National Image in the Age of Mass Self-Communication: An Analysis of Internet Users' Perception of Portugal

L. Godinho, N. Teixeira

Abstract—Nowadays, massification of Internet access represents one of the major challenges to the traditional powers of the State, among which the power to control its external image. The virtual world has also sparked the interest of social sciences which consider it a new field of study, an immense open text where sense is expressed. In this paper, that immense text has been accessed to so as to understand the perception Internet users from all over the world have of Portugal. Ours is a quantitative and qualitative approach, as we have resorted to buzz, thematic and category analysis. The results confirm the predominance of sea stereotype in others' vision of the Portuguese people, and evidence that national image has adapted to network communication through processes of individuation and paganization.

Keywords—Internet, national image, perception, web analytics.

I. INTRODUCTION

THIS paper aims to contribute to the analysis of national image, a concept studied by a wide number of social sciences which, since the 1950s, has become increasingly more prominent in constructivist literature in International Relations, an approach focused on understanding the impact of culture in political action. This concept is not confined to scientific interest, though. Especially since the end of the Cold War, the issue of creating a systematic and adequate image of the State has been a government concern throughout the globe due to a need to increase internal political support, as well as international power. At a time when participating in global markets and policies is more and more crucial for nations, how they are projected and perceived by peers has become an important factor not to be seriously considered by their leading elites. Actually, the above-mentioned projection and perception indelibly affect the relation among States and the strategic responses they develop [1], national image thus becoming one of the most important tools in external policy.

The concept of national image is closely linked to image theory, which has been considered a psychological factor, a mental representation or even, to use the definition by [2], a human construct within an axis of perceived traits projected by an object, event or person.

The wide number of studies on the issue of image makes it evident that there are two different approaches: the picture and the non-picture. The former believes that a picture is needed, external to the individual, to trigger mental representation or imagery experience [3], [4]; the latter focuses on the individual and his ability to create images regardless of whether he was exposed to an external picture [5]. The present study, however, allows us to not dwell on the conditions of mental image activation as the aim is rather to define that image. Our focus will be a specific type of mental image, the so-called national image, in particular how Portugal is perceived and represented by non-Portuguese through the analysis of their online texts.

We question if that massification of online communication since the 1990s has influenced Portugal's external image; to test this contention we will analyse online publications about the country by Internet users around the globe. The dependent variable will, therefore, be national image; the independent variable, the online text.

We aim to answer a series of questions: how many people on the web talk about Portugal? Where are they from? What ideas are associated with the country? What feelings underlie these texts? What degree of interest do they draw from readers? And in answering these questions, what can we infer of the country's external image?

We will analyse the issue from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective so as to meet three specific objectives: 1) quantify the presence of the keyword Portugal on the World Wide Web; 2) identify the discourse representations of that presence; and 3) analyse the elements the country is associated with. The study was held between March 1st and May 31st 2014.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study, on the representation of Portugal on the web, requires that we first discuss the concept of national identity, as well as reflect on how this image is made manifest in a virtual environment such as the Internet and its dissemination in online networks and communities. Finally, we will link national image and State power.

A. National Image as Unit of Analysis

In the past years, national image has been studied under three very different perspectives in social sciences [6]: as a feeling of national identity (self-image) related to State self-image, to how they explain themselves and their expectations regarding their future; as projected image, related to the promotion of national image in the international community using the media and diplomacy, among other tools; as perceived image, related to how States are mentally represented by their peers.

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The current study is on perceived image. We conceive national image as a construct representation in the mind of non-Portuguese and which we have access to through studying their Internet posts. The analysis will be based on the theories of several authors.

Boulding and Kunczik study national image from a psychological perspective, as a phenomenon that is only mental [7], [8]. Boulding defines it as «a cognitive, affective and evaluative behavioural structure», historical in nature, change-resistant and totalitarian regarding the other representations. The author states that national images aim to simplify reality, they are «naive, self-centred and unsophisticated» [7], and that they translate a binary vision of reality, seeing other States as «friends» or «enemies», «strong» or «weak». Kunczik [8] views this concept as «cognitive representation (…) of a country, what an individual believes is true about a nation and its people» [8].

Herrmann and Fischerkeller's [9] and Herrmann et al. [10] perspectives are similar, as these authors consider the images of political leaders as «schemata (…) and ideal images», other countries being portrayed as the enemy, the colony, the imperialist, the ally, among other representations that determine external policy decisions [6]. Other authors, such as Wang [11], see it as a multidisciplinary phenomenon and view national image as a product of psychological, sociological and communication factors and define it as «the climate of opinion made of the collective expression of perceptions and judgments on a country by its international publics» [12]. These judgments, perceptions and mental representations on the nations are not made independently but rather result from the experiences and stereotypes of the individuals who produce them [1]. The stereotype is, actually, considered one of the phenomena that most contributes to the creation of mental constructs, considering it is «a series of traits attributed to the members of social groups» [12] which tell us «how we should see the world even before we see it» [13] and reflects «our projections of the world based on our values, positions and rights» [13].

