

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLITICAL
CAMPAIGNING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
FOCUSING ON THE INCUMBENT AND THE
CHALLENGING CANDIDATE DURING THE 2019
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS IN MALTA

by David Mallia

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APPLICATION OF DEGREE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree leading to a Bachelor of Communications (Honours) with European Studies at the Faculty of Media & Knowledge Sciences.

Tutor

Prof. Marc Edge

Lecturer of Journalism at the Faculty of Media & Knowledge Sciences

STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I, the undersigned, hereby confirm that this dissertation is the result of my own work, by making use of printed books, published periodicals, internet sources and official sources as stated in the bibliography.

David Mallia

April 2020

DEDICATION

To my mum, Rita, my dad, Patrick and my sister, Diane for all of their encouragement throughout the years to continue furthering my studies at University.

Moreover, to all of the lecturers who taught me over the past 4 years, for their constant support, dedication and patience.

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Table of Content

<i>APPLICATION OF DEGREE</i>	2
<i>STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY</i>	3
<i>DEDICATION</i>	4
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i>	5
<i>LIST OF FIGURES & ILLUSTRATIONS</i>	8
<i>LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS</i>	10
<i>Abstract</i>	11
<i>Introduction</i>	12
1.1 Background	13
1.2 Aims & Objectives	14
1.3 Practical Relevance	14
1.4 Research Questions	15
1.5 Outline	15
<i>Literature Review</i>	16
2.1 Introduction	17
2.2 Definition of social media [SM] and general use	18
2.3 Social media use in political campaigning, participation and mobilisation	21
2.3.1 Social media use in political campaigning - Case Studies (non-EU countries).....	23
2.3.2 Facebook - Cambridge Analytica (FB-CA) Scandal – Attention with intention	25
2.3.3 Social media use in political campaigning - Case Studies (Europe).....	25
2.4 The socio-political Maltese media landscape	27
2.4.1 The Maltese media	27
2.4.2 Malta’s media law	28
2.4.3 DCG and the contemporary, present day	28
2.4.4 Politics in Malta	31
2.4.5 Social media use in Malta	32
2.4.6 The 2019MEPE, in Malta and the use of social media	34
2.5 Political campaigning in Malta including the use of social media	36
2.5.1 Social media in political context	37
2.6 Incumbency advantage and the Maltese context	38
2.6.1 Incumbent Advantage	38
2.6.2 Incumbency advantage on social media.....	39
2.6.3 Studies on comparing the social media usage of the incumbent with the challenger candidate in Malta	41
2.7 Conclusion	41
<i>Methodology</i>	42
3.1 Introduction	43
3.2 Research Strategy	44
3.3 Netnographic semi-structured Interviews	45
3.3.1 Sample Size	46
3.3.2 Political Parties.....	46
3.3.3 Sex & Age	46

3.3.4 Contents of Interview	47
3.4 Social Media meta-data collection.....	48
3.4.1 Facebook Data	48
3.4.2 Instagram Data	48
3.5 Social Media Qualitative Data Analysis	49
3.6 First-hand experiences of Maltese political campaigning.....	50
3.7 Methodological limitations.....	51
<i>Analysis, Results & Discussion</i>	<i>52</i>
4.1 Introduction	53
4.2 Analysis of the netnographic semi-structured interviews.....	54
4.3 Analysis of the social media meta-data.....	60
4.3.1 Social media that was analysed.....	60
Illustration 1: The candidate's social media.....	60
4.3.2 Instagram Data	60
4.3.3 Facebook Data.....	63
4.4 Facebook Qualitative Analyses.....	66
4.5 Quantitative Data - Secondary Analysis.....	69
<i>Conclusion and Recommendations</i>	<i>71</i>
5.1 Introduction	72
5.2 Major Findings	72
5.3 Other findings	72
5.4 Limitations of the Study.....	73
5.5 Further Research	73
<i>References</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Appendices.....</i>	<i>81</i>
APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DR MIRIAM DALLI	81
APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MR CYRUS ENGERER	82
APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DR ROBERTA METSOLA.....	83
APPENDIX D – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DR MICHAEL BRIGUGLIO	84
APPENDIX E – INTERVIEW CONSENT.....	85
APPENDIX F – DR MIRIAM DALLI INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	90
APPENDIX G – MR CYRUS ENGERER INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	97
APPENDIX H – DR ROBERTA METSOLA'S INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (SOCIAL MEDIA ADVISOR – MATTHEW TABONE).....	102
APPENDIX I – DR MICHAEL BRIGUGLIO'S INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT.....	112

LIST OF FIGURES & ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE 1: Social media Sites in 2020 (Kellogg, 2020)

FIGURE 2: Social media use by age in the US (Pew, 2019).

FIGURE 3: Social media usage in the US by platform (Pew, 2019).

FIGURE 4: Politically-owned Media including major national and independent media

FIGURE 5: Television audience share during July 2019 (BA, 2019).

FIGURE 6: Favourite program genres during 2019 (BA, 2019).

FIGURE 7: Radio audience share during 2019 (BA, 2019).

FIGURE 8: Dominant parties in Malta in 2019.

FIGURE 9: 2014 MEP Elections results (EPC, 2020).

FIGURE 10: Electoral Materials used during the party campaigns in Malta (EEMC, 2019).

FIGURE 11: Policy dimension focus in Malta during the 2019MEPE (EEMC, 2019).

FIGURE 12: Policy focus during the 2019MEPE (EEMC, 2019).

FIGURE 13: The 2019MEPE results in Malta (EPC, 2020).

FIGURE 14: Use of social media networks across the European Union (Eurobarometer, 2019)

FIGURE 15: Different means of communication during political campaigning (Zammit, 2017)

FIGURE 16: Survival rate of MP incumbents in Malta since 1921 up to 2013 (UM Malta Elections, 2020).

TABLE 1: Candidate social media to 3 main policy areas each

TABLE 2: Shortened Names

ILLUSTRATION 1: The candidate's social media

TABLE 3: Instagram 'heart' reactions per candidate analysed through the last month of the campaign.

TABLE 4: Instagram post totals per candidate between the 1st of May & 25th of May, 2019.

TABLE 5: Challenging candidate's daily page Likes FB page evolution

TABLE 6: Dr Miriam Dalli's page like FB evolution

TABLE 7: Challenging candidate's daily new page likes

TABLE 8: Dr Miriam Dalli's daily new page likes

TABLE 9: Challenging candidates daily unique page engagements (includes a mixture of organic and paid engagements)

TABLE 10: Table 10: Challenging Candidates Daily Page Total Reach (includes a mixture of organic and paid reach)

TABLE 11: Total number of posts per candidate during the 2019MEPE.

TABLE 12: The amount of post reacts between the 1st of May and 25th of May, 2019

TABLE 13: Reaction type to posts posted by Dr Miriam Dalli

TABLE 14: Reaction Type to posts by Dr Roberta Metsola

FIGURE 15: Study Age Demographics (Schmitt, et al., 2019)

FIGURE 16: Voting during the 2019 EP elections (Schmitt, et al., 2019)

FIGURE 17: Which party did you vote for? (Schmitt, et al., 2019)

FIGURE 18: Social Media followership during the EP elections (Schmitt, et al., 2019)

FIGURE 19: Voting during the 2017 general elections (Schmitt, et al., 2019)

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

European Union (EU)

European Parliament (EP)

European Commission (EC)

Malta Labour Party (MLP)

Partit Laburista (PL), the Labour party in Malta, formerly known as the MLP

Partit Nazzjonalista (PN), the Nationalist Party in Malta

2014 Maltese European Parliament Elections (2014MEPE)

2019 Maltese European Parliament Elections (2019MEPE)

Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)

Party of European Socialists (PES)

European People's Party (EPP)

University of Malta (UOM)

Electoral Commission Malta (ECM)

European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

Proportionate Representation (PR)

Single Transferable Vote (STV)

Malta Electoral Commission (MEC)

Integrated Marketing Communications (MIC)

Social Networking Services (SNS)

Abstract

This dissertation seeks to analyse the social media differences between the incumbent and the new candidates during the 2019 European Parliament Elections in Malta. Although the use of social media in political campaigning has been studied widely, particularly in the US, limited research on the subject exists in the local Maltese context. This study draws onto several research approaches in its data collection, including semi-structured netnographical interviews, social media meta-data collection and social media qualitative analysis. In a bid to reduce potential bias, comparative studies were used by including two political parties in the focus of this research.

Results have shown that social media offers an even platform for all Maltese political candidates. Both Facebook and Instagram were used to target different age groups, paid adverts did not guarantee a better performance at the polls. While challenging candidates were seen to be more active with a higher degree of interaction amongst their followers, incumbency advantages work in favour of the candidates if they prove their ability to hold on to the seat. Moreover, current political debates may have affected the outcomes of the results. Research limitations of this study included the issue of timing, where one was not able to harness all of the social media data due to the timeframe the dissertation was undertaken in.

Keywords: European Parliament Elections; Social Media; Social Media Campaigning; Facebook; Instagram; Marketing; Politics; Political Marketing (Malta)

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Over the years, political matters have been central in many a conversation in several contexts and settings, from schools to cafeterias, bandclubs to cinemas, and may often lead to heated discussions, particularly in Maltese contexts. However, data has shown that political interest in Malta is fading due, as reflected in the relative drop in voter turnout in elections (Debono, 2019). Since Facebook's inception in 2004, political candidates have increasingly relied on the use of social media to market their policies and reach their voters aided by the use of their party's traditional media. This is also due to the Proportional Representative Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) system which is employed in Malta.

According to the Eurobarometer, 79% of the Maltese population make use of social networks with 94% of people visiting them on a regular basis (Debono J. , 2019). This seems to make it mandatory for Maltese political candidates seeking to be elected to make use of such platforms, with those vying for re-election and others who are new to the democratic process. This dissertation seeks to analyse the use of social media for political reasons and the characteristics one can find in the marketing strategies employed by candidates in the 2019 European Parliament Elections in Malta. This dissertation will explore the way social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have been innovatively used to target different audiences and age groups, to ultimately create a tailor-made experience to persuade voters. However, such tactics are employed differently between those who already have a pre-defined audience and others who have to build up their audiences. A substantial discrepancy exists between the incumbent candidate and the challenging one.

1.2 Aims & Objectives

The key aims and objectives of this dissertation are:

1. To understand the current interpretation of social media for political campaigning use during European parliament elections within the local context;
2. To analyse the use of social media between an incumbent and a new candidate and the differences in the strategies and tactics deployed by the two types of candidates;
3. Analyse Maltese audience interaction with candidate social media within different political groups and whether this translates/ converts into votes.

1.3 Practical Relevance

This dissertation offers an insight into how political propaganda is received, viewed and interacted with by the social media audience and how one message from one political group is delivered differently by different candidates. Such research can be used by future political candidates from any political background to deliver their social media campaigns more effectively, and benefit from this marketing tool.

Candidates can find ways to optimise and segregate their political messages in ways to receive greater social media responses and achieve the full potential of the said platforms. One can also understand the interest of the local audience in European politics and whether the interest is increased or decreased through the marketing campaigns of the said candidates.

1.4 Research Questions

This dissertation seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What social media differences were there between the incumbent and the challenging candidate during the 2019 European parliament elections?

RQ2: In what way does focusing on the national agenda through social media, instead of the European one, aid a candidate to perform better in the polls?

RQ3: What is better in reaching the voting audience in Malta: traditional media or social media? Have the candidates made use of both, and how? Is social media replacing the traditional media or is it serving to compliment such media?

1.5 Outline

Now that an overview to the dissertation's focus has been established, the following chapter will now turn its attention to a review of literature available. In this chapter, social media use in political campaigning, the social media landscape in Malta and the incumbency advantage, specifically the 2019MEPE will be discussed and explored. The methodological approaches adopted in this study will then be presented in the following chapter, whereby the methods used for data collection and analysis such as netnographic semi-structured interviews and social media meta-data analysis will be discussed . The results, encompassing the interviewees and the social media data, will then be examined, interpreted and explained in the subsequent chapters. Finally, the conclusion encompasses an overview of the implications of the major findings and also includes suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Writing in the 1960s, McLuhan (1967) wrote: ‘The medium is the message/massage’, as if envisioning the internet and social media as we know it today, ‘encouraging participation’ and creating a ‘global village’ (McLuhan, 1967). In fact, social media ‘has become a powerful mechanism for political campaigns to strategize their communication plans’ (Gosman, 2016). Given the Maltese polarised political system, social media has been extensively used through the years for a number of purposes such as reaching audiences during general elections and referendums. Malta is especially interesting given that out of all European member states, Maltese political parties have their own traditional media types including television stations, radio stations and newspapers (Sammut, 2007).

In the local scenario, due to the age demographics of the particular political party’s voters, traditional media types may be more effective than SM to reach their audiences. However, is this continuously changing? How have the party’s changed and modified their communication channels to better reach the younger audience? This study examines this topic by focusing on the social media differences between the incumbent politician and the new candidate. Does the diversification of network platforms make a difference to better reach the different facets of the audience?

The purpose of this chapter is to give an in-depth overview of the current literature found within the social media realm, its uses in political communication and elections in order to engage the audience, incumbency advantages and how it has been used in Malta.

2.2 Definition of social media [SM] and general use

Definitions of the term ‘social media’ are diverse. On a superficial level, this may refer to the commonly used social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. However, there is more to SM than meets the eye. As defined by O'Reily (2005), “web 2.0 is the network as platform”, from treating the internet as a library to a communicative one where people are able to participate in and contribute, while at the same time the software they use is actually enhanced as more people use it. Thus, SM forms part of this internet fabric.

Kaplan (2010) describes SM as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (p. 61). However, one critique by Fuchs (2014) about web 2.0 is that it only allows corporations to ‘exploit’ their own interests towards internet users by making use of online marketing. In *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* Fuchs (2014) finds a number of definitions which describe social media including:

Social media which increases our ability to share, to co-operate, with one another, and to take collective action (Shirky, 2008, p.73), enables individuals and communities to gather, communicate, share ... collaborate or play, computer mediated communication, user-generated content (Boyd, 2009, pp. 210-230) and various others.

Examples of these techno-social systems which have these characteristics include the social networks mentioned above. Nonetheless, Fuchs (2014) raises the need to be able to think critically about social media. We cannot just ask, why is social media used? But above all, at what cost? Therefore, the notion of power needs to be taken into consideration. Who controls the media? One needs to understand the social aspect of media which finds its roots in social

theory by people such as Durkheim and ‘the product of social process’, Weber’s ‘social relationships’, and Marx ‘the ability to co-operate with one another’ (Fuchs, 2014, pp.10-24). He also viewed social media as a participatory culture.

In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins (2008) argues that that SM is participatory in nature. It is a place where “consumers are invited to participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (p. 331). He takes a deeper consideration into how society needs to make use of various media for information and knowledge. A piece of text for example, is a medium, however, the media has evolved and taken new forms. Such ‘delivery technologies’ include newspapers, books and websites with social media offering the same level of opportunity. Jenkins (2008) also outlines the differences between the old and new media which American politics have made use of, being able to offer “participation, reciprocity and peer-to-peer rather than one-to-many communication” (Jenkins, 2008, p.290). Below is a list of the prevailing social media platforms currently dominating the internet.

Social Media	Founded	Number of users per month	Headquarters
Facebook	2004	2.45 billion users	Melno Park, CA
Whatsapp	2009	1.5 billion users	Melno Park, CA
Instagram	2010	1 billion users	Melno Park, CA
Reddit	2005	430 million users	San Francisco, CA
Snapchat	2011	360 million users	Los Angeles, CA
Twitter	2006	330 million users	San Francisco, CA
Pinterest	2010	322 million users	San Francisco, CA
LinkedIn	2003	310 million users	Mountain View, CA

Figure 1: Social media sites in 2020 (Kellogg, 2020)

Research carried out by Pew (2019) in America shows that such social media platforms are dominant amongst young people. Pew (2019) also concluded that Facebook is the most dominant social media in the US at the time of writing.

Social media use by age

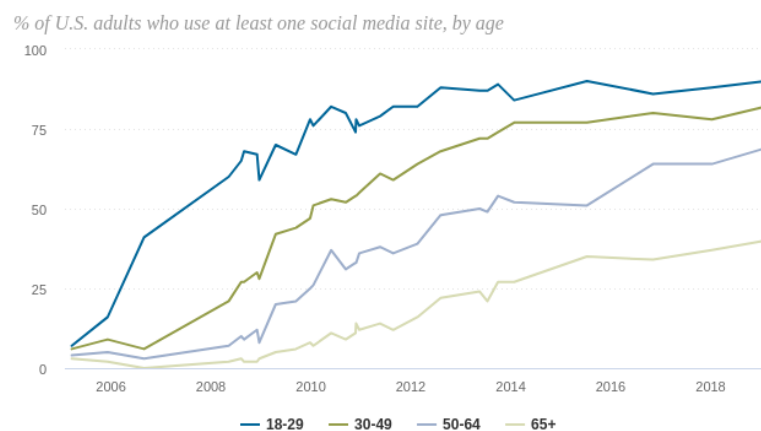


Figure 2: Social media use by age in the US (Pew, 2019).

Which social media platforms are most popular

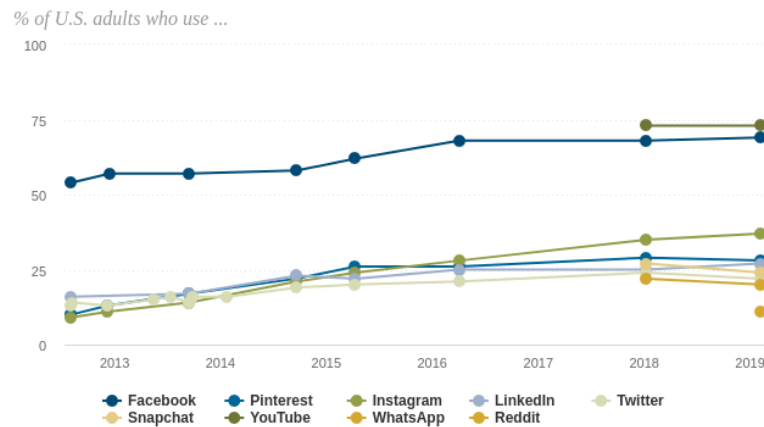


Figure 3: Social media usage in the US by platform (Pew, 2019).

2.3 Social media use in political campaigning, participation and mobilisation

Social media has been utilised extensively in politics, with a particular interest to analyse its impacts on political content, communication and political information. In early political communication studies, one could note that the challenging candidate had to increase their efforts to remain relevant. Jess Venture, an ex-wrestler, crowdsourced his campaign to remove the establishment. This displays the ability of “how an outsider could challenge the establishment using digital-technology” (Lillerer et al., 2017). Similarly, Obama’s 2008 campaign for the US Presidency utilised SM to personalise political communication and commodified the SM as a tool. This tool has the ability to harvest digital traces of voters (Bumber, 2014). However, research carried out by Pew (2019) observed that the campaign did not make use of the ‘social aspect of social media’ and rarely engaged with the audience (Resentiel & Mitchell, 2012).

A study which focused on German federal campaigns, particularly on the use of social media usage for different aims by various candidates concluded that politicians tended to prioritize different matters than the audience (Stier et al., 2018).. Moreover, channels such as Facebook and Twitter were used for different purposes. Much of the available literature which focuses mainly on the metadata which is a result of the political communication on social media and not into the policy areas of the posts by politicians. Moreover, one can conclude that a retention of the status quo is kept throughout online campaigning by the replication of traditional messages (Gibson et al., 2014). Moreover, most candidates tended to tailor-make their messages towards the majority of voters which they are addressing (Druckman et al., 2010).

Auter & Fine (2018)'s analysis of over 15,000 US senate Facebook posts finds that challenger candidates tend to make more use of social media to mobilise and engage with their audiences due to recognition and resources. Moreover, the candidates who are in some competitive race and underdogs tended to adopt strategies more on Facebook. One may observe similarities with Malta's socio-demographics namely because most of the Maltese population is on Facebook and due to Malta's bi-polar political system. Therefore, if a politician knows that their potential audience is found on a certain network, they may tend to redistribute and mobilize their message there. Again, a similar can be found in Malta. With the introduction of 16-year-olds vote, politicians made use of Instagram as a way to engage with the younger audience.

Other studies also suggest that mobilization through social media can increase voter turnout, a tactic highly used by digital parties around the world (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 2010). From a European perspective, given the decline of voter turnout in recent years (excluding the 2019 elections) it allows for more citizen involvement in a political life. It also reinforces the theory of the offline spill-over effect and allows for overcoming 'the EU's perceived democratic

deficit.’ In political communication, social media is perceived to bypass media filters, increase user-generated content (which is prized greatly by campaigners), thus decreasing the dependency on third parties, influencing the mass media and providing an overarching view of the electorate.

However, the ‘digital divide’ represents a significant challenge in political campaigns being able to reach all target segments of society. Moreover, SM is able to target the young more effectively (with social media being attributed majorly to the young audience), micro-target and increase audience in offline events. A characteristic of campaigning in Malta, due to issues relating to size is the personalised campaign with the candidates focusing on their individual personality which gives them a more ‘emotional appeal’. This is exemplified by drawing onto the use of SM platforms by the former labour party leader Joseph Muscat. ‘The multiplier effect’ of social media content is a vital tool for the politician as it allows the politician to have access to an endless amount of connections through groups, friends of friends, hashtags and mentions (Davies, 2014). Yet, academic research are somewhat limited, especially in the use of social media for political reasons as most research focuses on specific platforms, mostly Twitter and Facebook.

