

Beyond like, share, and comment: Cape Verde Armed Forces performance on Facebook

Más allá de gustar, compartir y comentar: performance de las Fuerzas Armadas de Cabo Verde en Facebook

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Abstract

This article examines the communicative strategies used by the Armed Forces of Cape Verde (FACV) on their official Facebook page, aiming to understand their impact on public opinion and the construction of institutional legitimacy. A mixed-methods approach was employed, analyzing 129 posts published between April and October 2023, through a combination of quantitative interaction analysis (13,000 reactions and 3,000 comments) and thematic qualitative content analysis. The results show that posts related to tragic events generate higher levels of interaction, while recruitment and institutional communication content elicit more moderate responses. The study's findings highlight the need for strategic management of institutional social media, with emphasis on editorial planning and aligning content with the institution's communication goals.

Keywords: Armed Forces, Cape Verde, social media, public relations, performance.

Resumen

El presente artículo examina las estrategias de comunicación utilizadas por las Fuerzas Armadas de Cabo Verde (FACV) en su página de Facebook, con el objetivo de comprender su impacto en la opinión pública y la construcción de legitimidad institucional. A través de un

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enfoque metodológico mixto, se analizaron 129 publicaciones realizadas entre abril y octubre de 2023, combinando análisis cuantitativo de interacciones (13.000 reacciones, 3.000 comentarios) con un análisis cualitativo temático de contenido. Los resultados muestran que las publicaciones relacionadas con acontecimientos trágicos generan mayores niveles de interacción, mientras que los contenidos de alistamiento y comunicación institucional tienen una respuesta más moderada. Las implicaciones del estudio sugieren la necesidad de una gestión estratégica de las redes sociales institucionales, priorizando la planificación editorial y el alineamiento del contenido con los objetivos comunicacionales de la institución.

Palabras clave: Fuerzas Armadas, Cabo Verde, social media, relaciones públicas, performance.

Sumario

1. Introducción. 2. Marco teórico. 3. Metodología. 4. Resultados. 5. Discusión. 6. Conclusiones. 7. Referencias.

Summary

1. Introduction. 2. Theoretical framework. 3. Methodology. 4. Results. 5. Discussion. 6. Conclusions. 7. References.

1. INTRODUCTION

With rapid advancements in digital technology, social networks have transformed communication practices, reshaped public engagement and presented both significant opportunities and unique challenges, particularly in security, information governance, and institutional reputation (Mislove, 2009; Sommerfeldt et al, 2012; Lawson, 2014; Saxton & Walters, 2014; Bortree & Seltzer, 2015; Xu & Saxton, 2019). For professionals in Public Relations and Organizational Communication, these platforms have become critical tools, offering innovative channels for engagement and relationship-building with diverse audiences (Archer, 2019; Lu et al., 2021; Kim & Park, 2023, among others). This study focuses on the Cape Verde Armed Forces (FACV), exploring how their use of social media facilitates or hinders interaction with civil society

Cape Verde, on the other hand, is a small island country located on the west coast of Africa, just over 300 miles from Senegal. Formed by 10 islands and 16 islets with a population of no more than 500,000 inhabitants (Statistical National Institute from Cape Verde, 2021) - although 1.5 million live abroad - it has been independent from Portugal since 1975, with a stable democracy, a multi-party political system and a favorable ranking for freedom of the press and expression, ranking 41st according to the latest Reporters Without Borders study (2024), the fifth best on the continent, behind only Mauritania (33rd), Namibia (34th), Seychelles (37th) and South Africa (38th) (www.rsf.org). And despite being a small country without significant natural resources, it is a nation proud of itself, with a strong sense of identity (Lobban, 2018; Madeira, 2014; Madeira, 2015; Fernandes, 2002), which does not remain oblivious to the socio-technological changes occurring in other parts of the world, with its population increasingly adopting digital devices and technologies, such as cell phones and their associated applications (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc.) that facilitate communication among its citizens.