For Perlman and Cozby [12], stereotypes are «traits attributed to the members of social groups» prominently made by ethnocentric processes such as social categorization and group concept in terms of in-group and out-group. This ethnocentric position appears to be structural in the creation of stereotypes since it places the subject's group at the core of the analysis and, consequently, analyses others as inferiors [14] [1].

The relation between groups is a crucial element in the study of the stereotype. Alexander and Levin [15] identified three dimensions in the relation among States that influence the creation of stereotypes: compatibility of objectives, relative power and relative cultural status. The perception that each country has of the other in regards to these dimensions will influence the stereotypes and the image each will create of its peers and, as a result, the way they will relate.

All the authors mentioned above seem to consider national images, namely those by political elites, as crucial elements in external policy decision-making as well as in the establishment of bilateral and multilateral relations.

B. Discourse Representations on the Web

Stereotypes as mental images not rarely become symbols which, when in a textual form, are called discourse representations. These are based on the difference between what is real and what is mental representation of reality [16] and, when present in discourse, they reflect the global vision its author has of the world though the interpretation also depends on the recipient's framework of values and reference. This means that the interpretation, from the perspective of discourse representation, is only possible when taking into consideration the context it was produced in, if the link between word and context is clear: producing the former changes the latter and the latter determines the production of the utterance. Thus, we may infer that all discourse representation includes two dimensions: the referent and the conditions. The referent represents the object under discussion; the conditions represent all the information gathered in the referent, the context in which the object operates. At the moment a text is interpreted, new referents and conditions are included in the existing representation and update it [17]. Theoretical priority to context also determines that we consider the conditions that discourse representations of Portugal are produced, which, since we study those representations appearing on the web, implies the need to define the web and the experiences therein.

The relation between society and Internet is a rather expanding field of studies in the humanities and in the social sciences as part of a wider, key debate on Media Ecology [18]. This interdisciplinary field in Media Theory considers that the predominant means of communication in each society is responsible for the social processes of its time [19], thus viewing technology as the main cause of social change.

The Internet is now part of around 40% of the world's population and this fact has led to a debate on its features and effects on social structures and thought.

A heated controversy is now ongoing as to the web's ability to revolutionize social order, yet there is apparent consensus as to the change that has taken place in the last decades in the relationship between Humanity and computer, initially on computer and thought and nowadays more focused on its role in terms of social relations [20]. There is also consensus on the idea that the Internet increasingly mediates Humanity's relation with the world and that this mediation evolves more and more rapidly. It has quickly shifted from a text-centred to a multilingual and multi-platform system, presently called «web 2.0», which allows text, photo and video integration and is accessible through a growing number of fixed and mobile technological media.

The wealth of technology and languages has made the Internet a part of the daily life of 40% of the world population, thus fulfilling its initial promise of being a global medium [21]. Since it appeared, in 1969, it has linked men and women from all over the world at an increasing speed and ease and, especially, in an unprecedented way in the history of human communication.

One of the factors behind the Internet's world dissemination is the fact that it facilitates social interaction and allows reproducing traditional means of human relation in a virtual

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environment, namely the creation of the so-called virtual communities [22], [23]. Most of the social dynamics on the web is on these virtual communities and, therefore, most web content is produced here whose relevance has been acknowledged by science and has been object of research.

The study by Adrian Budiman on online virtual communities has identified two types of communities: dependent communities, which are a virtual extension of traditional communities already in existence and in which members interact face-to-face; and self-sustaining communities, in which «relations among members are made, developed and maintained through virtual meetings on the web based on common interest» [24]. Budiman also realized that both virtual communities perform four social functions - exchange of information and of social support, friendship and fun - and a range of motivations, from accessibility/ convenience, escapism, identity shift, social recognition, voyeurism and written communication. Issues such as confidence and social isolation were also identified, which leads us to conclude that the web tends to reflect offline social processes.

C. Power and National Image

Another perspective from which national image has been analysed is in terms of its relation with state power as the former is commonly considered a tool of the latter.