2.3.1 Social media use in political campaigning - Case Studies (non-EU countries)

Social Media has been utilised in many non-European countries for political campaigning purposes. A study conducted by Ahmed et al (2016) in the use of Twitter in the 2014 Indian elections concluded that new emerging parties within the country made use of Twitter to seek ‘media validation’ while other established parties made use of such platform to support their ‘offline strategies’. On the other hand, in a study conducted over 3 Australian elections which

analysed trends in online political campaigns. Macnamara & Kenning (2014) established increasing efforts of ‘e-electioneering’. However, during the 2013 Australian elections, when compared to the other elections, incumbent candidates and parties only made use of social media as a ‘one-way transmission of their campaigning messages’.

Contrastingly, Gainous et al (2018) analyzed the effect social media campaign spending has on electoral success in US congressional elections. Gainous et al (2018) concluded that in 2012, spending more had an effect on electoral success but in 2016, the relationship correlated inversely. In the 2018 Fiji National Elections, Tarai (2019) examined the social media usage extent of different political parties and discovered that the incumbent government had a dominance in Fiji’s social media landscape though this was being challenged by the opposition’s social media through an increase of social media reaction.

Other research has also focused on the use of political campaigning comparing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat in the 2016 US Elections (Bossetta, 2018). Bossetta (2018) concluded that most campaigns had, more or less, the same content. There was Facebook usage dominance amongst the platforms, and platform diversification was utilised by everyone even if the platform lacked most of the audience. By way of contrast, through a research conducted on Ukrainian nationalist parties, electoral campaigning and social media sentiments by Dorshenko et al (2019) concluded that challenger parties tended to go the extra mile to provide ‘opportunities of personalised engagement’ through their social media.

Samsudin (2019) researched SM during the 2018 Malaysian general elections and how the opposite coalition managed to topple over a 61-year ruling government. A key observation within his study was that social media extended the dissemination of information to voters rather than attracting new voters. Samsudin (2019) concluded that by proper segmentation of

the audience of the ruling government, *Alliance For Hope* was able to target its message conforming to the ‘currents of change’ which were occurring within Malaysia.

2.3.2 Facebook - Cambridge Analytica (FB-CA) Scandal – Attention with intention

The FB-CA scandal can be characterised as one of the biggest scandals to ever surface with regards to social media use in political campaigning. A UK-based company named ‘Cambridge Analytica [CA]’ offered campaign services by harvesting Facebook data on millions of Americans which was central to the UK Brexit referendum and Trump’s 2016 Presidential election, both of which have been monumental in democratic history. This made it possible for the campaigns to target specific audiences who had psychographic profiles which showed voters content at the right moment and at the right time (Yochai et al., 2018; Wead, 2017).

‘The Great Hack’, a documentary on the FB-CA scandal saw David Carroll file a lawsuit against CA for his right of information, under British law, which CA did not provide (Cadwalladr, 2019). Central to this documentary were also Brittany Kaiser and Cristopher Wylie, ex-employees of CA. This led panicked lawmakers to enact regulation across their countries with the European General Data Protection Regulation [GDPR] law coming into force later that year in May, 2018 (Burgess, 2020).

2.3.3 Social media use in political campaigning - Case Studies (Europe)

Social media has also been used in EU countries. A study by Stetka et al. (2019) compared the use of Facebook in voter engagement comparing Czechia and Poland. Interestingly enough, conclusions revealed that the challenger was more active on Facebook in Czechia while big parties ‘led the most intensive Facebook campaign’. This correlates what is being explored in this dissertation. A study on political participation on the use of Facebook during Brexit determined that there was positive correlation between political interest and online

participation from the media during political campaigns. However, a negative correlation was then registered after the vote (Bossetta et al., 2018).

2.4 The socio-political Maltese media landscape

The relationship between politics and media is thoroughly described by Blulmer & Gurevitch (1995) with their five-level model of political-media relationship. The first level is media ownership by political parties which will be the level closely discussed in the below sections.

2.4.1 The Maltese media

The newspaper was the first media format to feature in Malta, its history dating back to the times of the French in Malta. The ‘Journal de Malte’, run by the French, was thus the first newspaper in Malta which was used to spread governmental propaganda (Vassallo, 1954). It was only under British rule that Luigi Tonna and Filippo Izzo managed to obtain a press license out of which two ‘Italian’ newspapers then emerged. Readership suffered due to small population and Italian speaking locals (Frendo, 2004; Zammit, 1962-2008). With the development of newspapers in Malta over the years and the pluralisation of broadcasting, in 1991, the emergence of political radio stations and even TV stations came into effect and led to a new rise of politics in Malta. The burning of the premises of The Times on 15 October 1979 was truly a dark day in the progress of media in Malta (Calleja, 2019).

Malta is the only country in Europe where political parties also own radio and television stations (Borg & Anne Lauri, 2019; Sammut, 2007), which is a distinctive characteristic of the media system which is present today. Calls for the closure of the party-owned stations have been proposed by the Nationalist and AD parties calling for ‘truth, justice and democracy’ amongst the parties (Diacono, 2019). This was followed by kickbacks from the Labour party accusing the Nationalist party of proposing such paper due to their current precarious financial situation.

2.4.2 Malta's media law

Under Article 41 of the Constitution of Malta, anyone who resides in Malta is able to open and operate a press, print and a newspaper or journal under the provisions specified by law. Moreover, through the new introduction of the Media And Defamation Act,

abolished criminal libel, introduced the concept of the 'citizen journalist', the concept of mediation, introduced various provisions which strengthened freedom of the media and prohibited the multiplicity of libel lawsuits.

From a European aspect, Article 10 of the ECHR ensures that 'everyone has the right of freedom of expression'. Moreover, the newly enacted European Union Audio-visual Media Directive regulates an even playing field for all broadcasters, ruling the shaping of technological development and safeguarding of the media pluralism.

2.4.3 DCG and the contemporary, present day

The ECPMF has 'deep concerns' about the state of press freedom in Malta after the assassination of citizen journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia (ECPMF, 2019). She heavily criticised ministers for corruption, money laundering and abuses of political power. She is mostly known for her work in uncovering the Panama Papers¹ which exposed ex-chief of staff Keith Schembri and former Minister Konrad Mizzi in owning offshore bank accounts. In this multi-level crime, and hereto, a number of people have been charged of her murder including the alleged killers, Alfred & George Degiorgio, and Vince Muscat, the middle man Melvin Theuma and the alleged mastermind behind it all, Yorgen Fenech (Watson, 2019).

For more information about the burning of the times, read here (Calleja, 2019).

Figure 4 provides a snapshot of the Maltese mainstream media landscape in April 2020:

Media Type	Name	Owned
Newspaper	Kulhadd	PL
Newspaper	Il-Mument	PN
Newspaper	Times of Malta	Allied Newspapers Ltd
Online Portal	One.com.mt	PL
Online Portal	Netnews.com.mt	PN
Online Portal	TimesofMalta.com	Allied Newspapers Ltd
Online Portal	Tvm.com.mt	Public Broadcasting Service
TV Station	ONE	One Productions (PL)
TV Station	NET	Media Link Communications (PN)
TV Station	TVM	Public Broadcasting Service
Radio	ONE Radio (92.7 MHz)	PL
Radio	NET FM (101 MHz)	PN
Radio	89.7 Bay (89.7 MHz)	Eden Leisure Group

Figure 4: Politically-owned media including major national and independent media

According to research conducted by the broadcasting authority in July 2019, notably exactly after the EP elections, with regards to television stations, TVM heads the audience share with 33.90%, Foreign Stations 31.83%, ONE with 17.90% and NET with 10.09% (BAMalta, 2019).

Audience Reach by TV Station																
	Ranking	Total [≈N] [rounded-up]	Total %	Gender		Age Group					District					
				Males	Females	12-20	21-30	31-50	51-70	71+	South Harbour	North Harbour	South Eastern	Western District	Northern District	Gozo & Comino
TVM	[1]	120,000	33.90	33.90	34.76	32.95	34.59	42.93	35.81	33.12	31.26	30.71	34.50	37.59	29.65	37.48
ONE	[3]	63,000	17.90	17.90	17.75	18.07	8.53	11.96	12.37	24.83	21.05	20.65	16.63	19.55	23.12	14.21
Net	[4]	36,000	10.09	10.09	9.73	10.48	2.04	6.05	7.32	10.50	15.38	9.58	9.90	7.98	11.28	12.00
TVM 2	[5]	8,000	2.07	2.07	3.15	0.87	2.42		3.13	1.81	1.71	1.62	1.32	2.06	2.69	2.39
Xejk	[6]	7,000	1.86	1.86	2.05	1.65	0.98	3.12	0.35	0.81	3.85	1.57	2.09	1.21	0.49	2.74
TSN Melita/GO	[7]	3,000	0.77	0.77	1.46		4.43		1.02			0.68	0.70	0.84		1.83
GO Stars	[8]	3,000	0.69	0.69	0.81	0.56	1.44		1.09	0.33	0.52	0.47	0.76		1.98	0.51
F Living	[9]	3,000	0.57	0.57	0.14	1.04			0.33		1.48	0.74	0.46		1.50	0.48
Melita More	[10]	1,000	0.15	0.15	0.16	0.14					0.45	0.47				0.39
iTV	[11]	1,000	0.12	0.12	0.24			2.17								0.75
Smash	[12]	1,000	0.06	0.06		0.14					0.19					0.39
Foreign Stations	[2]	112,000	31.83	31.83	29.76	34.11	45.57	33.75	38.58	28.59	24.10	33.51	33.63	30.78	29.29	26.82
Total %			100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Based on TV Viewers excluding all those who could not identify a station and/or could not remember which station.																

Based on TV Viewers excluding all those who could not identify a station and/or could not remember which station.

Figure 5: Television audience share during July 2019 (BA, 2019).

Dominant programs which took centre stage were encompassed around local and foreign news with a major interest from males.

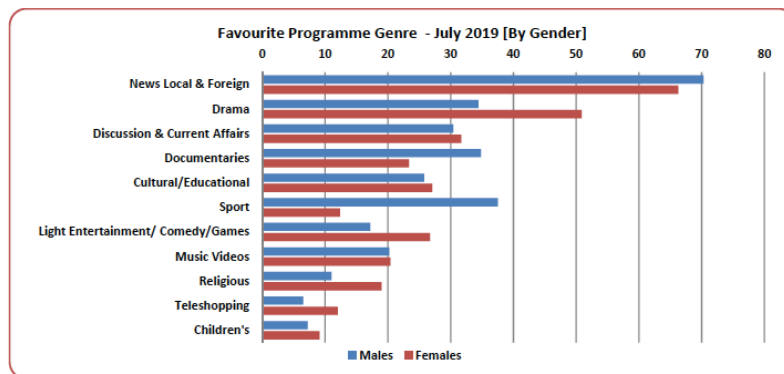


Figure 6: Favourite program genres during 2019 (BA, 2019).

With regards to radio stations, 89.7 Bay dominated the scene with a total audience share of 25.92% followed by ONE Radio with 16.47% and Radju Malta with 11.61% (BA, 2019).

Audience Reach by Radio Station																
	Ranking	Total [≈N] [rounded-up]	Total %	Gender		Age Group					District					
				Males	Females	12-20	21-30	31-50	51-70	71+	South Harbour	North Harbour	South Eastern	Western District	Northern District	Gozo & Comino
89.7 Bay	[1]	64,000	25.92	28.04	23.57	75.70	42.74	35.98	8.80	0.52	20.83	25.02	29.89	28.65	29.20	17.15
ONE Radio	[2]	41,000	16.47	16.13	16.85	7.89	4.54	8.08	28.78	27.84	23.78	14.88	14.37	21.47	10.80	15.07
Radju Malta	[3]	29,000	11.61	11.49	11.74	2.45	5.86	8.26	15.75	19.12	9.62	12.48	9.41	14.66	9.47	22.64
Vibe FM	[4]	25,000	9.92	10.41	9.38	8.86	26.35	16.20	1.04		6.62	10.92	13.78	7.78	11.61	
Calypso Radio	[5]	20,000	7.85	8.85	6.74	3.24	2.36	2.86	20.42	9.07	9.05	4.42	7.41	10.69	10.72	10.27
Radju Marija	[6]	14,000	5.62	3.00	8.53			1.52	5.47	16.97	9.36	5.26	4.70	3.29	4.74	6.30
X FM	[7]	11,000	4.38	5.60	3.02	1.86	6.31	8.71	0.52	0.53	3.48	5.99	2.23	3.77	6.04	
103	[8]	11,000	4.14	3.48	4.88			1.24	5.94	10.63	3.96	5.34	4.89	0.82	4.17	2.10
Magic	[9]	10,000	3.81	2.54	5.23		6.70	6.38	3.19		3.19	4.89	4.35	2.21	4.02	
Net FM	[10]	10,000	3.81	3.33	4.34		2.21	0.94	4.94	9.51	6.28	3.52	3.47	4.51	2.59	
Smash Radio	[11]	6,000	2.41	2.26	2.57			6.30			1.52	1.05	3.94	1.32	1.33	17.13
Campus FM	[13]	3,000	2.16	2.79	1.47			2.50	2.99	2.58	0.67	2.67	1.57	0.82	4.08	3.03
Radju Malta 2	[15]	1,000	0.60		1.26			0.58	0.96	0.78	0.00	1.04			0.00	6.30
Community Stations	[14]	2,000	0.94	1.41	0.41		2.93	0.46	0.61	1.38	0.97	2.14			0.53	
Foreign Station	[12]	6,000	0.36	0.69					0.59	1.05	0.67	0.39			0.70	
Total %			100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Based on Radio Listeners excluding all those who could not identify a station and/or could not remember which station.

Figure 7: Radio audience share during 2019 (BA, 2019).

2.4.4 Politics in Malta

Developments of politics in Malta go hand-in-hand with the history of the Maltese Islands. Immigration and property are a number of political issues which both spectrums of Government and the Opposition have been in battle over for a number of years. General elections in Malta witness a number of parties in full blast campaigning with mass meetings being held everywhere and divide the nation into two. In fact, general elections have always sustained the highest number of turnouts compared to MEP elections and referendums. European elections are seen ‘second order elections’ (Carammia & Pace, 2015). At the time of writing, Government is currently formed by the Labour party led by Dr Robert Abela with the Nationalist party in the Opposition, and led by Dr Adrian Delia.

Below is a list of the dominant parties in 2019:

Name	Ideology	Position	Date of Formation
Labour Party (Partit Laburista)	Social Democracy, Pro-Europeanism	Centre-Left	1921
Nationalist Party (Partit Nazzjonalista)	Christian Democracy, Social Conservatism, Economic Liberalism, Pro-Europeanism	Centre-Right	1880
Democratic Alternative (Alternattiva Demokratika)	Green Politics	Centre-left/left wing	1989
Democratic Party (Partit Demokratiku)	Social Liberalism, Green Liberalism, Pro-Europeanism	Centre-Right	2016

Figure 8: Dominant parties in Malta in 2019

2.4.5 Social media use in Malta

2.4.5.1 Malta's Hyper-local social media use

Malta's SM use can be described as a hyper-local one with its characteristics being described by Grech as "a hybrid of civic, community, state-wide public affairs, and alternative newspaper movements combined with the interactive and broadcasting abilities accompanying Web 2.0" (Borg & Anne Lauri, 2019).

2.4.5.2 Research on social media use in Malta

The earliest quantitative data available for the use of social networks in Malta is from 2012. According to the Eurobarometer, from a sample of 500, of which 494 were Maltese and 6 from the UK, 39% reported that they made use of social networks daily, with an EU average of 27% during that time. 36% never made use of such networks while 9% did not have access to the medium (Eurobarometer, Public Opinion, 2012). In contrast, the most recent data available for social network use in Malta was provided by the same institution in November 2019. From a sample of 504, out of which 467 were Maltese and the rest from other countries, it was concluded that 68% made use of social media networks daily, the highest compared to other European countries with 16% who have never made use of such networks while 7% did not have access (Eurobarometer, Public Opinion, 2019). This shows that social media usage in Malta has increased drastically by almost 29% by those who make use of it every day.

Unfortunately, the data above does not detail which specific social media platform is being used. However, there is more specific local data which can give us some insight into this. According to ICON (2016), in a study done in collaboration with the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences at UOM, it was concluded that out of a sample of 790 respondents, 89% made use of Facebook, 63% made use of YouTube, 41% made use of LinkedIn and 22% made use of Instagram with 67% of those 22% being under 21 years of age. There is other data which

is available, such as statcounter. This reports that as of March 2020, 83.63% make use of Facebook with 6.15% making use of Pinterest (Statcounter, 2020). Napoleoncat reports that 342,900 people in Malta make use of Facebook with the second best platform being Instagram with a total of 141,800 people (NapoleanCat., 2020). Due to the discrepancies when compared to national found data, this cannot be considered as reliable.

A study conducted between *Hootsuite* and *we are social* reported that up until January 2020, 91% of the total Maltese population made use of social media networks with 98% accessing them from their phone. Potential reach from social media advertising included that 360,000 citizens could be reached via Facebook, 170,000 via Instagram. 101,100 via Twitter and 200,000 via LinkedIn (Datareportal, 2020). Nonetheless, this data may not entirely be reliable given that it does not reflect national and European data.

2.4.6 The 2019MEPE, in Malta and the use of social media

2.4.6.1 The 2019MEPE research on Malta

A report conducted by the European Elections Monitoring Centre in collaboration with the Institute of European Studies at UOM analyzed the campaigns in Malta. It is to be noted that for the first time ever, Malta made use of a ‘hybrid vote-counting system’ (EEMC, 2019). With the parties being particularly bi-polarised, several key areas were focused on, including ‘Malta’s economic growth ... immigration, abortion, housing and rental prices’ These were in fact central topics at that time, and are still up until this day. One also notes how the incumbent party benefitted from a super social media outreach and tv productions with PN suffering slightly with its precarious financial situation at that time (Vella & Sansone, 2020) as illustrated below:

Political party	Social contents	Poster and Press advertising	Commercials	Number of seats
Partit Laburista	76	-	6	4
Partit Nazzjonalista	23	4	9	2

Figure 10: Electoral Materials used during the party campaigns in Malta (EEMC, 2019)

Given that the parties have their own media, they relied heavily on this maximize their potentials besides ‘face-to-face interactions and door-to-door canvassing’, a substantial trait of Maltese politics. The labour party tended to focus highly on national issues with the AD and PD focusing more on EU wider issues.

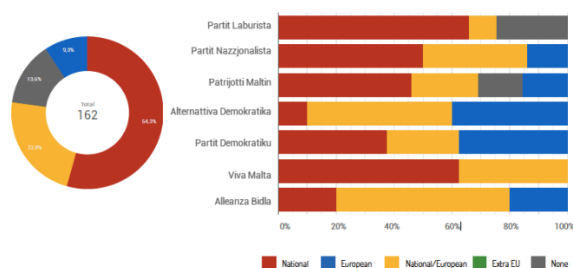


Figure 11: Policy dimension focus in Malta during the 2019MEPE (EEMC, 2019)

Topics varied throughout all of the electioneers with ‘inter-related socio-economic factors’ determining the outcome of the election emphasising political-value based campaigns.

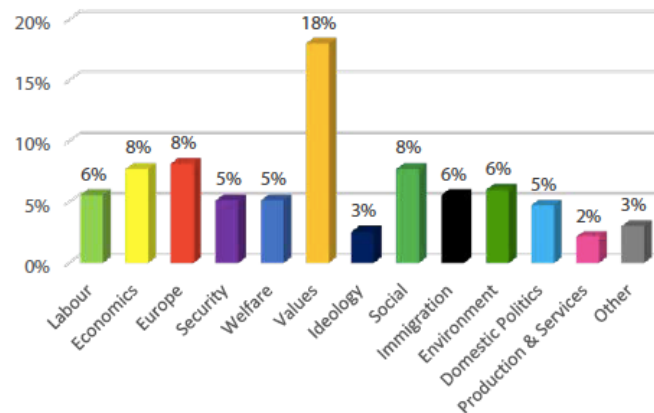


Figure 12: Policy focus during the 2019MEPE (EEMC, 2019)

2.4.6.2 Results

During the 2019MEPE, Imperium Europa was the best performing party outside of PN or PL parties with a total of 9,693 votes on the 35th count, with a quota totalling 37,174 showing a major increase of interest in far-right politics in Malta. The best performing candidates during the 2019MEPE were Dr Miriam Dalli with a total of 63,438 votes, and Dr Roberta Metsola with a total of 38,206 votes on the 1st round reaching more than the required quota.