The following are some noteworthy statistics regarding Cabo Verde: 1) As of early 2024, the country had 433.7 thousand internet users, representing a penetration rate of 72.1%. 2) In January 2024, Cabo Verde recorded 266.1 thousand social media users, which accounted for 44.2% of its total population. 3) At the beginning of 2024, there were 609.5 thousand active cellular mobile connections in Cabo Verde, surpassing the total population at 101.3%. 4) According to data from advertising tools on leading social media platforms, there were 264.9 thousand users aged 18 and older engaging with social media in Cabo Verde at the start of 2024, equivalent to 63.7% of the population in that age group. 5) More generally, 61.3% of the total internet user base in Cabo Verde, regardless of age, utilized at least one social media platform in January 2024. 6) At that time, the gender distribution among social media users was balanced, with 49.8% being female and 50.2% male. Lastly, 7) According to data from Meta's advertising resources, Facebook had 266.1 thousand users in Cabo Verde in early 2024 (Data Report, 2024).

In this context, the Cape Verde Armed Forces have not remained on the sidelines, adopting these technologies (in this case, Facebook and Instagram as a communication tool in Social Networks) to communicate with their audiences of interest. However, the presence and use of social networks by armies remains a topic little studied and debated in recent years. Consequently, exploring how armies adopt and adapt their communication strategies in social networks is crucial to understand the contemporary dynamics of the Armed Forces in the digital environment.

While there is abundant research on the use of social media in organizational or business contexts (Saxton & Walters, 2014; Bortree & Seltzer, 2015; Xu & Saxton, 2019; Lu et al., 2021; Kim & Park, 2023, among others), there is relatively little in military organizations, characterized by being highly hierarchical, where order, discipline, obedience and verticality of command prevail. Despite this, there is research about the use of social media on military organizations (Mineiro, 2010; Lawson, 2014; Olsson et al, 2016) and master theses about specific country cases (Santos, 2015; Groulx, 2015). We are interested in reviewing the social media relationship between the Cape Verdean armed forces and citizens.

Nowadays, with the advance of new information and communication technologies, social networks stand out as one of the main current social phenomena (Capra, 2008). Thus, the FACV has shown a growing presence in social networks (specifically Facebook and Instagram), although it may still be insufficient, facing various challenges of communication with its stakeholders in the promotion of the institutional image, which makes it essential to work on the credibility of institutions, in this case, the FACV.

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social networks are:

“... web-based services that allow individuals to (1) create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and scroll through their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site”. (p. 211)

Considering this idea defended by both researchers, we understand that digital social networks are structures based on computer systems or computers, formed by individuals,

organizations or groups connected to each other by one or more types of relationships, such as friendship, common interests, commercial exchange, among other possibilities.

Wasserman and Faust (1994), along with Wellman (1997), define social networks as interconnected sets of actors (individuals, organizations, or groups) linked by social ties. Kent (2010) expands on this, describing social networks as "any interactive communication channel that allows two-way interaction and feedback" (p. 645).

Digital social networks (SNSs) offer users novel platforms for sharing information, ideas, and experiences. These interactive spaces enable global connectivity while fostering specialized online communities where users engage on topics of shared interest (Barros, 2020; Doh et al, 2024).

Essentially, social networks have emerged as widely embraced digital communication tools for businesses and institutions, serving as direct channels for connecting people with similar interests or goals. This simplicity and accessibility allow companies and institutions to engage directly with their target audiences (Nakara et al, 2012).

Indeed, McCorkindale & DiStaso (2014) noted that research on social media has rapidly become one of the most significant areas in public relations. Similarly, Wright & Hinson (2014; 2017) reached this conclusion in their extensive annual surveys, which tracked the growing influence of social and emerging media within the public relations industry. They found a broad consensus that new media significantly influence current public relations practices.

Through observations and informal interviews with stakeholders, it became clear that the FACV's presence on social media is limited, with engagement and interactivity lacking despite some recent increases in activity. This limited interaction and publication frequency could impact the institution's visibility and engagement potential.