Since Nye's approach [25], [26], state power has been analysed from a wide perspective, including both traditional indicators - such as the population index, military technology, or GDP – as well as a set of informal dimensions, such as popular culture or the reputation of actors in the international scene. Nye named the former hard power and the latter soft power. These metaphorical names, hard and soft, do not correspond to actual content. The so-called hard power imposes or commands through the economy or the arms in order to attain its objectives; soft power aims to attract through «cultural values», the «examples provided by internal practice and by policies» and through how «the country conducts its relation with others» [27]. Both powers contribute to the affirmation of states in the international scenario, though, at a time when media coverage is global, thus creating cultural relations among people and communities that would otherwise never meet, the importance of soft power has been recognized by political elites and social scientists. Discussion on contemporary state has thus become inseparable from discussion on how the State communicates its values. This debate inevitably leads to the issue of media coverage and to the challenges brought by the Internet. Castells named this global trend informationalization of politics, i.e., «politics essentially framed, in its substance, organization, process and leadership, by the logic inherent to the media system, especially by the new electronic media» and considered it one of the main sources of the crisis in contemporary State.

Several different discourses on States are now freely and spontaneously expressed on the World Wide Web from a series of sources and evidencing a plethora of values and identities. These discourses are made of texts and images filled with meaning on the States, i.e., of signs that can project the image of nations beyond themselves.

D. Nation Branding

The study on the perceived image of the State has been developed from three main perspectives within social sciences [27]: a technical and economic perspective, focused on the «conditions for economic growth, efficiency and the building up of capital», a perspective commonly developed by Marketing, Management and studies on Tourism; a political perspective, interested in understanding «the impact that national image has in State-nations participating in a global system of international relations», an approach made manifest in the concept of «public diplomacy» and more commonly found in the field of International Relations, Public Relations and International Communication; and a cultural perspective, focused on the implications of national image on national and cultural identities, the one preferred by cultural and media studies. This division of approaches is, however, questioned by authors such as [28]-[30], which see this one-sided approach as inadequate and propose a convergence of perspectives. So as to meet this objective, Anholt created the most successful model of analysis of nation-brands, a holistic method that includes the economic, political and cultural dimensions, introduced the issue in the political agenda of dozens of countries and made it an acknowledged academic field [31]-[35].

Fig. 1 Nation branding hexagon [34]

Since 2005 [35], Anholt has published the Nation Brand Index, which, every year, lists a wide number of States according to their influence potential. Underlying this index is a classification method in six categories (Fig. 1) - Tourism, Exports, Governance, Investment and immigration, Culture and Heritage and People - which are coded and made operational through survey application to 18 thousand consumers from 18 countries from the OECD.

We aim to study the external image of Portugal using Anholt's model; however, we do not aim to identify Portugal's position in the ranking but rather develop an alternative approach to the issue by using the web as the object of analysis and defining a separate set of categories to be described later in this paper.

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III. Methodology and Analysis

The affirmation of the web as a space of conviviality soon drew the attention of social sciences - interested in knowing new means of expressing public opinion and in debating available study methodologies. Among them, the so-called web analytics has established itself as one of the most revolutionary from a scientific point of view, as it allows to validly study public opinion at a lower cost and in less time than traditional research methods, such as surveys or interviews. Though this is a recent research field, studies conducted so far evidence a relation between social trends and opinion expressed on the web; a similarity in terms of results has been detected between studies carried out via survey and studies conducted via web analytics.

Web analytics is based on the idea that the Internet is a wide and open text where people express themselves. It is a text written voluntarily and spontaneously, which gives it a unique status as a platform providing direct access to the thoughts and emotions that explain human action, exactly what social scientists look for.

From a methodological point of view, the units of analysis in web analytics are the posts, the words, the pages or the «like» from users in pages about which they are asked to express an opinion and their choice is of crucial importance for any research in this field. However, the most common data in web analytics is the text and that can be analysed from a series of perspectives and using a plethora of methods. Text mining algorithms are often used by scientists and sophisticated software has been designed to meet the challenge to find meaning on the web.

In the present study, web analytics will be used. The analysis will be carried out through application of a set of computational methods that adequately address the questions, among which a technological platform able to reach more than 150 million websites all over the world, besides the main social networks, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Google+ and analyse them in 180 different languages.

We aim to develop two different approaches: the first will be a quantitative approach, focused on buzz analysis; the second, at a later stage, a qualitative approach focused on thematic and category analyses.

A. Analysis of Portugal Buzz

The presence of Portugal on the web will firstly be studied through quantifying the number of lexical references to the country. This is called buzz, a particularly important indicator since the number of references tends to indicate the importance given by public opinion to the theme - the higher the buzz on a subject, the higher its social relevance.

Buzz analysis of the keyword «Portugal» will focus on two specific geographical areas. We aimed to understand, at an initial stage, its distribution in the world, and, at a second stage, in a number of States deemed strategic to the country: the Portuguese-speaking countries (Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa - CPLP), the 28 countries in the European Union (EU) and the United States of America (USA).