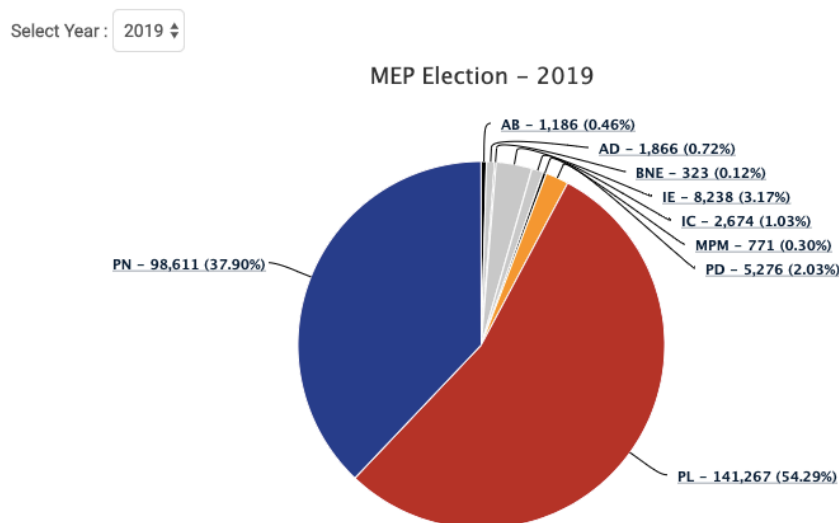


Figure 13: The 2019MEPE results in Malta (ECM, 2020)

2.5 Political campaigning in Malta including the use of social media

One particular study which focused on the use of both online and offline methods for activism was conducted by Malta's *Front Horizon* environmentalist movement concluded that 'they are part of a social network' by making use of the political structures in Malta and its media landscape (Briguglio, 2018). In a dissertation about the EP elections on a national level, Cefai (2010) found that candidates tend "to promote the national agenda rather than the European one". Moreover, in a dissertation about the use of political marketing and social media in Maltese politics, Abela (2016) shows us that although social media is being heavily used for political marketing, online participation for civic and political matter is very low. Thus, the potential of such social media is not fully reached. Nonetheless, this may not exactly fit into today's context as social media use over the past 4 years in Malta has changed drastically.

With the introduction of the 16-year-olds' ability to vote, a whole new target cleavage for politicians seems to have been introduced. Owing to the fact that language is essential when transmitting one's message to the public, one may observe whether online posts in English or in Maltese, as this may affect the connotations and efficacy of the way the message is received. Given the Bi-polar nature of our political system, the country is in most cases divided between the left and right parties found in Malta. In his dissertation, Zammit (2017) concluded that Facebook in Malta remains the dominant medium used by politicians to reach their audiences.

2.5.1 Social media in political context

One must also explore why people follow specific social media platforms. In the Maltese context, from the latest available Eurobarometer information used above, out of a total 501 respondents, 47% tended to not trust social media networks. Contrastingly, from the same data, the respondents were also asked about their intake of news on political matters with 52% relying on the same social media networks. However, the most dominant medium in this case is television with a total of 72% (Eurobarometer, 2019).

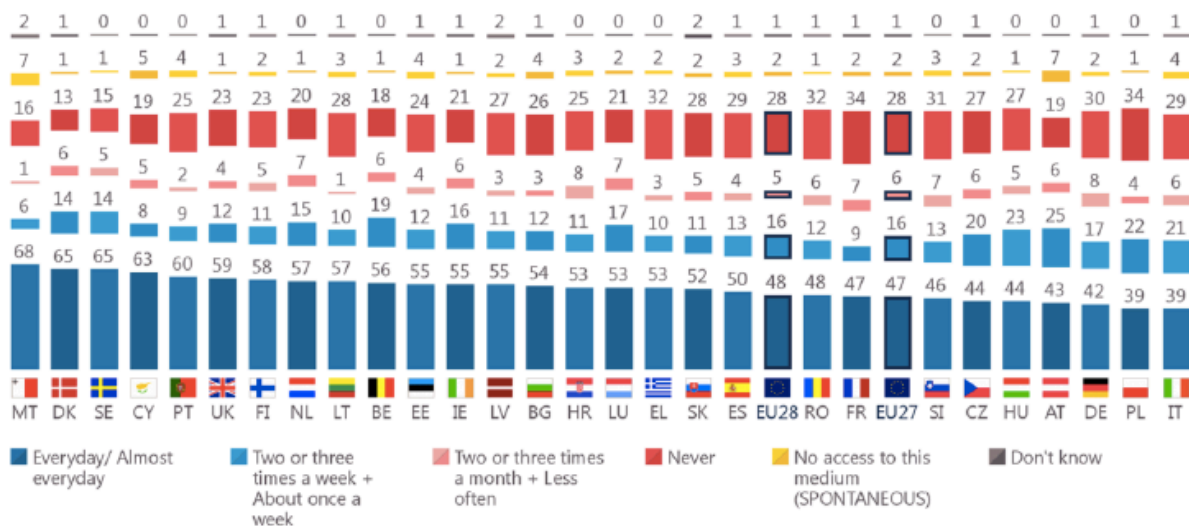


Figure 14: Use of social media networks across the European Union (Eurobarometer, 2019)

Moreover, through research conducted by Zammit (2017) for his thesis regarding the impact of social media on political campaigning in Malta, he concluded that social media was the most widely-used form of communication with TV and face-to-face ranking second and third.

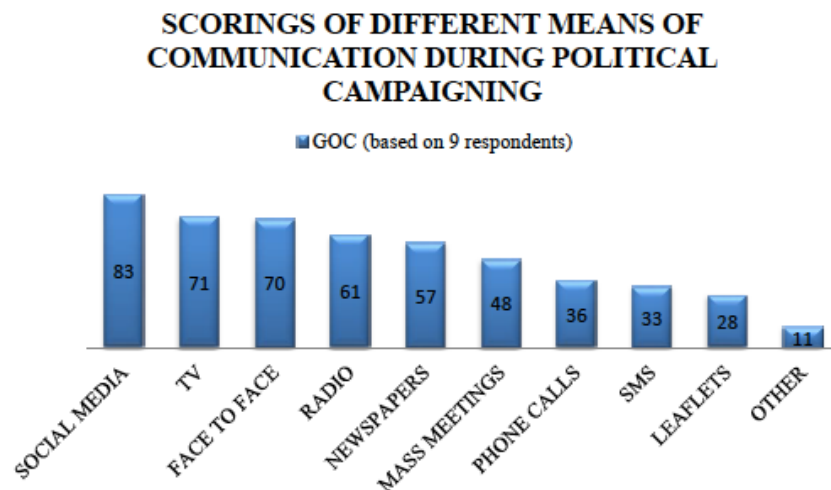


Figure 15: Different means of communication during political campaigning (Zammit, 2017)

2.6 Incumbency advantage and the Maltese context

2.6.1 Incumbent Advantage

Although the subject of incumbency advantage can potentially merit a dissertation for itself, most research about this subject rotates around the US sphere and elections with a few studies extending to other countries. Erikson (1971, p. 395) states that incumbency

“offers a considerable advantage to the candidate ... use his office to do favours for individual constituents, increase his visibility... generate additional financial support ... this leverage of incumbency offers an electoral advantage large (enough) to make it quite difficult for an incumbent to be defeated in a general election.”

In his research on Danish incumbency, Dahlggaard (2016) identified three main topics elevated from US incumbent studies. Advantages could come from several sources including media coverage, public recognition, policy credit and higher resources allocation. This can also be enjoyed by both a party from the number of running incumbents or by the individual which increases the likeliness of winning seats based on this incumbency

2.6.1.1 Malta Incumbents

Data provided by UM Elections Malta. up to 2013, show the progression over the years of general elections and the number of incumbents from one legislature onto the next.

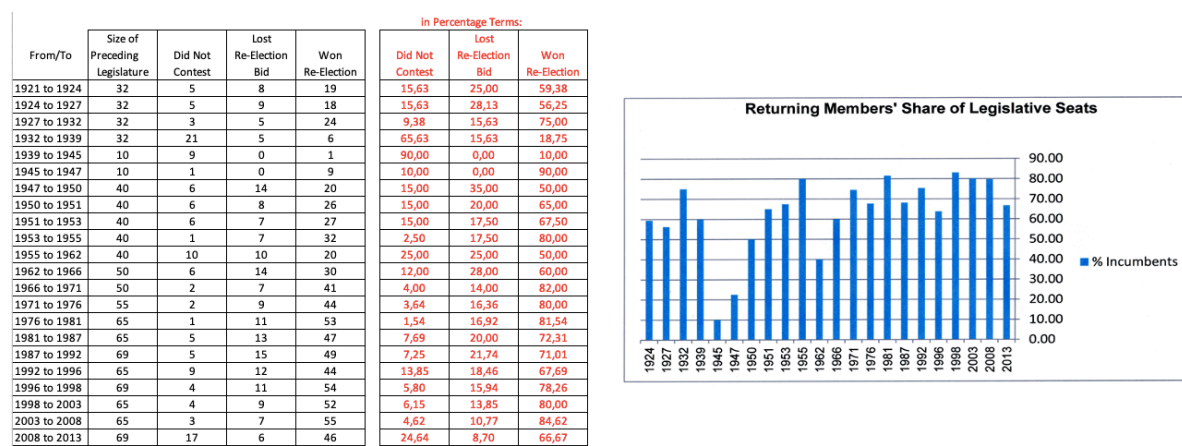


Figure 16: Survival rates of MP incumbents in Malta since 1921 up to 2013 (UM Malta Elections, 2020)

In this table, one observes that there is a substantial ‘dip’ in 1945 caused by World War II.

The best performing year for incumbents was in 2008 with a total of an 85% retention rate.

The average amongst all incumbents between 1921 and 2013, taking into account their size legislature is 26 MPs. Unfortunately, there is no data available with regards to MEP incumbency in Malta as of yet.

2.6.2 Incumbency advantage on social media

Most research on incumbency advantage is US-oriented which focuses on the media advantage which includes SM. However, it does not discuss the specific platforms in which the candidate has an advantage over. One of the only accurate studies which one can find is US focused and studies Obama’s and Romney’s twitter in the 2012 Presidential elections. In their study, Gunn & Aaheim concluded that “the accounts volume and potential impact” between the two profiles was evident with the Obama campaign posting 9 times more than the Romney campaign.

Secondly, the usage of social media in campaigns has become standard and merely used to promote the candidate rather than the debate with the politician having total control of the message.

SM does not generally work in favour of the new candidate but the incumbent has the upper hand due to the power in social media hierarchy. This is contradictory to the study of the challenger who benefits from the social media tool by changing the rules of the game (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009). Lastly, even if the donations increase after joining a social media platform such as Twitter, the 'new technology' seemed to only benefit new candidates (Sen, Yildirim, & Petrova, 2017), reinforcing Jackson and Lilleker's (2009) findings.

2.6.3 Studies on comparing the social media usage of the incumbent with the challenger candidate in Malta

No studies are available with regards to a comparative analysis between the incumbent and challenger candidate, specifically on social media in Malta. Thus, this highlights the importance of such a study to be conducted, in a bid to add to the local database of research on Maltese politics this hitherto lack of information.

2.7 Conclusion

The chapter has sought to present the conceptualisation of social media, its rise in political communication, the advantages that come with incumbency its Maltese aspects, the socio-political landscape and incumbency studies. The following chapter will now turn its attention to the methodological approaches adopted in this dissertation. Essentially, several data types are needed from social media to understand the key differences between the two. This will be discussed further in the following chapter dealing with research methodology. This would greatly benefit those interested in starting a political campaign especially those aspects to look out for when challenging the incumbent.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Social media usage in political campaigning seeks to fulfil a number of objectives, namely to increase user-engagement, reach out to the audience, deliver their messages, policies and also increase attendance in offline events. In the local Maltese context, while several studies draw a comparison between the political atmosphere and the use of social media, research on incumbency is limited. Thus, this study examines the social media differences between an incumbent and a challenging candidate during the 2019 Maltese European parliament elections. This chapter will now delve into the methodological approaches adopted in the data collection for this dissertation. The level of engagement on social media and the main agenda focused on by the politician will be analyzed as to better understand any similarities and differences of each candidate.

3.2 Research Strategy

This dissertation adopts a triangulated mixed-method research strategy, which was divided into the three parts as follows.

The first part involved qualitative interviews which were held with both incumbent and challenging candidates. As table 8 illustrates, interviews were held with candidates from the 2 dominant parties in Malta, namely the PL and the PN (RQ1 & RQ2).

The second part then directed its attention to the collection of quantitative meta data from social media posts, whereby given the number of SNS available, this study focuses specifically on Facebook and Instagram. For the scope of this study, only the last month of the campaigns were looked at, hence between 1st of May, 2019 and 25th of May, 2019. This tool is used as a measurement of the content rather than analysing the content itself. (RQ1 & RQ3), especially because although this data does provide a good understanding of how the social media was performing, it lacks to tell us exactly why it performed so well.

The focus of the third part of involves the qualitative analysis of the social media posts. This helped to understand which policy areas the candidates focused on and identify what policies worked better for them. This also helped to gauge their angle and target audiences. (RQ1, RQ2 & RQ3).

3.3 Netnographic semi-structured Interviews

In order to understand to what extent the candidates made use of social media, a total of four qualitative interviews were held with an incumbent and a challenging candidate from both the PL and PN camps. This helped to identify the size and reachability of the target audience. Questions focusing on the SNS, and their target audience. Their use of the traditional media is also a dominant aspect of Maltese politics, and incumbency advantage, given the fact that the parties own the media, was also explored. Questions also dealt with the subject of SNS expenditure, the candidates' policy orientation and opinionated questions (such as SM performance throughout), and the rise of social media in far-right politics.

This table lists the candidates that were interviewed.

Interviewee	Political Role
1	Dr Miriam Dalli PL (Incumbent) – Member of the European Parliament
2	Dr Roberta Metsola PN (Incumbent) – Member of the European Parliament
3	Mr Cyrus Engerer PL (Challenging) – Advisor to the Minister for the Environment
4	Dr Michael Briguglio PN (Incumbent) – Member and Member of the General Council

Table 1: Interview participants' political roles

In Dr Roberta Metsola's case, the interview was held with her social media advisor, Mr Matthew Tabone. Interviews were held online by making use of 'skype interviews' and 'over-the-telephone interviews' a netnographic approach by (Kozinets, 2015). This allows for 'self-reflexive note-taking' through the interview for any things which might affect the study. Although time consuming, Adams (2015) identifies a number of advantages for semi-

structured interviews which allowed for “probing, open-ended questions aimed at ‘program recipients’ i.e. constituents” .

3.3.1 Sample Size

A total of 4 candidates who contested the 2019 Maltese European parliament elections and who made use of both Facebook and Instagram were chosen for this study. All of the candidates were active on the relevant social media at the time the interviews were carried out.

3.3.2 Political Parties

The sample included an equal ratio between the PN and PL candidates. This type of segregation in political allegiance through their social media with their party roots serving as an influencing factor.

3.3.3 Sex & Age

The sample included 2 males and 2 females, where 2 females were the incumbents while the 2 males were the challenging candidates. As gender is an influencing factor, the sample size of this research aimed to narrow gender discrepancies and aim for more of an equal sampling size. At the time of this thesis, the youngest candidate was thirty-eight years of age while the oldest was forty-five years of age. While this may not be a substantial age difference, age is considered to be an influencing factor too.

3.3.4 Contents of Interview

Consent from all the participants was first sought. The interviews varied, depending on whether the candidate was incumbent or challenging. Furthermore, party-relevant information featured in the questions asked.

3.4 Social Media meta-data collection

In order to understand the social media differences between the incumbent and the candidate, the social media's meta-data needs to be analysed first. This helped identify information such as likes, comments, shares, level of engagement and several other criteria. Most of the information could be collected from the posts themselves, however, the candidates were also contacted and provided supplementary information to better interpret the social media data. Through the Facebook page insight function, one could back track to any time in the page's history and collect the necessary data over a period of days. Although Instagram does offer such insights, it is only limited to analyse a custom date.

3.4.1 Facebook Data

Days (between 1st of May, 2019 to 25th of May, 2019) compared to:

- a) Daily FB page likes;
- b) Daily new FB page likes;
- c) Daily unique engagement;
- d) Daily page total reach;
- e) number of posts;
- f) number of post reacts;
- g) Reaction types.

3.4.2 Instagram Data

Days (between 1st of May, 2019 to 25th of May, 2019) compared:

- a) 'Heart' Reactions;
- b) Total Amount of Posts.

3.5 Social Media Qualitative Data Analysis

This SM qualitative data was gathered to understand the candidate's pitch, the context of their post and to whom the post could have been aimed at. From all of the posts which were posted by the candidates, a list was formed with the candidates' 3 main policy areas. This was compared to data available by Eurobarometer, which identified the 3 main issues which Maltese people were concerned about up to November 2018.

Candidate	SM	Policy Areas
Dr Miriam Dalli	FB & INSTA	3 Main Policy Areas
Dr Roberta Metsola	FB & INSTA	3 Main Policy Areas
Mr Cyrus Engerer	FB & INSTA	3 Main Policy Areas
Dr Michael Briguglio	FB & INSTA	3 Main Policy Areas

Table 1: Candidates social media to 3 main policy areas each

This helped to conclude whether the 3 main policy areas which the candidates spoke about were close to that which the people were concerned about. One of the limitations in this case is that it is difficult to corroborate if the participants in the Eurobarometer survey were the same participants who engaged on the candidates' SM. Although the Eurobarometer presents a number of demographics of those who voted on the areas which concerned them the most, again, there is no guarantee that these are the same participants.

3.6 First-hand experiences of Maltese political campaigning

To be able to understand SM use in political campaigning, a researcher needs to embed themselves in the field. During the 2019MEPE elections campaign, I was closely involved as a freelance photographer. It gave me a particular insight and hands-on experience into how campaigning works from a technical perspective but more importantly, from a social medial point of view. This is, in fact, what triggered my interest in embarking on this thesis. Moreover, it turns the study into a more ‘tangible’ one, becoming part of the ‘setting’ while breaking the boundaries of the ‘virtual community’ (Kozinets, 2010).

3.7 Methodological limitations

One of the limitations of this thesis is the timeframe in which the meta-data was collected. Since the 2019MEPE were held on the 25 May 2019, data collection occurred one year later.

Another limitation was the timeframe in which the interviews were held in, thus between March and April, 2020. The recall of certain information from the candidates could have been limited to some extent, also possibly because of other political events which took place prior to the elections.

Moreover, the interviews were held during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malta, and thus, some technological limitations could have possibly existed as interviews were held online. Nevertheless, all the candidates had a clear understanding of the conferencing software that was used.

Bias is also one of the limitations which can also be foreseen with this type of comparative study. In a bid to limit bias, it is imperative to state that the writing of this dissertation has tried to be unbiased as possible, and an outsider perspective has been adopted.

Another limitation may include the choice of those affiliated with the political parties involved. Their answers and opinions (pundits) might not represent all of the politician's opinion. Furthermore, the data does not go into the mentions of the candidates by third parties, which could possibly be a big factor of someone's success on SM such as hashtags, mentions, groups, private SM conversations and fan pages.

Chapter 4

Analysis, Results & Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is structured in three sections. will the different data types that have been collected. The first section will analyze the semi-structured interviews and the second section will turn its attention to an analysis of the meta-data by comparing and contrasting the data with each other. The third and final section will examine the ‘policy areas’ which the candidates focused on.

4.2 Analysis of the netnographic semi-structured interviews

The participants' names are abbreviated as follows -

Name	Shortened Name
Dr Miriam Dalli (incumbent)	MD
Mr Matthew Tabone on behalf of Dr Roberta Mestola (incumbent)	MTRM
Mr Cyrus Engerer (challenging)	CE
Dr Michael Briguglio (challenging)	MB

Table 2: Shortened Names

When asked about their current positions within the parties.

MD – MEP

MTRM – MEP and member of the parliamentary group

CE – Holds the position of an advisor within the ministry of environment.

MB – Member and member of the general council.

When asked about which SM usage they made use of during the campaign.

All candidates made use of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter with MTRM making also use of LinkedIn to some extent.

When asked about their target audiences.

Each candidate had a different target audience with each of the SM used with Facebook aimed at an older audience, Instagram particularly aimed at a younger audience while Twitter focused more on the European audience and the media.

MD – Targeted different messages at different groups. . Climate change was aimed towards younger audience, social issues towards the 35+, etc.

MTRM – Aimed their messages to different target audiences with every post with an exception of Instagram which was aimed at a younger audience.

CE – Aimed at people who 'tended to vote Labour'

MB – Popular with the young vote and tried to attract floaters with particular interest in environmental issues.

When asked about the 2014MEPE and its effects on the 2019MEPE (towards incumbents)

MD – If a good job was done, yes. If not, then no.

MTRM – Yes, due to previous following on SM, if used correctly.

When asked about the use of traditional media and then compared to sm.

MD – Primary tool was SM and traditional media was used to even reach a wider audience, example, elderly who tend to read the papers. Most important traditional media were television. Overall, SM is more important than traditional media.

CE – Radio is the best traditional media due to loyal followership. TV programmes also leave a good impact. A good lead up on SM, with the traditional media taking centre stage in the last 2 weeks.

MTRM – Made use of all available traditional media including independent ones. ‘If you are younger, the less likely you are to follow traditional media’. This is where SM kicks in.

MB – Had a weekly column on newspaper and a slot on the radio. He also looked into the news aspects of TV programmes and how MEPs tend to be more featured. Therefore, this deficit which is presented in traditional media is replaced by SM.

When asked about whether their manifestos were in line with their respective parties at the EP.

MD – On areas such as environment and climate change they were in line, however, there are divergent points which are country specific such as taxation, abortion, etc.

MTRM – The European agenda had to be taken into consideration but they needed to be translated into local ones.

CE – It was more in-line with the S&D rather than the PL one.

MB – One had to juxtapose the EPP manifesto with that of the PN. MB's manifesto was more liberal or to the left of the PN manifesto.

When asked about whether the national agenda is more important than the European one.

MD – When voting, the national agenda is taken into consideration when choosing the party and the European aspect taken into consideration when choosing the candidate.

MTRM – When voting people voted on national issues but translated from European ones.

CE – When it comes to agenda, party loyal voters tend to look at the local ones. Those who are not, look at the European agenda as important as the national one.

MB – Both are important, but a European agenda is a non-starter. Voters tend to look at national, local and personal issues.

When asked about whether someone else took care of their SM and if the person in charge reached their objectives.