As social media becomes a more prevalent tool for businesses and institutions (Terra, 2009), evaluating the visibility and effectiveness of these platforms is increasingly crucial. Effective engagement includes sharing accurate information, acknowledging errors transparently, and welcoming feedback and criticism from followers (Ibid, 2009). This focus is particularly relevant given the critical importance of social networks in public relations for institutional visibility and audience engagement.

Grunig & Hunt (1984) argue that public relations serve a pivotal role as a strategic function within companies and institutions, managing both internal and external communications. Public relations efforts are not peripheral but are integrated as fundamental elements of organizational strategy and planning (Cabrero & Cabrero, 2001).

Thus, public relations represent a strategic function within organizations, involving the planning and execution of targeted communication that fosters engagement with diverse publics (Wragg, 1989). Establishing trust and mutual understanding between the institution and its audiences remains a central goal of public relations. Through clear, effective, and tailored communication, public relations professionals inform and engage audiences, fostering a trusted relationship with stakeholders and conveying relevant institutional information (Grunig & Hunt, 1992).

Therefore, this study has delimited the following research questions: RQ1. To what extent does the presence and effectiveness of the FACV on social networks contribute to the promotion of transparency, public trust and accountability to civil society? and RQ2. What type of content does the FACV share on its Facebook page?

Thus, the general objective was to examine the communication of the FACV with civil society through the social network Facebook and the specific objectives were:

1. To study the communication and public relations strategy of the FACV in the promotion and dissemination of content on the social network Facebook, based on its publications, likes and comments.
2. To analyze and classify the types of content published on the Facebook page of the Cape Verde Armed Forces over a period of 7 months.
3. To characterize the official profile of the Cape Verde Armed Forces on the social network Facebook, considering aspects such as available links, number of followers and other specific information available.
4. To evaluate the *response* of the Cape Verdean Armed Forces -if any- to users' comments.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over the last two decades, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have risen in prominence (Wang et al, 2021; Avidar & Cohen, 2023), becoming vital tools for a wide range of organizations, particularly during times of crisis (Paul, 2001; Waters et al, 2009). While originally created for personal interactions, Social Networking Sites (SNS) are now employed by nonprofits, governments, corporations, and media outlets to disseminate information and advance organizational goals (Muralidharan et al, 2011). These platforms allow organizations to connect and engage with their stakeholders, often in real time, facilitating crucial exchanges.

Nonprofit and volunteer organizations, for instance, utilize social media in disaster scenarios to convey essential service updates and program details to their audiences (Paul, 2001; Waters et al., 2009). Waters' (2009) research further underscores how nonprofits capitalize on social media to streamline their operations, communicate with donors and volunteers, and maintain public awareness about their initiatives. By interacting with audiences on social platforms like Facebook, these organizations work to strengthen relationships with key stakeholders.

Similarly, Cho et al. (2014) found that nonprofit organizations adopted social media more quickly than corporations and academia, largely due to the platforms' interactive potential. For example, Facebook offers user-friendly engagement tools such as "Like," "Share," and "Comment," which allow audiences to express their interest in, share, or discuss content. These features facilitate a multi-tiered engagement model that public relations researchers leverage to examine immediate responses to messaging (Kim & Yang, 2017). Cho et al. (2014) further suggest that these various levels of user interaction reflect differing engagement intensities with nonprofit posts.

Beyond nonprofits, other entities—including the military—are increasingly leveraging social media to improve communication strategies. However, there is limited research on military-specific social media use. Studies that do exist emphasize its dual function in enhancing

national reputation and recruiting potential personnel (Olsson et al, 2016). Military social media posts often link to official websites, lending authenticity and relevance to their content and encouraging meaningful dialogue with a broader public.

In the United States, the military's adoption of social media is visible across platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr, which it uses to connect with diverse audiences and share information about missions, values, and career opportunities (Perry, 2010). Lt. Maj. Gen. Kevin J. Bergner, head of the Army's Online and Social Media Division, highlighted that the shift towards active online engagement allows the military to meet the public where they are digitally and establish an accessible, credible communication channel (Perry, 2010).