When the word «Portugal» was introduced in the platform's browser and the time period and the country we wanted to study were selected, a database would be accessible with thousands of pages in whose text the word Portugal appeared at least once. This database is organized in descending order according to the number of times the page was accessed to, which allows us to understand the degree of importance people assign to the themes referred therein.

The computational analysis conducted to the references to Portugal on the World Wide Web between 1 March and 31 May 2014 evidences the steady increase in the number of references, from about 32 thousand on 1 March to 115 thousand on 31 May (Fig. 2). The increase in the buzz was higher from 19 April onwards, which may be explained by the football world cup starting in early June - a rather mobilizing event on public opinion that is given early reference by traditional media and the web.
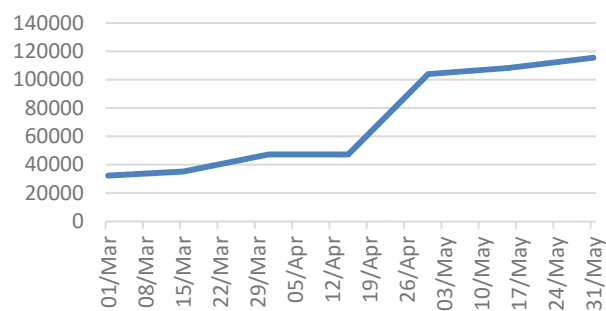

Fig. 2 *Buzz* of the word *Portugal* in the global web between 1 March and 31 May 2014

If we analyse the world distribution of that buzz (Fig. 3), we realize there are four main places showing interest for Portugal: the USA with 2.4m references to Portugal; the European Union, with 2.3m references; Brazil, with 1.2m and East-Timor, with 442 thousand references.

The analysis regarding the countries deemed strategic for Portugal (Fig. 4) shows that, in the three-month period of the study, the country was most spoken of in the USA, with a total of 2.4m references, in the European Union, with about 2.3m references, and in CPLP, with about 1.8m references. This evidences the importance of history and language as factors of symbolic closeness and of drawing of interest among peoples.

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Fig. 3 Geographical distribution of the b*uzz* of the word Portugal on the web between 1 March and 31 May 2014
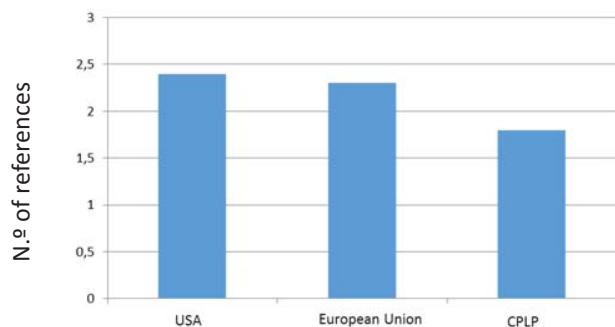

Fig. 4 *Buzz* of the word «Portugal», between 1 March and 31 May 2014, in the European Union, in the Portuguese-speaking countries and in the USA (in millions)

Fig. 5 *Buzz* of the word «Portugal» in the European Union countries between 1 March and 31 May 2014 (in percentage)

During the period of the study, in the 28 countries of the European Union (Fig. 5), excluding Portugal, the country is most spoken of on the French web, with 25% of the references, in Spain, with 24% of references, in Germany, with 17% and in the United Kingdom, with 11% of the references. These results, namely the fact that countries such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom are at the top of the ranking in terms of European buzz of Portugal, evidence the importance of Portuguese immigration in the international promotion of the country; in the case of Spain, the geographical closeness is a factor of national interest.
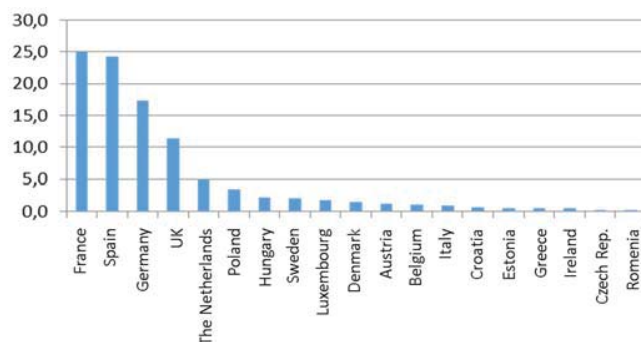
B. A Thematic Analysis of the Perceived Image of Portugal

The second approach to the study of the perceived image of Portugal is a thematic analysis, i.e., identifying web pages in which Portugal was referred to and order those pages according to their number of visitors. This way we will be able to know which web pages on Portugal were most read in the world and what were the relevant themes during the period of the study.