MD – She had a team which took care of media posts and photos while she took care of the choice of language. The team has reached their objective.

MTRM – She had help for social media posts but overall, the idea for the SM post would come from her. Objectives were reached.

CE – A communications team was created who uploaded posts be it photos and videos. Objective was reached with some small changes in hindsight.

MB – A team of volunteers took care of some sm, but mostly it was himself. Although improvised the objective was reached.

When asked about the rise of far-right politics such as Imperium Europa and if this was led because of a product of sm.

MD – It was a mixture of things including the SM, people wanting to move away from the ‘traditional party’, people questioning foreign workers in Malta, etc.

MTRM – Social media has offered everyone the same platform as other politicians. Since traditional media might not cover your stories, SM offers you this possibility.

CE – The result of a lot of populism and fake news. His popularity is a mixture of fear, populist speech and frustrated people.

MB – Protest vote in European elections goes well, especially in a 2-party system. They were vocal on SM but not professionally.

When asked about if they would change anything from an sm perspective.

MD – She was happy with how the team delivered.

MTRM – The use of language could be different by making use of more Maltese rather than English on certain aspects. More live videos as well.

CE – Try to be more transparent on certain topics. Do posts earlier rather than posting earlier and modify slightly the target audience.

MB – Give more responsibility to volunteers with regards to sm. One has to look at how money is at one’s disposal.

When asked about the use of endorsements on sm.

MD – endorsements were used in a way to listen what others ‘influencers’ have to say about you. This might mean that people trust what that person has to say.

MTRM – They helped but incumbents require endorsements less than a challenging candidate does.

CE – They are useful as it gives the people another reason why they should trust you. However, this is let down by an excessive amount of endorsements to everyone.

MB – He did not focus on endorsements for sm usage but rather appealed more to the outside vote.

When asked about their expenditure on sm and whether a candidate would have still reached people without SM expenses.

MD - €409 on Facebook, not on Instagram. Promotion was done on specific campaigns at specific times. There is an article on the exact expenditure on sm.

MTRM – The number are published on media portals. However, one cannot tell exactly whether it had an impact or not as one cannot tell exactly the moment when a person decides to whom he/she is going to vote for.

CE – It is available on articles online. It reached the audience; however, the target audience could have been adjusted.

MB – Around €2, 048 yet the exact number is online. However, most candidates spent money on activities which is an aspect of the finance.

The articles which the candidates referred to were found (Hudson, 2019). They do not refer to a particular month but rather to the total sum spent. Dr Miriam Dalli spent €409, Dr Roberta Metsola spent, €1,901, Mr Cyrus Engerer spent €4,895 & Dr Michael Briguglio

spent €1,678 (Hudson, 2019). All the transcripts of the interviews are available in the Appendices.

4.3 Analysis of the social media meta-data

4.3.1 Social media that was analysed

The following Facebook pages and Instagram Accounts were analysed:

Dr Miriam Dalli FB Mr Cyrus Engerer FB Dr Roberta Metsola FB Dr Michael Briguglio FB

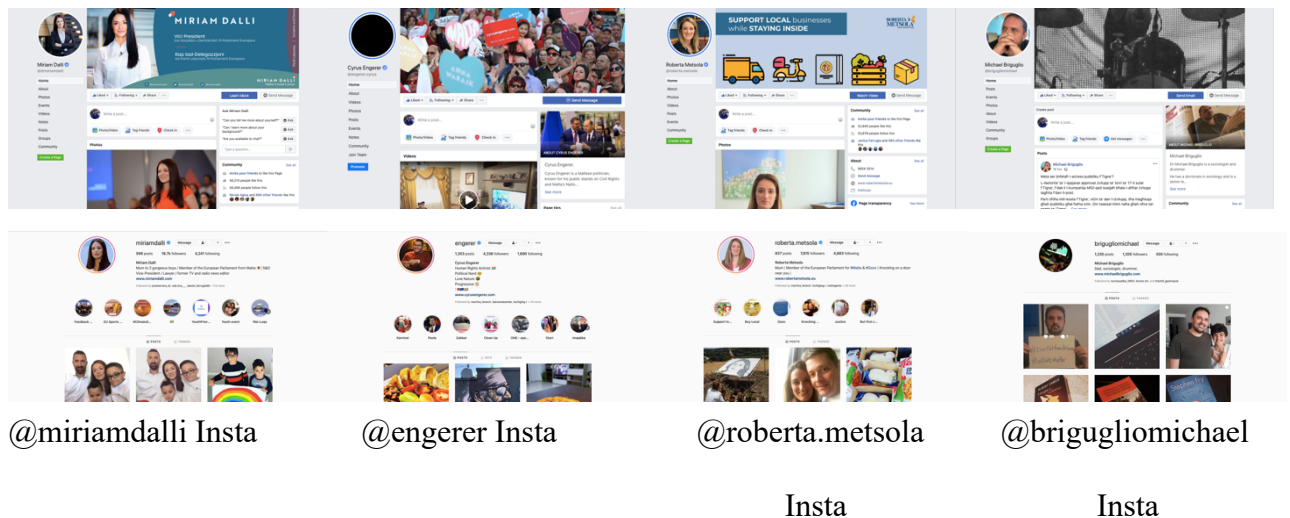


Illustration 1: The candidate's social media

4.3.2 Instagram Data

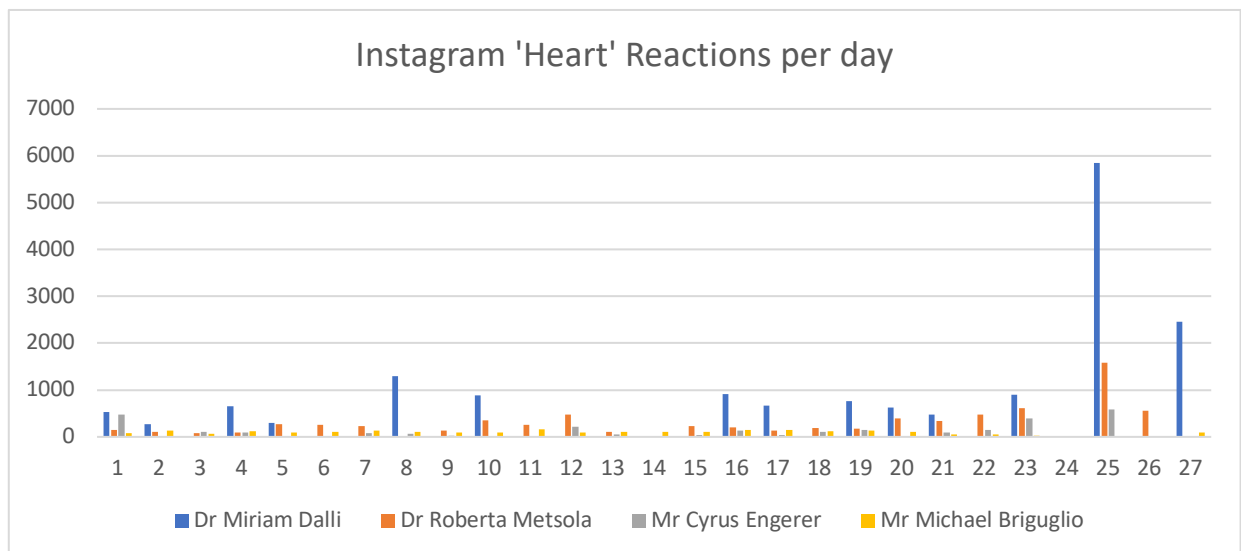


Table 3: Instagram 'heart' reactions per candidate analysed through the last month of the campaign.

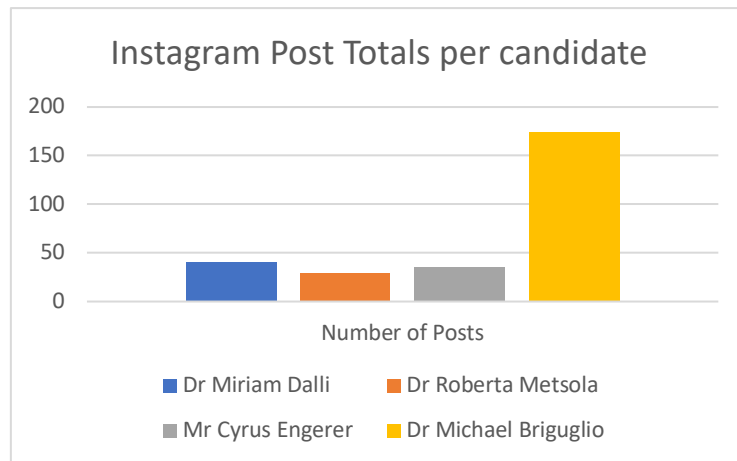


Table 4: Instagram post totals per candidate between the 1st of May & 25th of May, 2019.

Dr Miriam Dalli's Instagram – Almost 1 post per day, very light on descriptions with candid high-quality photos. Almost all the photos were accompanied by these hashtags: #onthebeat #campaigntrail #womeninpolitics #politics #malta #mep2019 #miriamdalli #thenextlevel #illivellijmiss. There was no particular policy focus as long as the photo contained a simple message. One can note that the page was highly active on election day.

Dr Roberta Metsola's Instagram – Adopted a 1-post-per day strategy. Each photo contained a small story mostly candid, high quality photos as well. Almost all the photos were accompanied by these hashtags: #yourMEP #malta #gozo #womeninpolitics.

Mr Cyrus Engerer's Instagram – Mainly focused on youths, with thematic videos of people stating that they will be voting for him complemented with high quality photos. In some cases, the hashtag #MaltaQabelKollox was used.

Mr Michael Briguglio's Instagram – Very personal and barely any high-quality photos. The content was a mixture of quotes, throwbacks and posters. He was very vocal about environmental, construction issues and the need for 'clean politics'. The posts were

accompanied by hashtags such as: #briguglio #ontheground #RiedaTajba #BeTheChange #Malta #MEP2019 #MEP #campaigntrail.

Data with relation to Insta Stories (popular among the younger population in Malta), Insta live stories and Insta Highlights were not analyzed. This was because these had to be analyzed during the campaign itself. Due to the small numbers of comments, these were not analyzed either. The amount of mentions and hashtags on each candidate was not calculated for the scope of this study.

One can observe that although Dr Michael Briguglio posted more on Instagram during his campaign, it does not necessarily mean that he would perform better. Therefore, other candidates adopted a strategy where they posted less, however the quality was much higher. This can be seen through the amount of 'heart reactions' Dr Miriam Dalli achieved.

4.3.3 Facebook Data

The data from Facebook was analyzed in two ways: First, by means of the metric data, we were able to understand how Facebook performed through a quantitative perspective. The second method focused on the ‘policy-context’ of the posts. From all the candidates’ Facebook posts, a list of 3 main priorities for each candidate was identified. This was compared to the 3 main concerns of Maltese people on a local level. According to a study conducted by Eurobarometer (2019), these concerns were immigration (49%), housing (43%) and environment and climate change (33%) ([Eurobarometer, 2019](#)). The results are presented in the following subsections.

4.3.3.1 Facebook Page Data

Both challenging candidates provided their relevant FB page data. Dr Miriam Dalli provided information to some extent while no information was available from Dr Roberta Metsola.

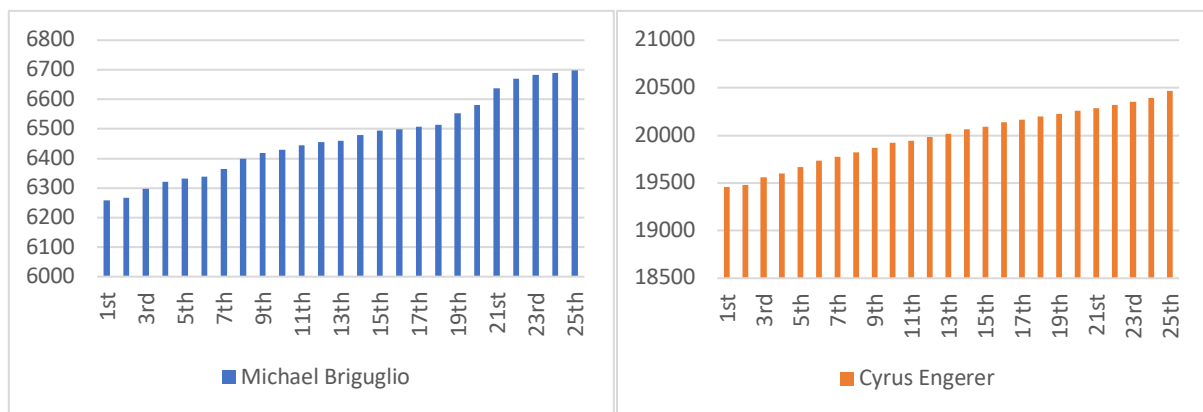


Table 5: Challenging candidate’s daily page Likes FB page evolution



Table 6: Dr Miriam Dalli’s page like FB evolution

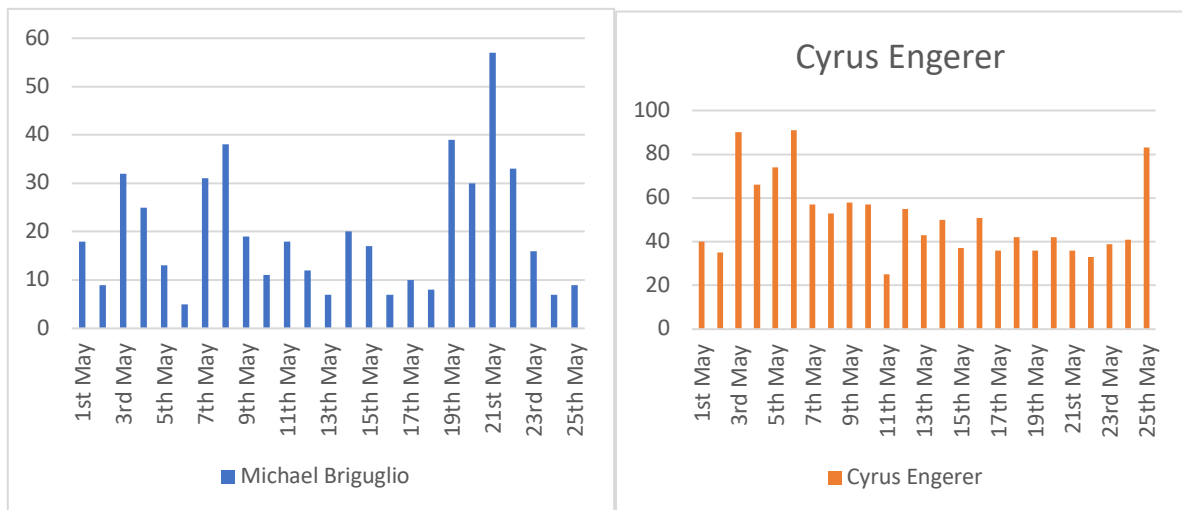


Table 7: Challenging candidate's daily new page likes

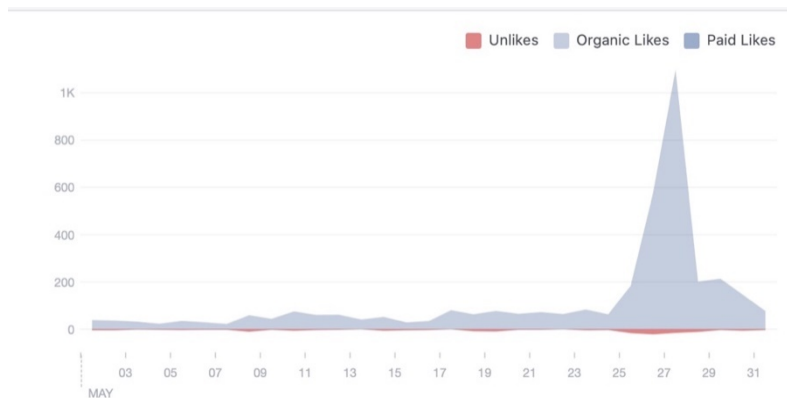


Table 8: Dr Miriam Dalli's daily new page likes

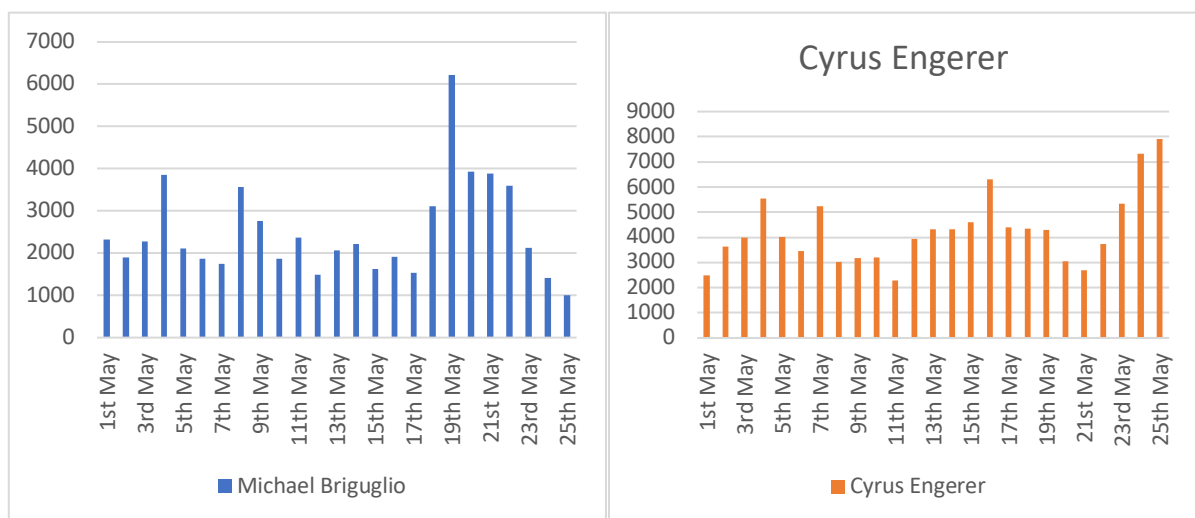


Table 9: Challenging candidates' daily unique page engagements (includes a mixture of organic and paid engagements)

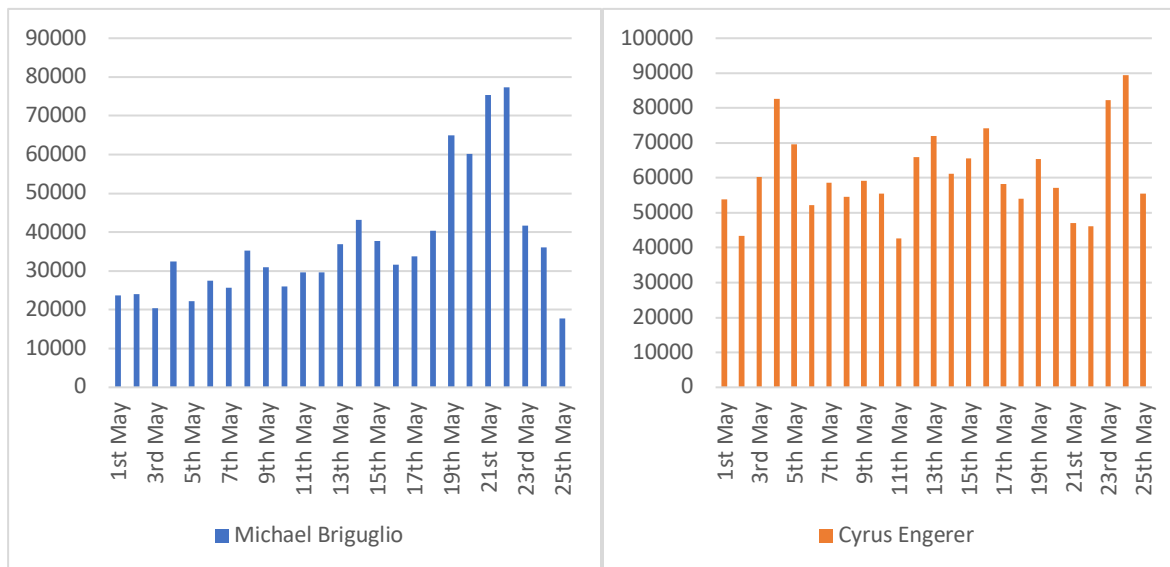


Table 10: Challenging candidates daily page total reach (includes a mixture of organic and paid reach)

This data reveals that candidates were in the public's interest on different occasions. This might be due to a number of specific posts which were posted during that time.

4.3.3.2 Facebook Post Data

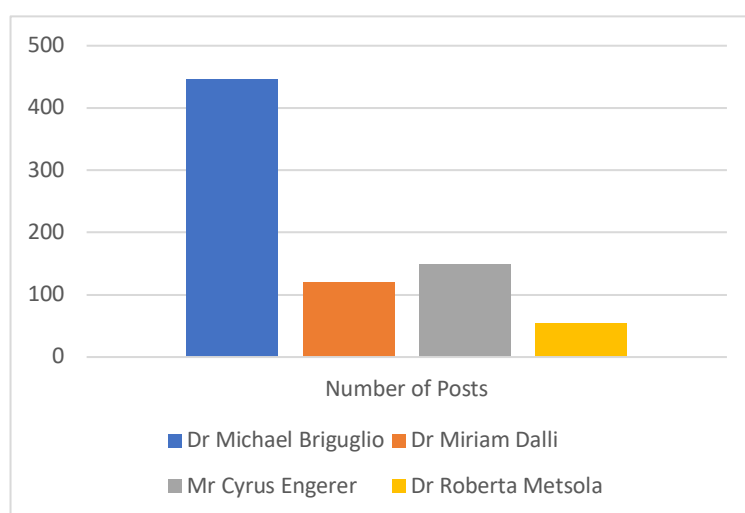


Table 11: Total number of posts per candidate during the 2019MEPE.

