, that local proximity-based political communication has significant effects on voter mobilization for an election (European Parliament) that registers very high levels of abstention, which can not only diminish the political vigor of the institution, thereby undermining the political foundations of European integration itself, but also infect the future behavior of voters at a national level.

In the concrete field of political communication it is fundamental to understand this in an integrated fashion (as proposed in 2004 by the AMA), i.e., in the broader scope of relational marketing, based on the idea that citizens who present themselves to vote have a continued value over the time in which their civic participation remains active.

The excessive value currently allocated to the role of the mass media in political communication has created difficulties in integrating the various types of communication actions linked to networks supporting the candidates and in investing in proximity communication.

The growing electoral demobilization can, thus, be partially attributed to the saturation of citizens due to the many communicational impacts to which they are subject, concerning which, the indifference and apathy may constitute, at least for some, a defensive response that is the product of a process of "automatic surveillance."

As such, voters may become more resistant to more mediatized forms of political communication, more distrustful in relation to your messages and therefore less likely to be influenced by that type of generic and abstract political communication, without an echo or identification in the specific experiences of those same voters.

The association between the decline of direct face-to-face political contact, and the increase in electoral abstention forces us to reflect on how to compensate that lack of personal contact, namely by means of the various forms of direct communication (face-to-face contacts, by phone, post or email or also through virtual and real networks), but always privileging a strong identity-generating personalization in political communication, notably through an emotional "proximity" between the communicational support and its recipients.

Recent evidence: in the fall of 2011, unexpectedly, candidates backed by the Democratic Party won the elections in Raleigh and Charlotte, North Carolina, due to a discreet but effective electoral mobilization action, conducted door-to-door by thousands of volunteers and members of the group "Obama for America". Indeed, the very credibility of the message depends on the quality of the relationship established by the voters, where the affinity of values between sender, messenger, message, and receiver stands out. In reality, the credibility of the message is crucial to its acceptance and the retrieval of compliant behaviors.

In response to the assertion of Marx (1969: 14) that "the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it", we share the view that it is not enough to understand the world, it is necessary change it progressively, always with the goal of improving the human condition.

In the field of electoral and political participation, that improvement does not imply that we should proceed in a more or less proactive or more or less coercive way, recriminating the abstainers or intending to eliminate the phenomenon of electoral apathy through mere administrative measures such as, for example, making voting mandatory.

We defend, from a macro point of view that the fight against electoral abstention must be seen from the perspective of civic mobilization and the gestation and development of the social capital associated to it. On a micro level, that combat gains by investigating the causes of voter apathy, by discussing and defining adequate strategies and by implementing actions which generate proximity identities such as those that we are presenting in this paper and that resulted in a significant decrease in electoral abstention in elections that many people believe to be of a second order. The roots of abstention are varied and complex, associated with resources and individual values and also with some collective aspects that are related, to the nature of the elections, the configuration of the electoral offer or even the condition of the partisan system, among others.

Only with a deep knowledge of these causes can we properly segment the abstainers (enabling action within the framework of strategic marketing, case by case, election by election) and contribute towards the establishment of conditions which aim to best define electoral legislation and towards regulations that facilitate both bureaucratic and political participation, increasing and diversifying the electoral bid, stimulating political "searches" through the establishment and development of durable and stable relationships with voters and local identity policies.

The harmonious development of these relationships, aimed at improving electoral participation, is also related to the improvement of the political distribution channels and to an appropriate political communication for the various segments of voters who, for one reason or another, choose not to exercise their right to vote.

The phenomenon of electoral abstention is complex and difficult to specify. The effects of networks, namely those that are generated via the internet, on electoral mobilization constitute a subject which political marketing, in particular relational political marketing, must investigate in depth.

The mobilization capabilities of these networks are huge, leveraged even further by the combined use of new information and communication technologies and content based on the principles of the local proximity-based communication that we have defined here.

The study of its impact on the population, particularly amongst the younger voters, where today electoral abstention has particular incidence, constitutes a challenge to which we must respond.

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