The thematic analysis of the keyword «Portugal», between 1 March and 31 May 2014, allowed to list the ten web pages most visited throughout the world where Portugal was mentioned. This analysis revealed that the country is associated with four major themes: society, politics, sports and tourism. Overall, these ten pages received about 5 billion views.

The page on Portugal most visited in the World Wide Web between 1 March and 31 May 2014, with 2.4 billion views, was published in Brazil, in the portal www.pinterest.com, it is

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written in English and is on «wedding», on wedding arrangements. This is a page of a Portuguese event planning company whose online contents associate Portugal to a natural, affectionate and aesthetically idealized lifestyle.

The second most viewed page in this ranking, having received about 720 million visitors, is a news on sports in the portal www.si.com describing the defeat of a Portuguese tennis player in an international tournament in May 2014. In this case, Portugal is described as an international sports actor, which awards it credibility status, though in this case it is the loser.

The third, with 708 million visitors, is a news on the portal of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) on the celebrations of the revolution which took place on 25 April 1974. The news links Portugal with democracy as well as the ability to change, inevitably associated with a revolution as the one which took place on 25 April 1974.

The next most viewed text is a post published in Brazil on the slogans of the imminent football world cup and which assigns the phrase «the past is history, the future is victory» to Portugal. The page had 459 million views.

The fifth most visited page on Portugal on the World Wide Web during the three-month period of the present study was in the BBC portal and received 219m views. This was an article on the recent history of Guinea-Bissau, in which Portugal in mentioned as a former colonizer, thus associating the country with it having been a dictatorship.

The next five pages, with a total of 965m visitors, belong to virtual forums in the portal www.tripadvisor.com about several Portuguese cities and they are on tourism. These pages include a series of comments on travels to Portugal and includes recommendations and complaints on car rentals, requests for suggestions regarding entertainment and experience sharing of holidays in the country. In all these posts, as well as the forums they are written in, Portugal is represented as a tourist destination of reference, with a wide range of cultural offer and services.

C. A Category Approach to the Portuguese External Image

Buzz and thematic analysis have allowed us to assess the degree of relevance of the theme «Portugal» for Internet users and its discourse representations. However, category analysis must be carried out if the present aim is to know, in a more detailed manner, the dimensions of the country's perceived image, of the relative weight of each dimension for world public opinion. The next paragraphs will focus on this analysis.

The methodology used was based on that proposed by Bardin [36]: creation of categories and indicators, identification of hits on the web, statistic data processing and, finally, inference and interpretation.

The categories were inspired by Anholt's hexagon (Fig. 1) and three dimensions of analysis: economy, politics, and culture. Each category was coded at a later stage, the result being shown in Table I.

The category «politics» aims to study Internet users' perception in regards to the political dimension of the Portuguese identity and was coded under the indicators: democracy, welfare state, immigration, justice, people and

security. Each of these indicators, in turn, was researched using several keywords in Portuguese and in English (Table II). The same was done for the other two categories - culture and economy - and the result is shown in the same table.

TABLE I
CATEGORIES, INDICATORS AND KEYWORDS USED IN THE STUDY OF PORTUGAL'S EXTERNAL IMAGE

Category	Indicators
Culture	art
	science
	food
	Sports
	sea and nature
	Tourism
Economics	growth
	crisis
	debt
	exports
	innovation
	investment
Politics	democracy
	welfare state
	immigration
	justice
	people
	security

TABLE II
CATEGORIES, INDICATORS AND KEYWORDS USED IN THE STUDY OF PORTUGAL'S EXTERNAL IMAGE

Indicators	Keywords	Indicators	Keywords
Science	science	Debt	debt
	scientific	Crisis	crisis
Sea and nature	sea	Growth	growth
	beach	Investment	investment
	nature		investor
Tourism	Tourism		invest
	Holidays	People	Portuguese
Sports	Sports	Immigration	immigration
	Football		Immigrants
	surf	Democracy	democracy
Art	Music	Justice	justice
	poetry		justice
	art	Security	security
	food	Peace	peace
	wine		peaceful
Exports	exporting	Welfare state	welfare state
	exports		
Innovation	creative		
	creativity		
	innovation		

Once the set to be analysed was defined, shown in Table II; we must operationalize it using the chosen software. However, before research is conducted, we must change each keyword into a query, allowing the researcher to define the exact parameters to research.