Dr Michael Briguglio posted a total of 446 posts with a mixture of photos, videos and link shares. Dr Miriam Dalli also included a mixture of photos, videos snippets from live

programmes she attended, live videos during tent meetings and links. Mr Cyrus Engerer was very similar to Dr Miriam Dalli's style. However, he adopted a 1-video-per-day during the last month where 1-minute videos were created summarising what he had done during the day.

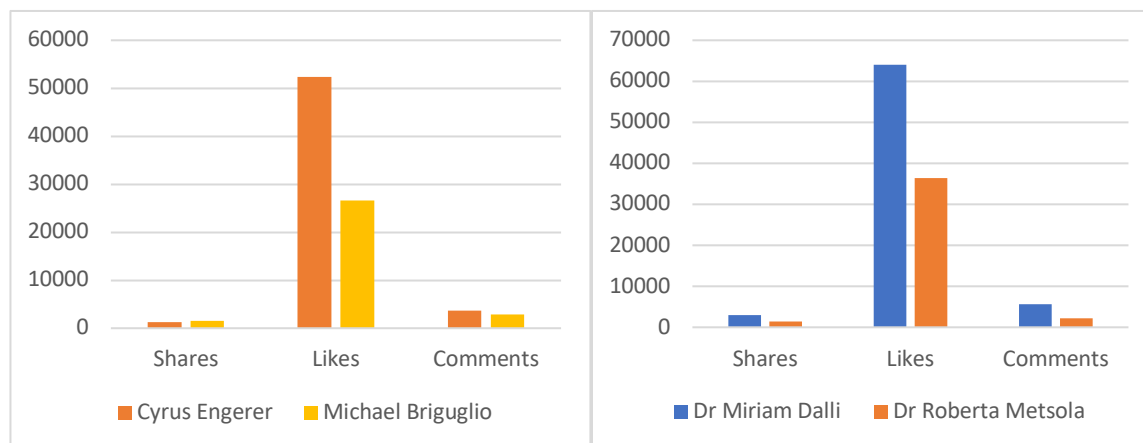


Table 12: The amount of post reacts between the 1st of May and 25th of May, 2019

One can see distinguishable numbers between likes and comments. Dr Michael Briguglio skipped Mr Cyrus Engerer in the number of shares, however, a difference can be felt between the number of likes and comments. Moreover, one can note that if Dr Roberta Metsola had posted more in a single day, she would have narrowed the gap between her and Dr Miriam Dalli.

4.4 Facebook Qualitative Analyses

An analysis of the 'policy areas' which were focused on and compared to the Eurobarometer survey. The policy areas identified by the public were: immigration, housing, and environment and climate change.

Dr Miriam Dalli's Facebook mainly focused on environmental issues, the economic and manufacturing sector, and youth. An interesting observation was that as an incumbent, she also got endorsements from EU MEPs, although these did not perform very well with regards to

numbers. The most well-performing posts contained only a high-quality photo of her with a small description. Moreover, an analysis of the reactions and comments was carried out. Given the number of posts, a sample was taken, as illustrated in the following table.

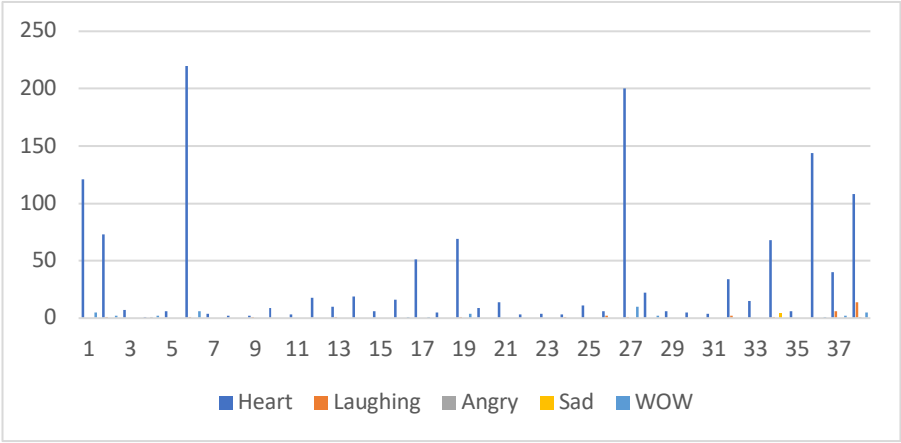


Table 13: Reaction type to posts posted by Dr Miriam Dalli

In the comments section, a number of posts were found, including a poster of Norman Lowell, which were not deleted. There was no interaction between Dr Miriam Dalli and the public in the comments.

Dr Roberta Metsola’s Facebook focused on the environment (specifically on single-use plastic), construction, and corruption. Other subjects such as taxation in Malta and youths were tackled too. She stuck to a 1-post-per-day strategy with some exceptions nearing the elections. Given the amount of posts, one was able to obtain all the data with regards to reaction type.

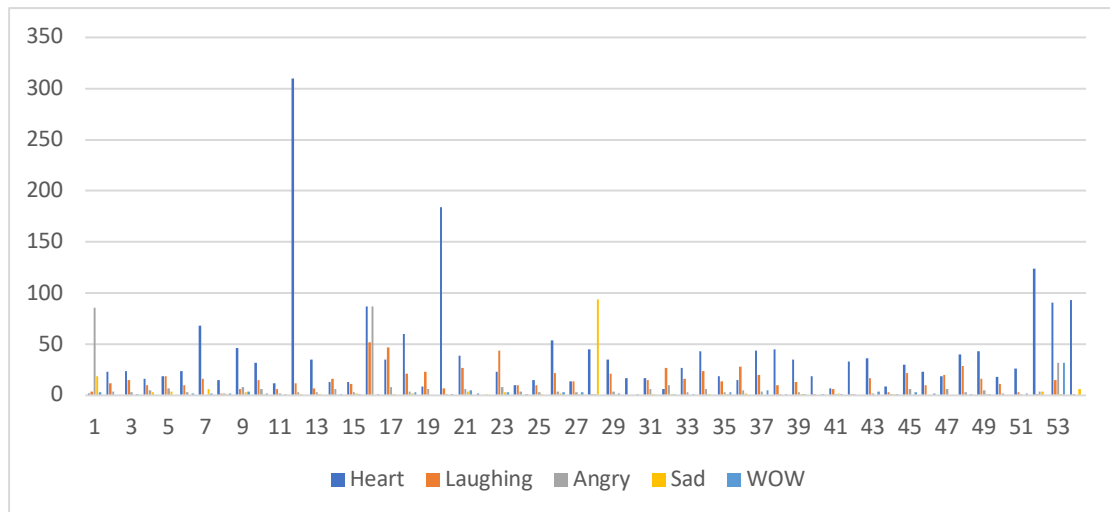


Table 14: Reaction Type to posts by Dr Roberta Metsola

One can observe that there is a more diversified reaction. This might be through the number of Labour voters which react to the posts as well, and a spike of ‘Sad’ reactions in the middle. This was a post in commemoration of Daphne Caruana Galizia.

Mr Cyrus Engerer’s Facebook focused on youths, EU funds, the environment, and working in favour of Malta. An interesting observation is that people were more vocal in the comments section and Mr Engerer was highly active in his responses to these people. Several promo videos were also created with people from different age groups and work areas that they will be voting for Mr Engerer.

Dr Michael Briguglio’s Facebook focused on the environment (clean air and single-use plastic), construction, land use, and EU funds. On a number of occasions, Dr Briguglio responded to people through the comments section too. He also created 2-minute live videos during the campaign speaking about what he would if he were elected. On these types of posts there was a strong varying reaction from people. Quotes in the form of pictures created the most engagement.

4.5 Quantitative Data - Secondary Analysis

An EU-wide survey carried out by the voter studies post-elections identified questions which are useful for this dissertation. The data was downloaded and Malta's data was extracted through SPSS. (EES, 2019). Through descriptive statistics, out of a total of 503 respondents, I was able to extract data as illustrated below.

From all the respondents, most people were between 25-39.

HAGE. Age recode

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24	69	13.7	13.7	13.7
	25-39	129	25.6	25.6	39.4
	40-54	114	22.7	22.7	62.0
	55-64	74	14.7	14.7	76.7
	65+	117	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	503	100.0	100.0	

Figure 15: Study Age Demographics (Schmitt, et al., 2019).

420 people voted during the European Parliament elections.

Q6. The European Parliament elections were held on ... May 2019. For one reason or another, some people in ... did not vote in these elections. Did you vote in the recent European Parliament elections?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, voted	420	83.5	83.5	83.5
	No, did not vote	72	14.3	14.3	97.8
	Don't know	11	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	503	100.0	100.0	

Figure 16: Voting during the 2019 EP elections (Schmitt et al., 2019).

172 respondents said that they voted for PL while 74 respondents said that they voter for PN.

Q7. Which party did you vote for in the European Parliament elections?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	did not vote	83	16.5	16.5	16.5
	other party	15	3.0	3.0	19.5
	did vote blanc or nil	11	2.2	2.2	21.7
	do not remember	126	25.0	25.0	46.7
	Partit Laburista	172	34.2	34.2	80.9
	Partit Nazzjonalista	74	14.7	14.7	95.6
	Alternattiva Demokratika	6	1.2	1.2	96.8
	Democratic Party	7	1.4	1.4	98.2
	Imperium Europa	9	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	503	100.0	100.0	

Figure 17: Which party did you vote for? (Schmitt et al., 2019).

The most interesting question is how close people followed the elections on SM during the elections out of which 84 responded very closely.

Q8. How closely did you follow the campaign ahead of the European Parliament elections in the media or on social media?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0 Not at all	81	16.1	16.1	16.1
	1	8	1.6	1.6	17.7
	2	24	4.8	4.8	22.5
	3	25	5.0	5.0	27.4
	4	21	4.2	4.2	31.6
	5	66	13.1	13.1	44.7
	6	41	8.2	8.2	52.9
	7	67	13.3	13.3	66.2
	8	53	10.5	10.5	76.7
	9	19	3.8	3.8	80.5
	10 Very closely	84	16.7	16.7	97.2
	Don't Know	14	2.8	2.8	100.0
	Total	503	100.0	100.0	

Figure 18: Social Media followership during the EP elections (Schmitt, et al., 2019).

When asked about who they voted for during the last general election, 198 said that they voted PL while 94 said that they voted PN.

Q9. Which party did you vote for at the ?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Other party	1	.2	.2	.2
	Did vote blanc or nil	6	1.2	1.2	1.4
	Did not vote	69	13.7	13.7	15.1
	Do not remember	130	25.8	25.8	41.0
	Labour Party	198	39.4	39.4	80.3
	National Force (Nationalist Party + Democratic Party)	94	18.7	18.7	99.0
	Maltese Patriots Movement	1	.2	.2	99.2
	Democratic Alternative	4	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	503	100.0	100.0	

Figure 19: Voting during the 2017 general elections (Schmitt, et al., 2019).

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will now turn its attention to the major findings which resulted from the analysis of the research and acknowledge the limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research.

5.2 Major Findings

Challenging candidates were found to be more active on social media with increased interaction amongst people. However, one cannot analyze online social media activities without taking into consideration the candidates' offline activities. Most of the social media posts were seen to be carried forward from offline events such as house visits, interviews, events and TV appearances. Moreover, one cannot guarantee that having a strong presence on social media will result in a vote in their favour. Incumbent candidates had the advantage of previous following, however, the PR-STV allowed for challenging candidates to be elected as was seen by Dr Alex Agius Saliba and Dr Josianne Cutajar from the Labour camp. Facebook served as a platform to share their ideologies and manifestos while Instagram seemed to focus more on developing the candidates' profile beyond the subject of politics.

5.3 Other findings

One needs to take into consideration the offline events that the candidates partook in ,which, in turn had a spill over effect on social media . These included the following: house visits, party, independent and international media appearances, previously known, endorsements from well-known personalities within in the local scene, party billboards, physical appearances during mass meetings or local public gatherings and policy focus and stance.

Live videos from politicians offered a wider opportunity and provided contexts for discussion. One can also note that Dr Miriam Dalli's and Dr Roberta Metsola's social media was much bigger than their party's one in terms of likes and follows. However, this may possibly be due to the European audience gained prior to these elections. Furthermore, the candidates' choice of language in their SM campaign is also relevant, with most candidates making use of Maltese and Dr Metsola having a combination of both Maltese and English. While incumbent candidates may rely on their previous election experiences, challenging candidates may not have the same opportunity, owing to the fact that political elections are a new enterprise for them.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

Facebook data needs to be addressed with caution, when available. It is recommended that this tool be further developed to help create more graphical representation of the data. This study only looked at the candidates' main Facebook and Instagram pages. It did not consider the candidates' personal profiles, the way the candidates were promoted by others with the biggest player being the party itself and their followership. Furthermore, this study did not elaborate on the candidates' past political history, which may arguably have affected SM given the amount of followership one can gain from previous popularity. Moreover, one cannot calculate the number of unique likes on a specific post, for example. No study campaign can be established as a standard as no study has ever been done within the local context.

5.5 Further Research

One can delve into further detail by analysing the way new social media platforms can offer a possibility to promote a particular candidate. Another focus of research may include an examination of the legal parameters in which SM functions, taking into consideration the candidates' expenditure and number of posting, and the implications on the election results.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DR MIRIAM DALLI

- 1) What is your current position within the labour party?
- 2) Which social media platforms did you make use of during the European Parliament Elections in 2019?
- 3) What target audience were you aiming for?
 - a) Do you think that you have managed to reach this target audience?
 - b) Where were you targeting a specific group in Malta?
 - c) Given the fact that you have already participated in the 2014 European Parliament Elections, do you think that this has helped in winning the 2019 European Elections?
- 4) Several traditional media sources were available during the campaign such as the party's newspaper 'It-Torċa', ONE TV & ONE Radio. Have you made use of such media?
 - a) Which traditional media type do you believe was better in reaching out to the audience?
 - b) Which was more effective; Social Media (Facebook and Instagram) or the traditional media sources? And why?
- 5) Do you think that your manifesto was in line with that which was being promoted by the S&D in the EP?
- 6) Do you believe that the national agenda is more important than the European one in the case of Malta?
- 7) Do you think that being an incumbent has helped in winning the majority that you have obtained?
- 8) Did you have someone else control your social media? Do you think that he/she has portrayed you in the way that you intended? Do you believe that the person has reached the objective of the campaign?
- 9) Through the result one can note the major increase in far-right politics such as Imperium Europa led by Norman Lowell with a total of 9,963 votes which only fell until the 36th out of a total of 39 counts. What can you comment about this? Do you think that the social media has contributed to this?
- 10) Is there anything that you would change if you were to re-do the election from a social media perspective?
- 11) During the campaign, you were given a number of endorsements from numerous people. Do you think that these were effective in reaching out to everyone? How influential do you think they were?
- 12) How much money did you spend on Facebook & Instagram during the last month of the campaign? (will ask from beforehand)
 - a) Do you think that it has helped in reaching out to the audience?
 - b) Do you think that if you did not spend any amount of money on social media, would you still have reached the desired win/majority that you would have hoped for?

APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MR CYRUS ENGERER

- 1) What is your current position within the Labour party?
- 2) Which social media platforms did you make use of during the European Parliament Elections 2019?
- 3) What target audience were you aiming for?
 - a) Do you think that you have managed to reach this target audience?
 - b) Were you targeting a specific group in Malta?
- 4) Several traditional media sources were available during the campaign such as the party's newspaper 'It-Torċa', ONE TV & ONE Radio. Have you made use of such media?
 - a) Which traditional media type do you believe was better in reaching out to the audience?
 - b) Which was more effective; Social Media (Facebook and Instagram) or the traditional media sources? And why?
- 5) Do you think that your manifesto was in line with that which was being promoted by the S&D in the EP?
- 6) Do you believe that the national agenda is more important than the European one in the case of Malta?
- 7) Through the result one can note the major increase in far-right politics such as Imperium Europa led by Norman Lowell with a total of 9,963 votes which only fell until the 36th out of a total of 39 counts. What can you comment about this? Do you think that the social media has contributed to this?
- 8) Did you have someone else control your social media? Do you think that he/she has portrayed you in the way that you intended? Do you believe that the person has reached the objective of the campaign?
- 9) Is there anything that you would change if you were to re-do the election from a social media perspective?
- 10) During the campaign, you were given a number of endorsements from numerous people. Do you think that these were effective in reaching out to everyone? How influential do you think they were?
- 11) How much money did you spend on Facebook & Instagram during the last month of the campaign? (will ask from beforehand)
 - a) Do you think that it has helped in reaching out to the audience?
 - b) Do you think that if you did not spend any amount of money on social media, would you still have reached the desired win/majority that you would have hoped for?

APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DR ROBERTA METSOLA

- 1) What is your current position within the Nationalist party?
- 2) Which social media platforms did you make use of during the European Parliament Elections in 2019?
- 3) What target audience were you aiming for?
 - a) Do you think that you have managed to reach this target audience?
 - b) Were you targeting a specific group in Malta?
 - c) Given the fact that you have already participated in the 2014 European Parliament Elections, do you think that this has helped in winning the 2019 European Elections?
- 4) Several traditional media sources were available during the campaign such as the party's newspaper 'Il-Mument', NET TV & NET fm. Have you made use of such media?
 - a) Which traditional media type do you believe was better in reaching out to the audience?
 - b) Which was more effective; Social Media (Facebook and Instagram) or the traditional media sources? And why?
- 5) Do you think that your manifesto was in line with that which was being promoted by the EPP in the EP?
- 6) Do you believe that the national agenda is more important than the European one in the case of Malta?
- 7) Do you think that being an incumbent has helped in winning the majority that you have obtained?
- 8) Did you have someone else control your social media? Do you think that he/she has portrayed you in the way that you intended? Do you believe that the person has reached the objective of the campaign?
- 9) Through the result one can note a major increase in far-right politics such as Imperium Europa led by Norman Lowell with a total of 9,963 votes which only fell until the 36th out of a total of 39 counts. What can you comment about this? Do you think that the social media has contributed to this?
- 10) Is there anything that you would change if you were to re-do the election from a social media perspective?
- 11) During the campaign, you were given a number of endorsements from numerous people. Do you think that these were effective in reaching out to everyone? How influential do you think they were?
- 12) How much money did you spend on Facebook & Instagram during the last month of the campaign? (will ask from beforehand)
 - a) Do you think that it has helped in reaching out to the audience?
 - b) Do you think that if you did not spend any amount of money on social media, would you still have reached the desired win/majority that you would have hoped for?

APPENDIX D – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DR MICHAEL BRIGUGLIO

- 1) What is your current position within the Nationalist party?
- 2) Which social media platforms did you make use of during the European Parliament Elections in 2019?
- 3) What target audience were you aiming for?
 - a) Do you think that you have managed to reach this target audience?
 - b) Were you targeting a specific group in Malta?
- 4) Several traditional media sources were available during the campaign such as the party's newspaper 'Il-Mument', NET TV & NET fm. Have you made use of such media?
 - a) Which traditional media type do you believe was better in reaching out to the audience?
 - b) Which was more effective; Social Media (Facebook and Instagram) or the traditional media sources? And why?
- 5) Do you think that your manifesto was in line with that which was being promoted by the EPP in the EP?
- 6) Do you believe that the national agenda is more important than the European one in the case of Malta?
- 7) Did you have someone else control your social media? Do you think that he/she has portrayed you in the way that you intended? Do you believe that the person has reached the objective of the campaign?
- 8) Through the result one can note a major increase in far-right politics such as Imperium Europa led by Norman Lowell with a total of 9,963 votes which only fell until the 36th out of a total of 39 counts. What can you comment about this? Do you think that the social media has contributed to this?
- 9) Is there anything that you would change if you were to re-do the election from a social media perspective?
- 10) During the campaign, you were given a number of endorsements from numerous people. Do you think that these were effective in reaching out to everyone? How influential do you think they were?
- 11) How much money did you spend on Facebook & Instagram during the last month of the campaign? (will ask from beforehand)
 - a) Do you think that it has helped in reaching out to the audience?
 - b) Do you think that if you did not spend any amount of money on social media, would you still have reached the desired win/majority that you would have hoped for?

APPENDIX E – INTERVIEW CONSENT

This informed consent is aimed for candidates who have participated in the 2019 MEP elections who are being invited to participate in a research titled **‘The use of social media in political campaigning: A comparative study focusing on the incumbent and the new candidate during the 2019 European parliament elections in Malta.’**

Principal Researcher: David Mallia

Supervisor: Prof. Marc Edge

Organisation: University of Malta

This Informed Consent form has two parts:

- An information sheet (aimed at sharing this study with prospective participants)
- Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)

Part 1: Information Sheet

I am David Mallia, a fourth-year Bachelor of Communications (Honours) with European Studies student within the Faculty of Media & Knowledge Sciences at the University Of Malta. I am currently conducting research on the use of social media in political campaigning focusing on the incumbent and the new candidate as part of my dissertation in partial fulfilment of my degree course.

Purpose of the research

Since Malta's accession into the European Union in 2004, Malta has presented a handful of candidates to represent the country in the European Parliament and in EU affairs. During the years, one starts to notice that certain candidates have contested for more than one election, some of which have been successfully re-elected while others lost the democratic battle with challenger candidates. Social Media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were immensely used by such candidates to promote their ideologies and ideas throughout the years. Social Media (SM) campaigning is one of the marketing tactics used by companies which uses different SM platforms which are available to us in this day and age. It directly tackles brand consciousness, user interaction and reaches business goals through specific audience targeting.