In addition, the US military has other types of relationships through mass media. An example of this is the US Navy's initiative known as "Sailor for a Day", which is an internship for journalists in which they get to know first-hand the day-to-day running of a naval base. By focusing on reporters as an audience, they improve their knowledge of the organization and ensure better coverage, combating misinformation (Veil et al, 2018).

Social media's role in public relations has inspired scholars to explore its transformative impact on communication theories. Kent & Taylor (2002) first advocated for creating dialogic online relationships to promote mutual understanding between organizations and their audiences. Their framework suggests that organizations prioritize user-centered communication methods, which was expanded by Kent & Li (2020), who called for a distinct public relations theory that encompasses unique social media features like conversational tone and user engagement.

Military organizations benefit from these platforms' functionalities, using social media applications in recruitment, public relations, public diplomacy, and facilitation of internal communication with service members and families (Lynn, 2009; Boatwright & Pyle, 2023). In a similar way, Eaton (2007) notes that YouTube specifically allows the Army to showcase its global contributions and role through videos, while Lawson (2014) suggests that studying the military's social media usage can reveal insights into digital-era image construction.

Social media also empowers users, whom Jenkins (2006) describes as "prosumers" or content creators and consumers, to participate actively in cultural dialogues. This shift from traditional one-way communication channels (e.g., television) to interactive platforms like social media reshapes the balance of influence between organizations and their publics (Castells, 2003). According to Torres (2009), the Internet has created an unparalleled scope for interaction, linking individuals globally and erasing temporal and physical boundaries. Lee & Alhabash (2025) take a view on the role of social media influencers introducing their own cultural background on promoting national bandings.

This social media evolution has driven the need for new roles in organizations, such as the Community Manager, who acts as a digital liaison between an organization and its audiences. Castelló Martínez (2010) characterizes this position as essential for crafting immediate, transparent communication policies that enhance organizational presence in social media environments. The Community Manager's role includes monitoring and responding to online sentiment, an approach increasingly adopted by institutions to foster community engagement and customer loyalty.

As organizations refine their social media strategies, research continues to document a growing understanding of how social platforms impact public relations practices. Yet scholars note gaps in public relations practitioners' expertise in fully leveraging social media's interactivity (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Robson & James, 2013). This deficiency has led to missed opportunities for dialogue-driven relationships with audiences, an aspect crucial to building trust and sustaining engagement over time (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007).

Public relations research continues to evolve, with scholars now focused on building social media-specific theories that address attributes like user interaction and platform-specific engagement (Kent & Li, 2020). Among these theories, we find the *conversational human voice* (Kelleher, 2009), where "organizations communicate with large audiences and the response is worth exploring". To achieve this contact, organizations have media that allow them to manage their online assets such as websites, blogs and FAQ lists, which allow the organization to engage with the public as one more within the discussion (Sears & Weimberger, 2000, cited by Kelleher, 2009). Another theory that points in this same direction is *organizational listening* (Macnamara, 2016), which develops the idea that the organization "listens" to its publics, to establish a dialogue with them, which could be relevant to foster trust in a military context.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research strategy, combining quantitative analysis of social media interaction metrics with thematic qualitative content analysis. This methodological choice allows the researchers to capture both measurable audience behavior (e.g., reactions, comments, shares) and interpretative narratives embedded in institutional discourse (Busquet & Medina-Cambron, 2017). According to Gil (2018), mixed methods enable the combination of objective data with subjective interpretation, allowing for a broader and more nuanced understanding of social phenomena.

Qualitative research in this context seeks to explore meanings, perceptions, and values, working with dimensions of reality that cannot be fully expressed in numbers (Minayo, 2001). It emphasizes the interpretative depth necessary to understand institutional identity and symbolic communication.

This is a descriptive and explanatory study. According to Hyman (1971, p. 102), descriptive studies aim to measure one or more variables in a defined population, while explanatory studies, as described by Sierra Bravo (1998), seek to identify causal or correlative relationships between variables. The aim was not only to describe the nature of FACV's digital communication but also to analyze how its content and strategies influence public interaction and perception.