Considering that the aim of the present study is to understand which themes, among those chosen for analysis, are the most and least associated with Portugal, we built queries that

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associate each keyword to the word Portugal and define a ten-word interval as research segment. These search words make the software to do a world web search, detect the word «Portugal», select the segment composed by the ten words before and after «Portugal» and, finally, find within those twenty words, the presence of each keyword. This process was conducted for each of the keywords and allowed us to list the themes associated with the word «Portugal» in a number of hits.

The conclusion drawn from the category analysis was that Portugal is mostly associated with culture (60% of the associations), followed by economy, with 35% of associations, and politics, with 5% (Fig. 5).
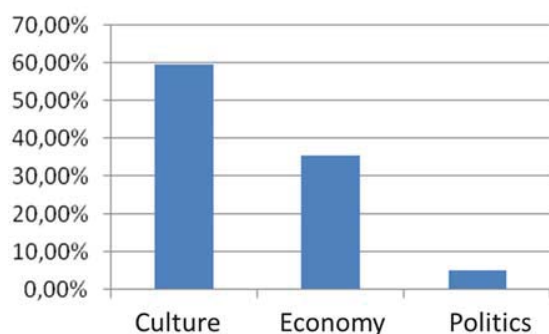

Fig. 5 Categories associated with the *keyword* «Portugal» on the World Wide Web

As evidenced in Fig. 6, «culture» is the top category, mostly because of the indicator «sea and nature» with 35% of references, followed by «sports» with 23%, and «tourism» with 15%. Elements such as the beach, the sea and nature, were the most associated with Portugal by Internet users (36%), a higher percentage than that obtained by the indicator «sports», associated 23% of the times to the country, namely to football, with 3653 references. Still within «culture», we emphasize the association of Portugal to «tourism» and «holidays» (2816 references), followed by «gastronomy», with 11% of hits.

Noteworthy in the indicator «gastronomy» are the keywords on «food» are now the double of «wine», the former obtained 1300 references and the latter 650. The indicator «art» was fourth, Portugal was associated 1223 times to the keyword «art» and 1065 times to the keyword «music». The indicator «science» was last, with 2% of the associations to Portugal, showing the low attractiveness of the country in terms of scientific research.

In regards to the category «economy» (Fig. 7), it is in second place due to the indicators «debt» and «crisis» which, together, account for 72% of the economic references to Portugal, evidencing the impact the world economic crisis and, in particular, the country's bailout had in world public opinion.
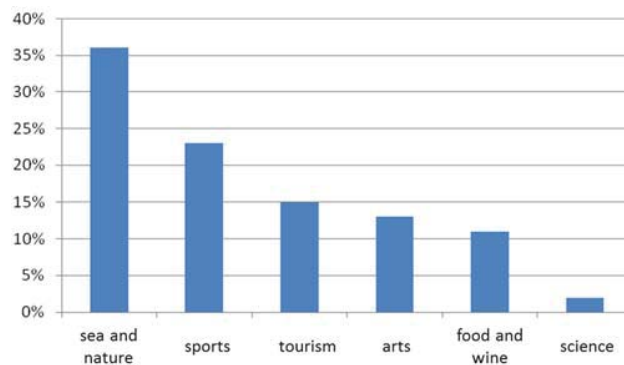

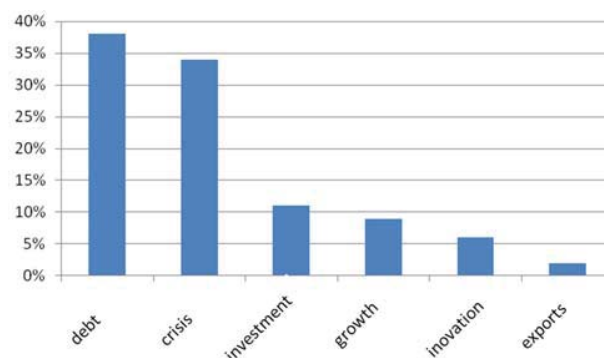Fig. 6 Cultural indicators associated to the keyword *Portugal* on the World Wide Web

Fig. 7 Economic indicators associated to the *keyword* «Portugal» on the World Wide Web

The indicators «growth», «exports», «innovation» and «investment», on the contrary, account for only 28% of references, which shows the negative image the world public opinion has of Portuguese economy.
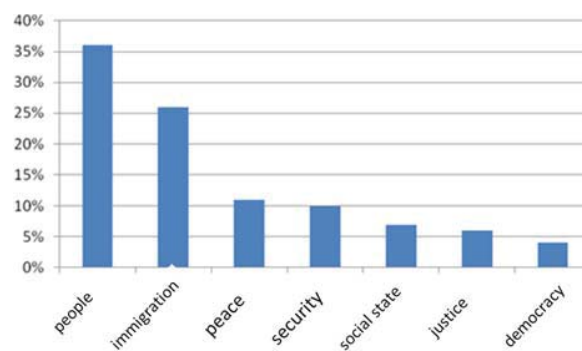

Fig. 8 Political indicators associated to the *keyword* «Portugal» on the World Wide Web

As far as the category «politics» in concerned with little over 5% of hits, Internet users mostly associated Portugal to indicators «people» (36%) and «immigration» (26%), which leads us to infer that the human dimension of the Portuguese culture is internationally recognized and considered a positive value, since the country appears 26% of the times in regards to

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welcoming foreigners and, in total, these two indicators account for 62% of references.