In the 2019 Maltese European Parliament Elections, incumbent and new candidates from the dominant camps in Malta being labour and nationalist party, have made use of sm campaigning to increase interaction with their voters. The study analyses the differences and strategy implementation between such candidates. Did sm lead to an incumbents victory? What were the factors that determined the new candidates success? Did incumbency offer a comparative advantage over the new candidate?

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in an in-depth interview that will take around 15-20 minutes.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research as you have practiced the use of social media for political purposes and participated as a candidate during the 2019 Maltese European Parliament Elections.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind. You can also withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

There is no direct benefit to you, but your participation is likely to further our understanding of the use of social media campaigning during the 2019 European parliament elections in Malta.

Confidentiality of Information

The information you share with me during the interview will be kept anonymous if the contestants request it. Therefore, if the contestant 'ticks' the 1st point on the certificate of consent, then the transcript will be used in the dissertation without anonymity. Once transcribed, all recordings will be deleted. If the contestant requests anonymity, the interview files will be saved under a participant number, and once transcribed, they recordings will all be deleted. I, as the principal researcher in this study, will be the only one to know what your number is, and the recording and transcriptions will be kept in a password-locked device. Disguised extracts from the interview may be quoted in a dissertation and published papers.

If you have any further questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask me any additional questions, you may either send me an email on david.mallia.16@um.edu.mt or call me on 79441120

CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

‘ The use of social media in political campaigning: A comparative study focusing on the incumbent and the new candidate during the 2019 European parliament elections in Malta’

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Please tick the box

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I am willing to let my name to appear in this research and in any reports, articles or presentations which will emerge from it. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the researcher. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to take part in the above study. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I would like to receive a copy of the transcript before this is used. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I would like to receive a copy of the study and am happy for the researcher to store my address details on a secure server in order to post a copy of the research to me when it is available. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

APPENDIX F – DR MIRIAM DALLI INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Date: 13/03/20

David Mallia: DM

Time: 11.23AM

Dr Miriam Dalli: MD

DM: What is your current position within the Labour Party?

MD: Member of the European Parliament.

DM: Which social media platforms did you make use of during the European Parliament Elections in 2019?

MD: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter.

DM: Those 3 were the main ones which you made use of?

MD: Ehe, I think they were the only ones to be honest.

DM: Ok.

MD: If you're not counting the website.

DM: No, not the website. The Social Media.

MD: Instagram, Facebook & Twitter and they were the primary platforms

DM: What target audience were you aiming for? Do you think that you have managed to reach this target audience?

MD: For each social media platform I have a different audience and I am aware of that. So, for Facebook I know that I am targeting that are 40+, Instagram I target the younger once and twitter it's more for a European audience.

DM: Ok, ok.

MD: At least that's my profile. So much so that I try to put different messages on the different platforms. Even when it comes to photos, I put different photos for Instagram for example as compared to Facebook. I do not put every Facebook post on Instagram, so I keep them, not necessarily separate from one another but a bit diverse from one another.

DM ok, ok – So do you think that you have managed to reach this target audience?

MD: I think so. Considering the results, I think did.

DM: The results speak for themselves, I guess.

MD: But the even for example the engagement. I had quite a high engagement per post. For example, Instagram stories, I always reach 1,500 views. Facebook during campaign you have a peak of people who engage with you on posts etc. Therefore, it's varied. Usually it was always,

I mean, a post which did not do well during campaign period was like 300 likes and that a post that really did well was like 3k, 2k in that, ehe. I think ehe, we managed to tap into the different categories.

DM: So, this is related to question 3, where you targeting a specific group in Malta?

MD: I wanted to tap into all the different groups, but I wanted to tap into the different groups with different messages. So, when I was speaking about for example about climate change it was mainly targeted at the younger once.

DM: Ok

MD: If I speak about social issues its mainly targeted for 35+. Then twitter, for example, I always try to put EU related messages because I find that on twitter there are more people that come from EU institutions, Brussels.

DM: Twitter is seen more politically oriented to that extent

MD: Ehe, more politically oriented and I think there you have more like the media or certain media, certain NGO's for example, so you know, the messages there are a bit different then Facebook and Instagram obviously

DM: Ok. Given the fact that you have already participated in the 2014 European Parliament Elections, do you think that this has helped in winning the 2019 European Elections

MD: It goes both ways. If you do a good gob, it helps you because people know that you're there, what you did, what you stand for, if you don't do a good job it will work against.

DM: Ok

MD: And I think it showed a bit just to give you an example and not to quote, for example, if you had to compare David Casa's numbers, he's been there for 3, you know, legislatures but he was never very very attractive to be honest, and I mean you know, ok he got elected but it wasn't like he got massive numbers but people say that the power of incumbency is there. And you know I think, yes, the power of incumbency is there.

DM: That is what I am trying to figure out with this thesis. Whether the incumbency actually helps in getting re-elected.

MD: According to me it depends, if you did a good job it will definitely help you. If you did not do a good job it will work against you because people would feel like they gave you a chance and you did not deliver.

DM: Ok

MD: But if you deliver it helps you because even when I, you know, go and meet people, so they know me, they know my face, they know the work I did or they have an idea of the work I did and it's not like you need to go introduce yourself from scratch.

DM: OK, Ok. Onto question number 4: several traditional media sources were available during the campaign such as the party's newspaper 'It-Torċa', ONE TV & ONE Radio. Have you made use of such media?

MD: I did but I was more focused on social media and I did use of traditional media where I thought there are people that I am not reaching through social media. So, my primary tool was social media and when there were pockets which I thought I did not reach then I went to traditional media

DM: Ok, ok.

MD: When I tell you pockets which I did not reach for example, the elderly who are inclined to reading, for example, considering my voters, they were more inclined to read Torċa and Orizzont so you know I focused a bit more on that

DM: Ok

MD: For example, then I did not focus a lot on the English speaking newspapers because, I did focus on some of them but as not as much as on Torċa and Orizzont because I felt that the readers of Torċa and Orizzont weren't so much available on social media but the readers of the English newspaper were following me on social media

DM: Ok

MD: According to me this is all specific to the person. According to me it is not like, you know, this applied to me so it will apply to others as well.

DM: So now this is a specific question about traditional media. Which traditional media type do you believe was better in reaching out to the audience? So, from the traditional media which you used

MD: Television because when I went to Xarabank for example, which is a television programme, the feedback you get is massive. So, you do understand that people really follow it and followed what I was saying, they have comments to share and everything. Now also, it might be that its programme specific, but I think overall, I got more feedback when I was on a TV Programme then for example when you write an article. So, people engage more when you're on TV.

DM: So, they see you on TV and then they interact with you through social media. Exactly because television is a one-way communication in reality, you know.

MD: And you're right about that because it might not necessarily have been the same if it was just the television programme. What I did is when I went on a television programme then I chose sound bites to put them online and those sound bites then got engagement and feedback from people. To be honest, I don't know if we had just, you know, I was just present in a TV

programme if that would have been enough to engage people, so, in that case it was a mix of both.

DM: Ok.

MD: But if I had to do an article and put it on social media, I wouldn't get as much engagement as with a tv programme and put it on social media.

DM: Now this question, I think, we have already answered it, which was more effective social media or the traditional media, I believe, from the conversation that we had, social media is more important to reach the audiences which you were aiming for.

MD: For me, yes.

DM: So, onto question no. 5, do you think that your manifesto was in line with that which was being promoted by the S&D in the EP?

MD: Not on all aspects but obviously considering that I was co-ordinator for the environment committee which was responsible for environment, climate change, public health and safety and I was very active also on the civil liberties committee, obviously, what I was pushing forward when it comes to environment, climate change when it comes to health, they were in line with the S&D but we have divergent points of view like taxation, like abortion, so, and it happens to all the countries. So, and it's not like we're part of a political group and we follow, you know, all the line of the political group from A to Z.

DM: Ok.

MD: But the majority of the things we agree with them, but then you have things which are nation specific as well.

DM: So, with this question we also go into Malta's case. Do you believe that the national agenda is more important than the European one in the case of Malta?

MD: I think so. So, I think people, they are interested in what we are doing at the EU level but what's going on here, affects them a lot. Even when they vote, I think first based on the party, which party they prefer and that would be the national, then when they choose who they vote for, they take into consideration the EU aspect.

DM: Ok.

MD: It's my hunch, it's not based on any particular studies, but my feeling is that they go like that. First national and then the EU representative that they think can best represent them at the EU level.

DM: Ok, so, question number seven, and I believe also that this question we have already touched upon it and it has been answered. Do you think that being an incumbent has helped in winning the majority that you have obtained? Which in this case, we do believe so.

MD: Partially I would say because there were other incumbents and did not get 64,000. So, it gives you the first push but then a lot of other things come into play.

DM: Ok, question number 8 is an interesting question, did you have someone else control your social media? Do you think that he/she has portrayed you in the way that you intended?

MD: When you say control, you mean put up posts?

DM: Put up posts, who took the photos also.

MD: Yes, definitely. I had my team, I mean. who took photos, they were with me and took photos whilst there and I had people who were putting up the posts, but I was always involved in the choice of language and in the choice of photos, etc. So, the final say sort of was mine.

DM: Ok and one other question with question number 8. Do you believe that the person has reached the objective of the campaign?

MD: I think yes.

DM: Question number 9. Through the result one can note the major increase in far-right politics such as Imperium Europa led by Norman Lowell with a total of 9,963 votes which only fell until the 36th out of a total of 39 counts. What can you comment about this? Do you think that the social media has contributed to this?

MD: I don't think it's the social media only, I think it's more of a general feeling of people wanting to move away from what they consider the traditional parties and social media might have an impact because then you have people going on social media and they start ranting about something and that feeling sort of and you have a ripple effect of that. But I think the core of the issue, is that you have people who are like a bit disenchanted with the traditional parties and who want to move away from those traditional parties.

DM: Maybe given also, at this point, given the rise of the national issues such as migration, it was a popular topic, as well.

MD: Definitely, therefore, I'm sure that migration, security issues because people somehow put all those things together and don't forget, the election happened when we had an increase of foreign workers coming into Malta

DM: yes, one hundred percent.

MD: And you had people who were like, you know, moaning that these people are taking their jobs or keeping the salaries down, so I think those things also had an impact.

DM: Ok. So, question number ten. So, the last 3 questions we can say. Is there anything that you would change if you were to re-do the election from a social media perspective?

MD: No. I'm happy with what the team did.

DM: I believe that the job was well constructed, you know, that's my personal view on it. So, question number eleven. During the campaign, you were given a number of endorsements from numerous people. Do you think that these were effective in reaching out to everyone? How influential do you think they were?

MD: They reached a certain audience. Because you have different groups of people. You have those people who are interested in what you are doing, those people who are interested in what you're saying, whether you're being pro-active on issues. Then there are people who have other politician's or influencers they prefer. So, when I was going for endorsements, my idea was to try reach those people that are not necessarily my followers but are followers of others and they would listen to what the others have to say.

DM: Ok.

MD: You have people who follow you and people who don't. I do understand that I have people who are not as influenced by me but they're more influenced by others. And that was part of the whole mix of campaigning sort of.

DM: So, this is the last question, you might choose not to answer it, but I believe that this is a question which will complete all of the information which I need. How much money did you spend on Facebook & Instagram during the last month of the campaign? Do you think that it has helped in reaching out to the audience?

MD: I didn't spend a lot, we had the amounts which were, I think Malta Today did an exercise. Malta Today did an exercise on how much money we spent, and I think it was around €500. I will try and find that article for you and then I confirmed how much we spent, and it was in the range that they said. So, I did not spend a lot

DM: €500?

MD: I think it was in that range. Let me look it up. I might be wrong. Let me look it up.

DM: If you want to send it to me later its fine.

MD: No, it's fine as you got me curious. For example, I know that from our end, Alfred Sant spent a lot. PI Incumbent Sant spent €6,326, myself, I spent €409.

DM: There is a sub-question to this...

MD: We used to use a lot the timing. When the campaign should run when we were pausing it, etc.

DM: Ok. So, you only ran, you know, adverts or promotions during times which you believe were the 'correct' times

MD: Yes, and I only advertised on Facebook, Instagram I did not advertise. Instagram it was the organic reach. The news item is saying €409, maximum €500, I do not recall spending more

than that to be honest with you. You know what helped as well, I have a lot of followers, so that helps. It's not like I had to invest a lot to attract people to the page

DM: Getting an audience...

MD: What I sponsored were specific Facebook posts that I wanted people to be aware of. During the campaign I never advertised to get people to the page. I just advertised to get the posts a wider audience.

DM: So, one last sub-question to number twelve. Do you think that if you did not spend any amount of money on social media, would you still have reached the desired win/majority that you would have hoped for?

MD: I don't think so because, you know, for me, doing messages on Facebook, on social media and promoting them in the right way was very open. I cannot tell you exactly whether it would have been the same or not. But I don't it would have been the same because otherwise I would not have spent money.

DM: Ok, interesting to hear this. From my side that's all. Do you have any other comments with regards to social media which was used during the elections which could contribute to thesis itself?

MD: I will send you this article, have a look it, because this article of Malta Today in my view shows that it was not a question of how much you spend money on Facebook to have a good campaign online.

DM: I will definitely look at it and include it in my thesis and in my literature review.

APPENDIX G – MR CYRUS ENGERER INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Date: 16/03/20

David Mallia: DM

Time: 07.52PM

Mr Cyrus Engerer: CE

DM: What is your current position within the labour party?

CE: I work within the ministry for the environment. I am an advisor to the minister for the environment.

DM: How long have you been involved within the party?

CE: Since, 2011.

DM: Which social media platforms did you make use of during the European Parliament Elections 2019?

CE: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter

DM: Ok. Question number four, What target audience were you aiming for? Do you think you have reached this audience?

CE: Yes, I had a target which was different for each Social Media. So, for twitter it was the journalists and the media, for Instagram it was young people under the age of 30 and when it comes to Facebook it was people between the ages of 25 and above, basically but mostly older.

DM: So, you segmented your audiences in that way according to platform. Did you target a specific group in Malta.

CE: People that tended to vote labour.

DM: Ok. Question number five. Several traditional media sources were available during the campaign such as the party's newspaper 'It-Torċa', ONE TV & ONE Radio. Have you made use of such media? Which traditional media type do you believe was better in reaching out to the audience?

CE: I think radio was one of the best. I had a programme that had been ongoing for the past, like for 2 years before the actual election. I went regularly on television on a number of programmes and I had a number of opinions written in newspapers but if I had to choose one of those, Radio, One Radio has a very loyal audience and the number of people according to the broadcasting authorities' survey was very very high so I think that was quite good, obviously television and one television and certain programmes like Pjazza are always important.

DM: And for example, programmes such as Xarabank maybe?

CE: On Xarabank, it's not you who chooses whether you go or not it's the party that chooses you. I was luck in the sense that I was chosen by the party to go on the only Xarabank programme that debated the European parliament elections. So, I was one of the labour candidates on the show.

DM: So, this is a sub-question to question 5. Which was more effective; Social Media (Facebook and Instagram) or the traditional media sources? And why?

CE: I think it depends on what time within the campaign. What time within the campaign. So, I think there had to be a leadup on social media but then during the last 2 weeks the traditional media was important because when people see you as one of the chose once by the party to debate on Xarabank, Extra and Dissett, I think that is a sign that people tend to look for before voting.

DM: Ok, so question number 6. Do you think that your manifesto was in line with that which was being promoted by the S&D in the EP?

CE: My manifest was Cyrus or the labour party?

DM: Of Cyrus.

CE: Of Cyrus was more in line with S&D then the labour party one was.

DM: Question number 7 talks more about the agenda. 7. Do you believe that the national agenda is more important than the European one in the case of Malta?

CE: When it comes to does people, who are loyal to the political parties it is. For the minority who is not, the European Politics is as important as national one.

DM: Ok. Through the result one can note the major increase in far-right politics such as Imperium Europa led by Norman Lowell with a total of 9,963 votes which only fell until the 36th out of a total of 39 counts. What can you comment about this? Do you think that the social media has contributed to this?

CE: It's a result of populism of a lot of fake news as a result of social media and I think that the result by Norman Nowell is a mixture of a number of things. First of all, the fear, the scaremongering that his party and some website and social media pages tend to install in the party. Secondly him being very populist. Thirdly, I do understand that there are a number of people who are a bit frustrated with the way the European Union works and therefore found solace in Norman Lowell's manifesto of change. Of having something different. Whether that change would actually be for the betterment of society, one can discuss. But I think that the fact that he spoke the peoples language in that they were frustrated with the way things work. That attracted a number of people to vote for him.

DM: Maybe, also, for example, I could mention one of the hot topics during that time was migration as well which might have also contributed to this.

CE: Yes. It's very easy to scaremonger on migration. At the same time, the country during the EP elections was passing through a phase of a lot of foreign people moving to Malta to work here, we had a lot of economic growth so maybe we could also have, although I think we did as a party do it quite well but maybe one should focus more as well on promoting the fact the large economic growth that we had was also attracting a number of foreigners to Malta. It is sometimes difficult to for some especially coming from an island which is isolated to all of a sudden start living in a multi-cultural society. That might have led to the issue since the change in Malta, the multi-cultural was not gradual but came all at once in a few years. So maybe that led also to such vote toward Imperium Europa.

DM: Ok.

CE: That said that would mean that people were not understanding the methods that Norman Lowell was actually saying behind the populist statements that he does because he is in favour of the EU becoming one country. An Empire – Emporium Europa. Which is contradictory to why a number of people decided to vote for him because of the number of foreign workers living in Malta.

DM: Not a lot of people really understood at the end of the day what he was promoting.

CE: Exactly. They understood/liked his populism.

DM: Question No. 9. Did you have someone else control your social media? Do you think that he/she has portrayed you in the way that you intended?

CE: We were a team behind all communications whether it was social media or other media. All the communications teams had access to my social media accounts and they could upload posts to all the social media. Yes, I think it was a joined effort between the team and myself. And at the end of the day, yes, we portrayed what we wanted to portray.

DM: Do you believe that the person has reached the objective of this campaign.

CE: Yes. I think we did. Looking back obviously in hindsight there are things that could have done differently or maybe not wait for certain things and start them earlier on but that is obviously with the benefit of hindsight. During the campaigns I was very happy with what we were achieving on our social media and I still believe that it was a very good thing that we did. It was a very small group without resources and we managed to hold a 1-year campaign be it posts, photos, videos. I think we were one of the campaigns that had most content probably we left the content too much to the end.

DM: Ok, so this connects with question 10 actually. Is there anything that you would change if you were to re-do the election from a social media perspective?

CE: Yes, I think what I would do differently would be firstly not to be afraid to dare. To say what one believes in. Even if people might not agree with you but at least you are more transparent about what one should believe in, so that would be one thing. Secondly, timing. I think that some things, I would shift things earlier rather than leave them for later. Thirdly, something I would change when it comes to social media, maybe, target also a difference audience. The thing is we were mostly targeting labour voters, traditional hardcore labour voters but the population is much bigger than and myself coming from a different background and only targeting labour hardcore might have been a bit of a mistake. So probably I should have targeted middle-of-the-road voters and floating voters which in reality I barely targeted at all during the campaign.

DM: Question number 11. During the campaign, you were given a number of endorsements from numerous people. Do you think that these were effective in reaching out to everyone? How influential do you think they were?

CE: Endorsements are important because they show that people that matter know you and trust you. In Malta's political bipolar spectrum, the problem is that most politicians tend to endorse all the candidates within their party. Therefore, endorsements by people outside of politics tend to make more impact and headlines. In reality though, you get elected if you have the party machine behind you. Like Josianne had from day 1.

DM: Last question in fact. I believe there are reports which specify the exact number on the media itself. How much money did you spend on Facebook & Instagram during the last month of the campaign? Do you think that it has helped in reaching out to the audience?

CE: I don't remember the exact amount, but it is on the media and it is a real amount. We could just look it up on Malta Today very easily or Times of Malta, I cannot exactly remember but there is the exact amount which I gave to the media and the electoral office and the electoral commission. Whether it reached the target, yes it did. I think it did but once again maybe the targeted audience was not the correct one. It should have wider and different

DM: Ok.

CE: More diverse then different.

DM: Do you think that if you did not spend any amount of money on social media, would you still have reached the desired voter amount that you would have hoped for?

CE: I think social media was important. To be fair, probably, most of the votes came from elsewhere not from social media because of the wrong target audience. Probably most of the votes came from radio and television.

(Note to self: I had other questions prepared specifically for Mr Engerer, however, since these were not asked, I did not mention them. One of the questions related to his past political life. Before he was with the labour party, he formed part of the nationalist party as the deputy mayor of Sliema. Since some of the Facebook audience could have been built from this time it could be that the social media did not react as great as others given that his audience was nationalist. This is confirmed by him in saying that he targeted the wrong audience.)

APPENDIX H – DR ROBERTA METSOLA’S INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (SOCIAL MEDIA ADVISOR – MATTHEW TABONE)

Date: 11/04/20

David Mallia: DM

Time: 14.45

Mr Matthew Tabone: MT

DM: What is her current position within the Nationalist Party?

MT: Member of the European parliament and member of the parliamentary group.

DM: Ok, question number 2. What social media platforms did she make use of during the European parliament elections in 2019.

MT: Twitter, Facebook and Instagram

DM: Those 3 platforms, yes?

MT: And LinkedIn to a much lesser extent

DM: Ok, with regards to question 3, what target audience was she aiming for? Do you think that she had managed to reach this target audience?

MT: Yes and No. Let me explain because an MEP election is anybody from 16 to + can vote. You have to tailor make your messaging for different sectors, different age groups, different genders depending on what you are doing. We managed to hit different demographics with every post rather than with different platforms with the exception of for example Instagram which was targeted generally at people between 16 and 40.

DM: OK

MT: That’s what how it was done. Now if you were to look at whether the message got through or not, that is an analysis that we are still doing, whether it was the platform, whether it was the type of messaging that we used, whether we actually wrote a post in English or in Malta, everything has an effect than we realised.

DM: OK, where you targeting a specific group in Malta for example: hunters, environmentalists, etc.

MT: Yes but depending on which post you would do. So, for example, you could have a post which was targeted only at healthcare workers or only at teachers or only at young woman for example or only at old woman

DM: and you had a number of these groups for example?

MT: yes

DM: or a specific group which is dominant over the others maybe which you targeted more rather than the other?

MT: Good question whether dominant or not. Maybe at some point, we tailored made message more towards people who were already likely to have voted for nationalist party candidates. So, at some point, it became clear that...so, you target everybody, right? Again, an MEP election is different to a national election. A national election you concentrate on districts and people have their preferred party and people generally do not move away from that with a number of exceptions but generally speaking. MEP elections it is easier for people to vote for the candidate rather than the party.

DM: Within the national elections it is easier because you have to focus only on your district so you do not have all of Malta to target.

MT: Exactly, so, for example, if you look at Facebook, for example, which has the biggest reach, something like 86% of the population is on Facebook, you have people like Miriam Dalli or Roberta Metsola, 2 MEP examples who have 50,000, 55,000 followers which you would never get if you are, unless you are, prime-minister, leader of the opposition, etc. So, your target audience is automatically much much wider than anybody else's on a national level.

DM: You would have a higher previous audience from new candidate for example.

MT: For sure, for example, an incumbent would have 5 years of building up a base.

DM: Exactly!

MT: You build up a following over 5 years and not over 5 weeks.

DM: In fact, this is one of the questions which I will go into right now, given the fact that you have, obviously this is for Dr Metsola but given that she has already participated in the 2014 European parliament elections, do you think that this helped in winning the 2019 European elections.

MT: Yes, for sure

DM: Ok

MT: I mean in terms of social media for sure because in 2014 for example, Facebook was still a new campaign tool in Malta and Roberta used it very often and very well compared to all the other candidates. 2019 it was obvious that you needed Facebook to get your message across. I mentioned Facebook in particular because it is the biggest one. Twitter and Instagram also have their uses but very different ones and Roberta has been using them for many many years. Which means that she also understands how they work a little bit more; she understands her audience a little bit more.

DM: and if I can recall correctly, Dr Metsola did not only participate in the 2014 one but even the one before that.

MT: And the one before that. She has been running since 2004. I have been helping out on her campaign since 2004. To give you an idea in 2004 we used to Faxes.

DM: What exactly?

MT: We used to use Faxes, Fax machines. Imagine, to have a website was the biggest thing in 2009, to have a fantastic website. 2019, the clicks on the website were next to nothing. Very minimal.

DM: So, you almost experienced the kind of social media change which happened in Malta.

MT: Completely and with it, the relevant of the national media. So, in 2009 and 2014, the national media played a crucial role. You had to have an interview on the Times of Malta, you had to say to something that was relevant for a national audience for the media to pick up. You did not need that in 2019. 2019 you could tailor make your own message. Now, for better or for worse, society might be worse off without having the relevant national media but this is the reality.

DM: Ok. So, we go to question 4, several traditional media sources were available during the campaign such as the party's newspaper 'Il-Mument' NET TV and NET FM. Has she made use of such media? And which traditional media type do you believe was better in reaching out to the audience?

MT: Yes, she made use of all the traditional media and not from party media but also independent media. So, she was always available to journalists, to people asking any sort of questions whether she was right or not it would get published but if you are asking me whether I could do that without social media, no, not possible. So, it is important, yes because you still have a close part of society that listens very faithfully to party media but it is a shrinking one. Whereas social media is a growing one.

DM: So, both of them are important. There might be the stigma for example that people in Malta tend to follow more the traditional media then the social media

MT: I think in 2019 we saw that no. It was not the case.

DM: A higher following

MT: And if you look, for example at Roberta Abela and Chris Fearne leadership election in December, Chris Fearne had much much more prominent from national media than Robert Abela. And Robert Abela made us of social media very cleverly and it paid off.

DM: Ok, this sub-question that we were going to go into, I think we have already answered it, which was more effective social media or the traditional media sources. With reaching out to the audience.

MT: Both. The younger you are the less likely you are to be interested in traditional media sources with reaching out to the audience.

DM: Both, the younger you are the less likely you are to be interested in the traditional media. So, the younger you are the only way to get your message across is to either meeting them, I mean, nothing replaces meeting people physically, right, especially in the Maltese context. But social media is still very important for certain sectors, particularly younger.

DM: OK. So, question number 5, do you think that her manifesto was in line with that which was promoting by the EPP in the European Parliament.

MT: Good question. In many ways, yes but it was a very localised campaign as well. So, the EPP had a very European wide campaign, in the sense that it would talk about concepts like Schengen, like migration from a European perspective whereas Roberta had to translate that into local issue. So, for example, yes, we talk about migration but we talk about migration from a local perspective.

DM: and if I can recall correctly, migration was a very hot topic during that time.

MT: It will always be a hot topic migration. That is something that is a very big voter winner or a very big vote loser at the same time. That is, I think how people handle something like migration says a lot about who that person is.

DM: So, depending on what policy you focus determines how your turn out will be with the voters?

MT: Yes, because even if it an issue that does not interest you, say the environment for example, how you respond to it says a lot about your type of character and who you are. So, people might not necessarily be interested in the issue but they are interested in the way you respond to challenges. So, are you weak as a person? Are you strong as a person? Are you well researched? These sort of things and that matters these days, more than sometimes the issue.

DM: Ok, question number 6. Do you believe that the national agenda is more important than the European one in the case of Malta?

MT: In European parliament elections, local issues took centre stage. So, for voters, yes, they voted on local issues but local issues translated from European ones. So, no one actually voted on whether Schengen is a good idea but they voted on whether Maltese students could travel abroad without any problems. So, it depends how you manage to translate the European method into a local one.

DM: OK, question number 7. Do you think that being an incumbent has helped in winning the majority that you have obtained, now this is a question aimed at Dr Roberta Metsola.

MT: Yes for sure because as I said you have 5 years in your job, people know you, they trust you, they might not agree with you all the time but they know what you stand for and what you represent and if you are not an incumbent, you are unknown and that is difficult for people to take that step towards trusting somebody who is not known vs somebody who is known.

DM: OK. Question number 8. Did you have someone else control your social media? Do you think that he/she has portrayed you in the way that you intended? Do you believe that the person has reached the objective of the campaign? etc.

MT: Yes, she had someone physically helping me, physical helping on her social media but everything was her. In the sense that she did not have the actual time to choose a photo, choose a caption, etc but she would phone me and tell me we talked about this, this is what I want to say and I would translate it on the social media. So, it was all her. I just pressed the button basically.

DM: Ok so question number 9 and this is quite an interesting question. Through the result one can note a major increase in far-right politics such as Imperium Europa led by Norman Lowell with a total of 9,963 votes which only fell until the 36th out of a total of 39 counts. What can you comment about this? Do you think that the social media has contributed to this?

MT: Absolutely, social media has given everybody the same platform, so whereas ... and this matches what I was saying about the national media before. In 2009 the journalists were the gatekeepers in the sense that, I do not want to call Imperium Europa anything but if you are an independent candidate, talking about Nazis and how good they are, on social media you can go good that. You have the same platform. Times of Malta would not publish your manifesto, you know. So, absolutely far right, far left, extremist ideologies a platform that is available to everybody and that sometimes people who think certain things are able to confirm this on social media and that does not help in terms of education, in terms of this and the other. This is one of the pit falls.

DM: Ok, so question number 10. Is there anything you would change if you were to re-do the election from a social media perspective.

MT: With hindsight yes, I would, for example use Maltese and English more in the sense that I think the most of Roberta's posts were mainly, we try to keep roughly 50-50 but I think that at the end they were more English written than more Maltese written.

DM: So, you would think that if they were in Maltese, they would have reached the target audience better.

MT: Yes, yes, I think so in certain aspects for sure. That is one of things I would have changed, a few more photos if I had the photographer be a bit better, done more live videos and more interactive posts.

DM: In fact, this live function which was offered by Facebook used quite a lot in these elections.

MT: yes, not so much by us I have to say. Very very rarely. It was difficult to come across as professional, in the sense that, we know what we are doing and when you are live, anything can happen – somebody starts sneezing or coughing or you know. The less controlled the environment the harder it is but in hindsight I would take more risks, I think.

DM: OK. Now with regards to question 11, I have to ask another question beforehand. Was Dr Metsola given endorsements?

MT: yes

DM: OK so, during the campaign, you were given a number of endorsements from numerous people. Do you think that these were effective in reaching out to everyone? How influential do you think they were?

MT: They helped. Whether she would have gotten the same results without them, maybe. Being incumbent, you probably need them less than if you are not an incumbent. If you are a new candidate, endorsements give you an idea to people of who you are and what you stand for, etc and people trust. In our party for example you have Lawrence Gonzi, Tonio Borg these big party grandies. If they give you an endorsement it would always help, you understand? Which will give the people the idea that this person can be trusted.

DM: Ok

MT: So, yes it helps but not the end of the world. We did not focus very much on endorsements. At the end we had a few but other candidates had many many more.

DM: Ok. So, question number 12, again, this is another question which I have to ask from beforehand and it is up to you if you want to answer it or not. How much money did you spend on Facebook and Instagram during the last month of the campaign? Do you think that it has helped in reaching out to the audience?

MT: I do not have the figures exactly but I think they were published. I think they were on Malta Today. If you google it will come up. Not a huge amount. I think it was something like a €1,000 in 6 weeks or even less, if I am not mistaken. But yes, it helped it meant that you could push your message towards people without your growth that you would normally have. Easier, again if you are an incumbent because you do not need to push that much because you already have follower which has been build up over 5 years.

DM: Do you think that if you did not spend any amount of money you would have still reached the desired win/majority that you would have hoped for?

MT: Good question I have no idea. It is easy to panic at the end. It's easy to say that I have this X amount of money and I am going to spend all of it on social media. I think the trick is not to panic and to trust in your message that you have but it is impossible to say how effective it has been. Yes, it has helped the message a lot of people but whether the people had already decided before, I do not know. Maybe.

DM: So, when do you think for example is the point where the people decide who they are going to vote for?

MT: Well, no but Roberta has always been very consistent when it comes to speaking polls and these kind of things 2 years before the election and those numbers never changed. She kept on with the same amount of work with the same level of enthusiasm that she has always had with the same messaging that she had always had one of the things that she did was to never overuse social media so she never had or very rarely had more than one post a day. Whereas other candidates had a new post every 35 minutes. So that one was of the strategies that she had made in the 2014 elections and she never went away from it. Throughout her time as an MEP you would only see one post a day unless something big had happened. But she does not overuse it and that means that people do not get tired of her page or overexposure or anything like that which I think other candidates, especially new candidates, had. Sometimes you see people so much that it gets you.

DM: And the social media sometimes by candidate is also used to rectify what they have been doing throughout the day, for example, let's mention a program which the candidates were invited to which was Xarabank and then they take snippets from that programme and then they put it up on social media, as well.

MT: Yes, that we also used. We also did that kind of thing to a lesser extent, again, and people like Miriam used to use that a lot. We never found that effective. It would help but I think people watch the show and make up their mind over who won the debate there. If you try too hard to show on social media how good I was people start to think actually maybe you were not that good.

DM: And I think the social media offered a kind a platform for the audience to interact on.

MT: Yes, That yes.

DM: This snippet was posted on social media and people go there and react with their positive and negative comments.

MT: yes, yes. A lot of them though, we found, especially towards the end of the campaign they are organised. So you would see, a lot, for example, negative comments, you would see that they all come from, for example, the labour party in our case and I would suspect that if you look at the labour party you would see the same trend and that then you start to ignore to a certain extent because if you want to organise it does not give a true picture of what people are think and that's one of the aspects to look at.

DM: Ok. That's all the questions from my side I do not know whether you have anything which could contribute to the thesis.

MT: Well one of the things that we noticed in 2019 that was very different from 2014 was the level of messages that we got on Facebook, Instagram and twitter. Rather than as opposed to emails. So, people did prefer to interact through Facebook rather than through email.

DM: It might be the case that it is easier, given the IT literacy of Malta amongst the elderly.

MT: Maybe it is easier, maybe it's just you have a photo so we put a face to a face maybe it's more like a chat than an email. But we noticed that. So, we spent a lot of time dealing with people who would have come from social media rather than email and the setup was designed for email.

DM: I have a question, how was it to work with other candidates within the same party? Was there like a cohesive team? For example, one of the prominent candidates from the Nationalist party was also David Casa. How was it working with him?

MT: yes, yes. Good – we worked well, with everybody, I think. It comes from her again she has been a candidate since she was 22 or 23 or something like that in 2004. So now that she is an incumbent, she tried her best, I think, to help new candidates and also people like David who she has worked with forever. So, they are good friends. People have different priorities. I think you would see somebody like Michael Briguglio who would have emphasised environment more than anything else. Somebody like Frank Psalia would emphasise immigration more than anything else. Roberta did not have that, in the sense that she had to talk about everything because people expect her to talk about everything.

DM: Ok

MT: So, we had a general message from the party in the sense that everybody knows listen this is the party's position but how you say it is up to you.

DM: Has the party helped in promoting the candidates either through their social media or something else.

MT: Yes, to a certain extent. Roberta has a stronger presence online then the party. Strangely enough.

DM: Interesting

MT: It was more the other way around. That was quite a strange reality actually because we invested so much time over the last 5 years on social media and we actually had a following with which was greater than the PN's one.

DM: I think there is a similar case with the labour party with Dr Miriam Dalli. I saw the same similarity

MT: If you look at the way Miriam and Roberta use social media it is generally similar. The trends are quite similar. Particularly because they are quite close when it comes to issues and these types of things. There is not a huge ideological divide between what they believe in as people. How they sell themselves and how they argue but they are both sort of centrist politicians. So that is reflected in their social media and quite frankly in the number of votes they both got.

DM: Ok. It might be the case I might ask you for more information with regards to insights from the social media itself and this is data which unfortunately I do not have access but if you were to have access to her page you would have access to it. I will give you a document on what I need basically. For example, the amount of likes which the page had during the last month because in that way I can compare with other candidates.

MT: More than likes as a page which increased during the campaign but not hugely.

DM: And page views for example. The reach it had the number of followers.

MT: That you would see. You would see for example like per post which would increase hugely during the campaign.

DM: Not sure if Facebook can give me that amount of information, for example likes per post because, again, you would need to go back to all of those posts until the 1 month before the election.

MT: But it is also different, again, we had the strategy of using 1 post per day. Which meant that all of the likes and comments and whatever were concentrated on one post. Other candidates had 10. So, not everyone had the same level of interaction with the people. How do you compare that. I do not know.

DM: But it might be that you had 1 post and you had a certain amount of interaction while that person did 3 posts but still had the same amount of interaction.

MT: Exactly. That's what we found usually. That we would have more with 1 than they had with 3.

DM: But then it depends the number of unique users to those interactions because it might be 1 user that interacted with all of those 3 posts. So that is something which needs to be looked into as well.

MT: Also, true, which we did not look into that. We did not have that data. That would be interesting to look into. How many times did the same person like the different posts.

DM: Now that is unfortunately data is something which goes beyond the objective of this thesis.

MT: But this is very interesting. This is something which I am very interested in. What drives people to like something or not and whether likes translate into votes is something fascinating.

DM: In fact, I have been doing some studies as well and with regards to social media and politics I think the most dominant country that makes the use of it is America and there is that very interesting case of Cambridge Analytica when it came to the Trump election.

MT: But again, I mean if you had to translate that into Malta, you could do that without too much technology behind it. We are a population of 400,000 and 300,000 are on Facebook every day and within 10 minutes you could more or less see every person how they voted in the past and their stand on certain issues. If you manage to aggregate all that data, morally that is very questionable but you would be able to definitely have an advantage over everybody else and I think this is one of the things that trump did. He micro-targeted districts in states that he would win and he did and most probably will do it again.

DM: yes, but in that case, they made use of data's people from Facebook from google which I think you would not have access to them.

MT: It was completely illegal. It is illegal to process data in that manner but given that the amount of data that people make public on their Facebook pages. It's quite likely and you would be able to tell where they stand on a number of issues and how they vote based on their social media information. Whether you have the time and the people to go through everything but it's interesting.

DM: Thanks for this interview. That should be all.

APPENDIX I – DR MICHAEL BRIGUGLIO’S INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Date: 02/04/2020

David Mallia: DM

Time: 16.32

Dr Michael Briguglio: MB

DM: First question ‘what is your current position within the Nationalist Party?’

MB: I am a member and a member of the general council.

DM: Question number 2, how long have you been involved within the party?

MB: Not much, I have been involved in politics for quite a long time for about 25 years I think but I joined the Nationalist Party before the general election of 2017

DM: So, the last general elections in fact, it’s 2017

MB: Yes, yes, but I was not a candidate or anything, I just joined the party and was active. I spoke in some mass meetings and in the media.

DM: Ok, ok. So, question number 3 what social media platforms did you make use of during the European Parliament Elections in 2019?

MB: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter

DM: Those 3 only?

MB: Yes

DM: What target audience were aiming for? Do you think that you have managed to reach this target audience?

MB: Well, I knew that I was a bit more popular with younger voters

DM: OK, you had any numbers in your hands with regards to this?

MB: No, I did not know from beforehand. I got to know through a survey which Lovin Malta had quoted.

DM: OK

MB: So halfway through the campaign I got to know.

MD: No, even though I am a sociologist I did not have any data beforehand which told me, I mean, I did not have the resources to carry out such stuff which is something which we can discuss later on because you have mentioned established/elected candidates and new candidates.

DM: Yes

MB: There is a huge difference

DM: There is, there is

MB: Which we can elaborate later on. Yes, yes.

DM: So, No, young people mostly, voters who are more liberal, I tried to look at voters who are more liberal, voters who are more into environmental issues and also voters who are not, even though I contested with the PN, I tried to attract towards the PN perhaps because they are either disappointed with labour because of corruption maybe or because of other issues. So, I was like, an outsider within the PN so to speak. So, I tried to attract floating voters, new voters and so forth.

DM: OK, With regards to the target ...

MB: Also, voters within the 10th district. I also tried to focus mostly, not exclusively but I tried to focus a lot on the 10th district, even because I was a local councillor for 15 years.

DM: It makes very good sense that you target your niche. So, with regards to the target audience specifically where you targeting a specific group in Malta? You mentioned the 10th district but maybe a specific group like for example the hunters, etc

MB: Environmentalists, people who speak about civil rights issues, people interested in social issues, social justice and so forth. As I said, I was on the left side of the PN so to speak. On the more liberal side of the PN. It was more issue based. So, I tried to focus on a number of issues. Some of which I was associated with myself for quite a number of years. Environment, good governance, civil rights, social justice and so forth.

DM: Ok. So, onto question number 5. Several traditional media sources were available during the campaign such as the party's newspaper 'Il-Mument', 'NET TV' & NET FM. Have you made use of such media?

MB: Yes, I had a weekly column on il-Mument, I was given a programme on NET FM every Saturday with somebody else, every Saturday morning and I was frequently invited on NET TV. So, I had pretty good coverage on the Nationalist media and I also participated regularly on other radio shows.

DM: Was this given to all candidates or to you specifically with regards to the column on il-Mument, on the radio programme on NET FM as well.

MB: Sorry, I did not understand. Can you repeat the question?

DM: yes of course, all the candidates received this slot for example in Il-Mument and on NET FM or just you specifically?

MB: Well, on il-Mument I had the column before I was a candidate.

DM: Ah, ok.

MB: Well, other candidates had a column as well in Il-Mument and/or In-Nazzjon. There was space for everyone.

DM: Ok, ok

MB: But, closer to the election once could see that everyone was writing more. I had been writing every week for quite some time before, well, not a very long time, but I was not given the column because I was a candidate. It was before that. But on NET FM, yes, I was given a programme to co-host but everyone had, I mean, everyone was given space. Some had space because they already had certain programmes like Frank Psaila had his Iswed Fuq L-Abjad, other were given regular slots in certain programmes like Dione Borg regarding newspaper coverage, the MEPs had their own programmes and they were all over the place. For example, MEPs featured regularly in news. If an MEP says something, it's usually seen as being in the public's interest but if a candidate says something, it's in the news only if the candidate is accompanied by the party leader for example. Or the other way around the candidate accompanies the party leader in a press conference but MEPs had this extra, given that they are elected MEPs and they were speaking at a European Parliamentary level everything they said basically was covered in the news. I mean, it would be interesting to analyse, I mean, it's not so how many programs you have I think, sometimes, it's also the type of coverage you are given There are various factors.

DM: Given the for-example column that you had in Il-Mument it would mean that the audience already knows you from beforehand

MB: Yes, I cannot complain about the coverage I was given. I think I was given good and fair coverage by the PN. Actually, given the precarious financial situation of the party I think it was the only resource that the party could give me actually. Good coverage but otherwise if you compare the new candidates to the MEPs, I think the MEPs had more resources than the party. The party was not in a position to give us resources other than media coverage and some printed ballot sheets to distribute.