A group of indicators of this category, such as «democracy», «justice», «security», «peace» and «welfare state» together accounted for a lower percentage, 38%; among these, Portugal appears mostly associated with «peace», with 233 references during the three-month period of the present study.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A country of sea, culture and humanity - this is Portugal when viewed by foreigners surfing the Internet, this new meeting place that poses one of the biggest challenges to the political, social, economic and cultural status quo of our time. It is also a country with a weak economy, politically associated with colonialism and dictatorship and rather distant from the European Union, on which much hope rested at the onset of the democratic process in 1974. Yet, nothing appears to have changed. Despite the many changes, Portugal is still perceived the same way it was in the 1960s - politically uninteresting, culturally divided between sea and football and economically behind. Cultural modernization, social change and global improvement of living conditions, which took place after the implementation of democracy and accession to the then called European Economic Community, appear unnoticed to the eyes of those watching us, either because they are unaware or because the traditional stereotype is too rooted. This is the general conclusion that may be taken from the analysis on the perception of Portugal in the world. Yet, if we study the results in detail and link them, we are able to further understand the phenomenon.

Firstly, we conclude that culture is the main dimension of the perceived image of Portugal and, therefore, the themes included - sea, tourism, sports, art and gastronomy - are vital for Portuguese external policy. Among those themes, football was at the basis of many of the discourse associations to Portugal (3653 hits), very revealing of the symbolic power of this sports, closely followed by the sea, with 3206 references.

Secondly, this study shows that, along with the positive cultural associations to the country, Internet users have a negative perception of Portuguese economy. The themes "crisis" and "debt" were more associated with the country (72% of the economic associations to Portugal) than the positive dimensions such as «innovation», «exports», «growth» and «investment», which, together, account for 28% of the economic associations.

In the detailed analysis of the category «politics», the third item the country is most associated with is «people», and to a peaceful and safe place for «immigration». However, the political associations to Portugal account for only 5% of the total, which is highly revealing of the image of the country as a weak international political actor. These three-dimensional results allow us to graphically represent the perceived image of Portugal (Fig. 9), a triangular representation that includes the three analysed vectors.
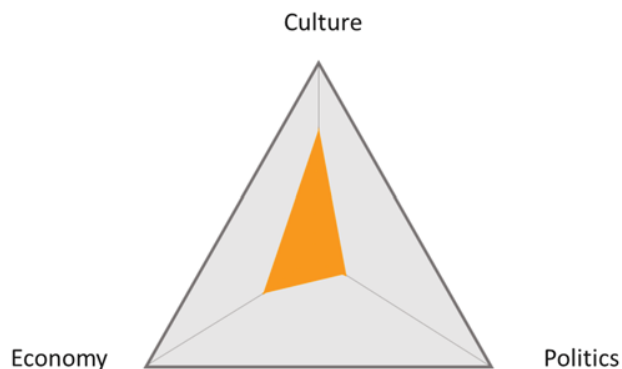

Fig. 9 Triangle on the perception of Portugal on the web

The results proved that participating in international events is a strategy that highly enhances the popularity of Portugal in the world, especially if these events are on themes that are associated with the country. As we have seen in the present analysis, the buzz on Portugal increased significantly after 19 April 2014, as the football world cup approached (it would start in June) and Portugal was one of the participants. Another concept Portugal appears especially associated with, due to the number of shares on social networks and to the use of the image, is that of «naturalness». The web page the country is referred to and was most read in the world during the three-month period of the present study, with more than two million views, was on «wedding» and presented it in an idealized way, using a very natural and simple aesthetics. The country is represented in photos as a rural and orderly place, affectionate and warm. This association created a very humanistic narrative and, perhaps because of that, it spoke to so many people all over the world. These results allow us to draw inferences that can be explained using some of the theories in this field of studies, in the border of political science and communication science. Firstly, we may infer that Internet users have a positive feeling towards Portugal.

The themes with references to Portugal are mostly positive - «beauty», «love», «naturalness», «sports», «credibility», «democracy» and «leisure» - only two being negative - «loss» and «colonialism». In terms of linguistic associations, most belonged to the category «culture» and evidenced a positive feeling as well.