DM: Ok

MB: But otherwise, nothing, I mean we had no human resources, because the party did not have the resources. So, media coverage was the only thing that the party could give us, and it did give us that.

DM: Ok, very good. This is a sub-question to number 5. With regards to your case I think you have already answered it with the newspaper. Which traditional media type do you believe was better in reaching out to the audience?

MB: Well, which traditional media type?

DM: Yes, so we are referring to newspaper, tv and radio.

MB: I think, the TV is the most important, if you had to compare the TV to the newspapers and to the radio. I had access to different newspapers in terms of articles and vlogs, even though I also lost a weekly article column during the campaign because of a newspaper policy regarding candidates. It's easier for the press to report established names who are MEPs than new candidates. Then again, sometimes the press did report on new candidates' statements. But,

DM: I would assume ...

MB: This was more likely to happen if they were more exotic statements or out of the norm. For example, Peter Agius was a new candidate. If he had a new initiative, he might have got reported on it, but then he would not have been reported on less spectacular but equally important items. On the other hand, MEPs were usually reported when they spoke on issues. So, there was that imbalance between MEPs and new candidates in both major parties. What Alfred Sant once referred to as the power of incumbency

DM: It is.

MB: There is a difference between MEPs and newcomers both in terms of media coverage, but even more in terms of resources.

DM: But if it were to be and if I had like for example, a press room and I was controlling I would try as possible to promote each and every candidate equally but that is not the scenario.

MB: Some media outlets offered services and advertorials at a cost.

DM: and then it depends who has the money

MB: At a cost which is prohibitive. If you are a new candidate you likely cannot afford this. Incumbents have a big advantage over non-incumbents because they have much more finance and at European level it is much bigger than at national level because at European Level you have EU funds. Incumbents have people employed with them, they have professional staff even in the message that they portray in the social media and they have funds which they use rightly so, I am not saying it's wrong, but there is this big imbalance which is bigger than at a national level. I mean, not even members of parliament, have the incumbency which members of the European Parliament have. Members of Parliament do not employ people and MEPs do. So, that is an imbalance which I think was also affected the result, for example within the PN camp, I think it made a big difference. For example, everyone was saying that Frank Psaila was one of the favourites to be elected but he was not elected.

DM: I had heard something about this in fact

MB: Yes. The fact that he was not an MEP did not work in favour of him. He did not have the incumbency which MEPs had. Nothing against MEPs Goodluck to them, we were a team after all, but this is something which needs to be analysed because there is an imbalance.

DM: yes, in fact we are trying to reach to some sort of conclusion with this thesis in fact. So another sub-question to question 5 which do you think was more effective; promoting through social media or promoting through the traditional media because in Malta there might be the stigma that reaching the Maltese voters is better through the traditional media rather than the social but there are different people who think otherwise.

MB: I think both are important. I spent almost all of my expenditure in my campaign on social media basically. I had no adverts in the press because I could not afford it, so I spent most of my money on the social media. But apart from the traditional media and the social media there are activities which are held on the ground and costly events such as coffee mornings and receptions. Having volunteers, for example to phone party members to attend events. If you have a team of volunteers with you who help you with house visits, house visits are very important as well, but they cannot explain everything. Frank Psaila was the candidate who did the most house visits for example. He spent a year, going everywhere but he was not elected. So, there are various factors which one has to look into including the traditional media and the social media, I think both are important, however, I think that the social media is very much into echo chambers. I think very often you have this algorithmic challenge to get out of your echo chamber and from what I see for example there was the Eurobarometer survey a few months ago. Many people do not really follow the media. So, there are other things which one has to look into, what I call on the ground campaigning. House visits, coffee mornings, events, incumbency. I learnt through this campaign that, something which almost shocked me, some voters expect MEPs to offer them flights to Brussels.

DM: It comes to a certain extent that you do house visits, and it's like what can you do for me and I will give you the vote.

MB: Yes. The house visits were hardly about the EU: many people speak to you about their realities, about local issues, about how the PN was divided, so they tell you I support Adrian Delia, or I support Simon Busuttil for example.

DM: In fact, this is a point which we will go into at a later stage.

MB: Yes. So, I think the traditional media and the social media are both very important. I do not think that one comes at the expense of the other, however, it is important to note that many people access traditional media through the social media but there are other aspects which are I think are very very important. The physical on the ground aspect which is invisible in the

media. If the media was speaking about governance, many people/voters speak about their realities and others want favours. That is the reality. Many voters want favours and they do not really care about whether, they mention issues which are mentioned in the media, they mention Keith Schembri and Konrad Mizzi and Joseph Muscat, but many voters want favours. Some told me I stopped voting the PN because I was not given this or because I was not given that. So, patronage is part and parcel of our culture and this is not really portrayed in the media. In the social media it's more about issues for example LGBTIQ rights or about the environment or about this or about that but on the ground many people do not speak to you about these issues, they speak to you about their everyday realities.

DM: Ok.

MB: Some of which, I mean, I am not saying that this is necessarily corrupt, for example, they would say, the area where they live has been abandoned for many years, or that they live in social housing for example and were promised a lift, years ago, and this lift never arrived, and they have to walk four stories to go up. So, by favours I am not necessarily referring to corruption, I am referring to the way how Maltese politics works, that you need a politician to forward your cause, that is part and parcel of Maltese politics.

DM: It's lobbying to a certain extent?

MB: Yes. Patronage.

DM: So, question number 5, Do you think that your manifesto was in line with which was being promoted by that of the EPP in the European parliament?

MB: Well the EPP manifesto was promoted in the last minute so we did not know what it had. The party manifesto was published quite late in the day but that's normal, I mean, usually manifestos are not published very early in the day. That is normal for various reasons. I had my own manifesto as did some other candidates.

DM: Do you have a physical copy of it?

MB: No, it was online.

DM: Ok.

MB: So, the manifesto was there as a PN candidate so I tried to make a synthesis my beliefs, this issues which I think I should promote at a European Level within a context of the PN. There was nothing against my belief in the manifest, but I was contesting as a PN candidate. It was quite an interesting exercise actually. How to juxtapose these different ideas as a PN candidate. So, it was not out of tune with the PN manifesto but perhaps it was more liberal or more to the left of the PN manifesto, but it was published before the PN manifesto.

DM: And they did not distribute for example the ideas that they were going to input in the manifesto?

MB: There was a process which was taking place within the PN. We were asked for our input and I gave my input as well but that was a slower process because it involved all the candidates obviously, it involved the EPP and so forth. But in the meantime, I am not sure if all of the candidates, but most candidates, even from other parties, for example, I mentioned Peter Agius previously. Peter Agius was speaking a lot about agriculture for example during his campaign and he mentioned some issues. We were also featured in press conferences, in party press conferences and over there, our ideas were taken onboard by the PN, those ideas which we agreed upon and then we took it from there.

**went out for a phone call from NET and then came back to continue the interview.

DM: we were at question number 5. With regards to; Do you think that your manifesto was in line with that which was being promoted by the EPP?

MB: Yes, generally I think it was inline, every candidate had his manifesto but there were different shades. I was more on the liberal, social environmental aspect because the EPP itself is an umbrella, the nationalist party is in itself is an umbrella, actually, this was one of the reasons why I decided to join the nationalist party in 2017 because even though I have my own background which is more to the left and liberal, within the umbrella it fits. So, I was part of this sort of kaleidoscope of different shades within the nationalist and the EPP umbrella.

DM: Ok, questions number 6. Now this is specifically within the case of Malta. Do you believe that the national agenda is more important than the European one?

MB: What I believe personally?

DM: Personally, as a candidate

MB: I think both are very important but having an agenda which is only European is a non-starter. Voters are focused on national, local and personal issues. So, there are various options which a candidate can do. One can simply speak about national levels, irrelevant of whether the EU comes into them or not. I believe there should be a balance between national and European issues but if it's a European election, one has to see how the national fits with the European and vice versa. It is useless speaking about reforming income tax at a European level because it is not within the remit of the EU. Therefore one has to, and I have tried to that very much in my manifesto, I tried to see how the issues which I was speaking about even though they have a national flavour could be combined with specific European directives or frameworks and which the European parliament has competency on.

DM: Ok. question number 7. Did you have someone else control your social media?

MB: Yes, I had some volunteers, a very small number, but mostly it was myself who did it, however, but I had a small team which helped me.

DM: with regards to this specific group of people that you had controlling your media, do you think that he/she has portrayed you in the way that you intended, and do you think that they have reached the objectives of the campaign?

MB: Well, it was, remember as I said, given that I was not an MEP, there was some planning on keywords and on certain imagery, but it was not a professional campaign. I mean, I did not have a media company doing it for me, even though the people that helped were knowledgeable. Some of them were very knowledgeable in the field, actually. But it was a very hands on thing, so, it was planned and improvised at the same time and a lot of things had to be done by myself in real time because the people who are helping you are volunteers and it was a small number of people they cannot be there 24/7. So, if there is something which I have to comment upon immediately and there is no one who can assist me, I have to do it myself. This also ended up sometimes in having, not mixed messages, but mixed imagery. Some of my memes were more professional than others. Others were not professional at all for example and I knew it. When you are on your own with a small team of volunteers its different then when you have something professional which you pay for. It's very very different. So, it was mostly a DIY thing, but I had volunteers who helped me.

DM: Ok.

MB: Not only putting up stuff but even from a conceptual point of view.

DM: So, ideas, content creating etc...

MB: Yes

DM: So, question 8. This is not essentially with relation to this thesis, but it is good to have a good idea of where this is going. So, through the result one can note a major increase in far-right politics such as Imperium Europa led by Norman Lowell with a total of 9,963 votes which only fell until the 36th out of a total of 39 counts. What can you comment about this? Do you think that the social media has contributed to this?

MB: Well, I ...

DM: I think in this specific election, he was one of the people that really performed with regards to an independent candidate.

MB: Yes, but my conclusion on this is a bit different and I wrote about this. I think that third party politics failed in the European elections even though the far right than all other 3rd parties because first of all there were 100,000 people who did not bother to vote. So, preferred not voting than voting for a third party. I wrote about this and I can send you a link. There are

various why one does not for a European election including patronage, but we can discuss that later.

DM: It is seen as a second order elections. I don't know if you ever heard of the terminology.

MB: Yes, but and Malta when you do not vote, political parties are given your details and sometimes it's like giving a message before the general elections sort of. Now, I do not really agree that the far-right did very well. I mean it did better than the other 3rd parties but it was still not elected.

DM: It still was not, no.

MB: I mean in European election, usually the protest vote does well. It did well in the context of a 2-party system. Now whether the social media assisted, yes, the far-right had quite a voice on the social media, but they did not have a professional campaign. I think it had to do more with a protest vote, but it was a very small vote. 9,000 votes are not a lot at a national level for a party. If they were elected it would be something else. What is significant and here I agree with you is that Imperium Europa did better than the green party, then PD which had 2 MPs and the other small parties. There I agree with you, but I do not think it was because of the social media, I mean they did not have a very professional campaign on the social media. Again, it is very tricky to analyse the social media when one does not have the numbers, because the social media has a lot of echo chambers. So, I am not sure for example the outreach much Norman Nowell's message on the social media had but many people on the ground where talking about Norman Nowell. It's probably not because he said something the week before on Facebook but because they know that Norman Nowell represents the anti-migrant voice.

DM: Given the certain subjects that where being talked about during that time.

MB: So, I met people during campaigning who would tell me, I am going to vote for Norman Nowell because he is the only one speaking who is speaking against migrants for example. It is not because he said something on Facebook but because Norman Lowell is a package sort of. Actually, I do not think that Imperium Europa had a very strong campaign on Facebook. I might be wrong

DM: I do not think so. I have not analysed properly their social media in detail.

Question number 9, we are getting to close. Is there anything that you would change if you were to re-do the election from a social media perspective?

MB: Yes, will. I did what I could within my limitations, and I said, most of my budget was spent on the social media but ideally if you have someone or two people who can be totally dedicated on the social media, that can help a lot. For example, I noticed that MEPs had people with them who were basically 100% on the social media and that helps a lot I mean. If you are

doing everything and if it's a DIY campaign with a small number of volunteers, you have limited time, you have limited energy, limited everything. If you are participating in a press conference you cannot film yourself sort of but if you have someone who is assisting you and who has control over your Instagram and Facebook, that is something else. So, in hindsight, maybe giving more responsibility to others on one's social media could help but then again it has to be a professional which again a non-MEP does not afford.

DM: Ok

MB: So, it is like a vicious circle.

DM: With regards to question 10, I have to ask you something beforehand before I actually ask it to you. Where you given endorsements?

MB: I was but I did not really focus on this very much. But I did have some events where some MPs endorsed me, but I did not really work on that. I know some candidates worked on it a lot, but I tried to appeal more to the outside vote. So, an endorsement wouldn't necessarily have work for me in my case. I tried to focus on being the outsider within the PN sort of.

DM: Ok because I was going to ask for example, do you think that these were effective in reaching out to everyone? How influential do you think they were?

MB: If I am trying to get an alternative voter to vote for me and I get an endorsement by a former PN minister it does not necessarily work in that case.

DM: It does not, ok.

MB: But if on the other hand I am trying to appeal for the PN core, I would need that endorsement but the PN core would not vote for me probably. The PN core would vote for someone who is PN core.

DM: Do you think that blind voting is an issue? They start from the beginning of the list and they go all the way. I believe that it is an issue in Malta and they were trying to find some sort of solution.

MB: I can assure you that the candidates were speaking a lot about the alphabet during the campaign. That your surname is before mine and so forth. Yes. It happens a lot and it was a concern for many candidates.

DM: I know of a particular case from the Labour party, Alex which reached the media.

MB: Yes, it does make a difference and I can tell that candidates were concerned a lot about this.

DM: OK, so last question and this is up to you if you want to answer it or not? How much money did you spend on Facebook and Instagram during the last month of the campaign? Do you think that it has helped in reaching out to the audience? Do you think that if you did not

spend any amount of money on social media, would you have still reached desired outreach that you had?

MB: So, I am trying to get the numbers, let me see.

DM: Even an estimate. It does not have to be the exact number if you want.

MB: 2,426eu out of which 2,048 was on social media, which is proportionality a high amount of my expenditure but then as I said because you asked about the impact. Various candidates, especially MEPs but not only MEPs, spent a lot of money on activities which are very costly, which I could not afford. So, the social media is just one aspect of finance. I spent proportionality, I think, as a candidate, proportionality I spent a lot on social media compared to other candidates and I think there was an article about this, about candidate's expenditure on Facebook. Actually, I think that you can get everyone's figure from there.

MB: Now, what is it effective? It helped but I was not elected. I knew that I was not going to be elected. I think I got quite a good number of votes given that I did not have incumbency and I did not spend a lot of money. Proportionality I spent a lot on social media compared to other candidates, but I spent very little on other stuff. So, the social media was for me very important. So, I think it did have an impact and I know that advertising it arrives at many people. But then again, sometimes it is the things, going back to your questions of how did I plan my stuff and bla bla bla, very often, the things which interest people most and go viral most are the things which you would have planned least which for you are the least important for example which perhaps have nothing to do with the EU.

DM: and they go viral.

MB: and it does not mean that people will vote for them. So, I cannot really give you an answer whether a social media advert results in a vote. I think there are many aspects including patronage, including how much voters trust you. I think but this is a rough guess and I do not have figures, probably, I got most of my votes from people who were younger and there was a LovinMalta survey about this where I featured, people probably from the 10th district probably and people who are probably more liberal. Probably, I did not get many votes from the core PN vote but from voters who are outside of the core and my message was very much directed in that way in the social media, as well. So, in my message I did not have a lot of partisan slogans for example. I was more issue focused.

DM: Ok, ok.

MB: I do not know what the impact was of the social media but for me it was very helpful because it helped me reach broader audiences.

DM: You know, for example, what type of comments you were having on the posts, if they were positive or if they were negative?

MB: Both. I had positive comments, I had negative comments as well. Well, trolling sometimes happened as well. I did have negative comments, yes. For example, one of the most negative comments I had which was quite frequent was that I switched from AD to PN. That was quite common but then I had many positive comments. People who said that I did the right thing to join the PN for example.

DM: I think there is a similar case like this. Cyrus Engerer had switched from Nationalist and went to Labour.

MB: But again, I am not sure. I mean, this could be a bubble. I think a lot of the campaigning is on the ground. I think the social media is very important, you cannot look at the social media on its own and on the ground, campaigning is very very important. But then again, as I said. The candidate who did the most house visits Frank Psaila was not elected but he did not have the incumbency. So, there are various factors and a lot of traditional campaigning methods which we do not see on the media. The social media adds another dimension, it's very important, it gives you outreach, it gives you a platform especially if the traditional media does not give you such a platform, but I think it is one very important aspect amongst others. Incidentally, I published a paper 2 years called 'Digital Activism, Physical Activism'. It is not on party politics but focuses on protests. I tried to analyse how the digital and the physical interact. You cannot look at one without the other. I can send it to you.

DM: yes, of course. It would be very helpful for the other study. Yes. I think that concludes I do not know if you have any other concluding remarks you would like to make even something which you would like to contribute.

MB: yes, it was something which I learned a lot. I have quite a lot experience in politics and even as a sociologist, but you realize that an MEP with a big party, you see a lot of things which are not seen in the media and that is very very important. Now, I, as a sociologist I analyse the social media in politics but I know that there are other aspects which we have to look into. For example, the Eurobarometer survey, which I have mentioned previously, tells us a lot about this. If you see who people trust most: the people trust the police more than the media. Now in the media we do not get that message. So, we have to look beyond. But again, the social media is a very very important tool and I think that in Malta, Facebook is still the most important tool in social media.

DM: Facebook, yes. In fact, if you had to analyse the numbers and even through studies which have been done by reputable companies in Malta for example ICON, you can see it clearly that Facebook is still the norm in Malta.

MB: Twitter is invisible. Twitter is only used by elites

DM: From a political perspective, twitter is mostly used for the European kind of audience.

MB: and Instagram is used more for the younger still you cannot compare it to Facebook

DM: It's starting to become a bit the norm amongst the younger population but again, Facebook is still the norm in Malta.

MB: Yes. Something which is very important is that even though you are with a party, you are on your own in various aspects, it's a learning curve.

DM: You learn as you go.

MB: yes. You learn as you and there was this big dis-levelling which is nobody's fault. I am not blaming anyone but it's how it is. That MEPs had a lot of funding at their disposal whereas many candidates did not, even because, the party as we know, because this is public, is in a precarious financial situation. It is nobody's fault but this dis-levelling was felt. Having said that, going back to your question on media, the party tried to assist us as much as possible in the media and it is assisted different candidates in different ways, and I think that was very positive. I appreciated a lot and again, you find people who use the social media most, but you find many people who listen to the radio for example. Who would want to phone on the radio and so forth. So, the traditional media is still very important especially for certain demography.

DM: The particular local context because I think Malta is one of the only countries in Europe or in the world as well that parties are allowed to have/own the media. For example, the two prominent parties in Malta, they both have their radio station, they both have their television.

MB: Yes, that is very true, but it is also very true that small parties have a lot of coverage on the independent media. PD and AD have a lot of coverage on the independent media. In other countries they do not get as much coverage. I mean, again, sometimes, I agree with you that big parties have ownership and that is something which, I mean, one has to look into but do not discount the fact that small parties have quite a lot of coverage in the independent media just as the big parties do of course. Some small party candidates gained a lot of coverage in the MEP campaign.

DM: Ok

MB: Candidate X says something, Arnold Cassola says this for example or AD has a press conference on this or PD says this. They got quite a lot of coverage, I mean, one can analyse the press releases and the coverage.

DM: Even for example, you are mentioning about programs and coverage, I think a program which people really followed was Xarabank when it came to these elections as well. There were the head-to-head debates amongst the candidates as well. What do you think about that? Do you think that it was effective?

MB: Many people do watch Xarabank, I mean, yes but people watch other program.

DM: Yes, I just mentioned Xarabank as an example.

MB: Yes of course, I mean, when the time came to see who was going on Xarabank, everyone wants to go on Xarabank but there are limitations of space and time. So, these are the dynamics which even within the same party every candidate has his or her own interest. So, yes. Again, one can count how many times certain candidates attended on certain programs for example then that is another analysis. Programs on the party station but also programs on national television. Some candidates had more coverage then other. That's a fact.

DM: Those incumbent?

MB: Mostly yes, not only however because for example, with every party, some candidates which are seen as the sort of, preferred party candidates. You can look at programs that you see that certain candidates featured more than others. I am not complaining, and I went on Xarabank and the little times I went on tv I did my best.

DM: So, the time of appearances on the traditional media aided the social media. So, for example the people saw let's say a person on Xarabank and they commented about him on Facebook.

MB: Of course, they interact with each other. Yes, so that's it basically. Then again, some candidates also benefited advertorials on news portals but not every candidate can afford advertorials.

DM: And then when they do that type of promotion they tend to appear as if they're aligning with sort of party or the other.

MB: Yes, I do not know how they look at it but as a candidate when I saw it, I mean of course, that candidate can afford these, yes. But again, it is how the system is. I think it should fairer, there should be safeguards for this, for example, but that's how it is, I mean, but it's nobody's fault. I am not blaming that candidate or the other but yes, advertorials cost a lot of money and if you do not have the money you cannot have an advertorial basically.

DM: I think that's all from my side.

MB: If you need any other clarifications let me know.

EMPTY PAGE