The negative feelings towards Portugal are mostly expressed in regards to economic matters and their dimension may be explained due to the closeness to the country's bailout, thus making the stereotype of «poor country» reappear which has been part of the country's external image for several centuries. In this study, the semantic field preferred by Internet users to refer to the Portuguese economy was clearly the international economic crisis, the use of a group of words with a negative meaning - as is the case of «debt» e «crisis» - was 44% higher than the use of words with positive meaning, which included «investment», «growth», «innovation» and «exports».

The second inference is that the external image is not a tool used exclusively by States. In the last decades, mediatization had already transferred this traditional field of the State to the mass media. The appearance of the Internet, though, especially

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the massification of Internet access and the growing relevance of social networks, have democratized the creation of an external image, which is now also in the hands of the common citizen. Thus, it has become a symbolic process in continuous (re)creation. This shift in the powers of the State to the individual may be explained with the development of the so-called mass self-communication [37], horizontal networks that allow the production and large-scale dissemination of customized messages and which contribute, along with other factors, to undermining the authority of the contemporary nation-station. This trend to individuation of the powers of the State is, in fact, reflected in other dimensions studied, such as the discourse associations to Portugal in which there is paganization of the national image. Portugal is not present on the web in an abstract and formal way but rather associated with specific themes such as the beach, the sea, football, food and wine, everyday themes for the ordinary person. This paganization is another evidence of today's communication era. With the onset of the Internet, mass communication is no longer confined to the industrial design it had in the 1990s, when it was developed in companies, it had a one-directional character and was aimed at a wide public. Now, it is segmented, customized and democratic both in terms of production and circulation. People have become large-scale cultural producers and transmitters, directly presenting their artefacts and benchmarks without mediation. The pagan expressions associated with Portugal thus naturally derive from the imagery of today's average person who lives anywhere in the world.

The two trends identified in the present analysis - individuation and paganization of the State's image - reveal a significant change in the type of communication that has been predominant thus far, based on the power of gatekeeping by traditional mass media.

Up to the massification of digital communication, the State controlled the production and dissemination of its image, namely through, among others, holding media groups and the regulation of the media system. The massification of self-communication has led to contents being produced, published and selected by millions of people around the globe whose control is no longer in the hands of the State and whose amount, variety and speed production are much higher than ever in the history of the media. This shift in communication paradigm was, in fact, realized by the State and by the traditional corporate powers, which have also altered their strategy so as to integrate the new era of network communication, creating spaces, languages and digital networks without which they would not be able to have a mediated relation with the citizens.

Both communication models - gatekeeping and mass self-communication - are present in today's public space, in an unprecedented semantic and power competition in political and media history.

Thirdly, the results of this analysis allow us to infer that the Atlantic, the linchpin of the Portuguese external policy since the 15th century until 1976 [38], is still predominant in terms of the country's perceived image.

Portugal, as all the dimensions of the analysis have demonstrated, was, during the period of the study, mostly associated with themes related to the sea and the former colonies; In the ten most visited pages on the World Wide Web where Portugal was mentioned, the country is never associated to Europe, which has been, since the establishment of Democracy, in 1976, the central vector of the country's external policy. The same occurs in the geographical analysis of the buzz of the word «Portugal», in which the web in the USA included more references to the country than the web in the European Union. These results do not confirm the initial hypothesis, that online communication may have altered the perceived image of Portugal. In fact, the sea remains the main identity capital of Portugal in the world, a concept that belongs to a wide semantic field that also includes words such as beach, sun, tourism, nature, sports, all of which mentioned by foreigners when referring to the country on the Internet. This particularly strong association between Portugal and the sea demonstrates the prevalence of the stereotype «marine country» and constitutes a two-fold phenomenon: on the one hand it works as a synthesis of what it means to be Portuguese and thus makes the country's international identity easier to be pointed out and remembered; on the other hand, though, it makes Portuguese identity one-dimensional inhibiting the potential for cultural and economic expansion. This study, therefore, reiterates the importance of the *durability* of historic cycles in regards to *proximity* in the building of national images.

Europe, the metaphor for development and human rights Portugal has turned to in the past thirty years in search of a post-revolutionary ideal and material support, appears as a weak referential when compared with the symbolic importance of the sea which, since the 15thc, is the structural dimension of Portuguese identity. We may even wonder if the symbolic weakness of Europe is not, in itself, a consequence of the economic, political and cultural crisis the continent is facing today. This is a question still open for those who, like us, are interested in the identity of Portugal in the world and in the power of words in the International Relations.

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