The analysis focused on posts published between April and October 2023 on the official Facebook pages of the Cape Verdean Armed Forces (FACV) and its three regional commands: the First, Second, and Third Military Regions. This period was chosen due to its concentration of high-impact events, including the death of soldiers, public ceremonies, official visits, promotions, and recruitment campaigns. Facebook was selected as the exclusive platform of analysis because it is the primary institutional communication channel of the FACV and the most widely used social media platform in Cape Verde, with a 70,02% of average social media user preference on 2023 (Statcounter, 2025). Other platforms were excluded due to their low institutional activity during the analysis period.

A total of 129 posts were collected from the main FACV page, and over 100 additional posts from the regional pages⁴. For each post, a structured matrix captured five variable groups: 1. Temporal variables (date and time of publication); 2. Content format (text, image, video, or mixed media); 3. Engagement metrics (likes, comments, replies, shares); 4. Thematic content (type of event or message); 5. Strategic alignment with institutional communication objectives.

3.1. Analytical framework

The analysis also sought to determine whether each post aligned with the institution's communication objectives and to identify the specific goal behind each message. Posts were categorized according to six communicational purposes: a) Involvement - Promote interaction with the audience, through asking questions, soliciting feedback, collecting opinions, and affective exploration (Santos, 2015); b) Tragic News - A category added by us to capture events involving death, loss, or serious accidents with emotional impact; c) Mission - Publicize the daily activity of the institution, to fulfill its mission or training to accomplish it (Santos, 2015); d) Recruitment - Publicize ongoing or future recruitment calls (Santos, 2015); e) Warning - Messages with alerts, urgent announcements, or operational instructions, mainly aimed at military audiences; and f) Public Information - General informational content aimed at the wider population, such as institutional data or updates.

In addition to this classification, the analysis applied five transversal analytical axes to deepen the understanding of each post: 1. Activity – Identifies the type of event or institutional action. 2. Community – Defines the audience addressed (e.g., soldiers, families, civil society). 3. Interaction – Analyzes the level and nature of engagement (e.g., emotional, participatory, reactive). 4. Format – Specifies the type of media used. 5. Strategy – Assesses whether the post reflects a planned or reactive communication logic. These five dimensions enabled a multidimensional reading of each publication, going beyond engagement metrics to reveal strategic, relational, and symbolic dimensions.

Considering the analysis technique, the quantitative component consisted of organizing all data in Excel spreadsheets for statistical treatment, calculating frequencies, distributions, and cross-variable comparisons. Facebook Insights was used to complement this data with indicators such as reach, visibility, and interaction trends.

The qualitative component was based on *manual thematic coding*, performed independently by two researchers. Triangulation was applied to ensure inter-coder reliability. Although no specialized software (e.g., Nvivo or AtlasTi) was used, all matrices were systematically reviewed and validated to ensure consistency of categories.

Content analysis, according to Bardin (1977), involves systematic, objective procedures to describe the content of messages. Krippendorff (2004) adds that this technique is suitable for analyzing all forms of communication—including written, visual, and multimedia formats—making it particularly appropriate for digital institutional communication.

⁴ Data tables annexes available at

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cUDZUPJYMtowJDDoUWlFhgopl64b_vc1/view?usp=sharing

4. RESULTS

The analysis examined engagement levels across four official Facebook pages associated with the Cape Verde Armed Forces (FACV): the general FACV page, and pages for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Military Regions. Engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares) were used to measure audience interaction, while post frequency, content type, and response behavior were also analyzed to assess FACV's overall digital engagement strategy.

4.1. Post frequency and engagement by Region

The data reveals significant differences in post frequency across regions: a) The 2nd Military Region led in activity with 90 posts, while the 3rd Military Region had the lowest with only 7 posts; b) Despite fewer posts, the general FACV page recorded the highest engagement (17,031 interactions), indicating that factors beyond post frequency, such as content relevance and audience targeting, likely influenced engagement outcomes. This disparity suggests that while frequent posting may contribute to visibility, it does not necessarily correlate with higher audience engagement.

Table 1. Engagement metrics by Region

Region	Total post	Total engagements (likes, comments, shares)	Average engagement per post	Response rate
Cape Verde Armed Forces	38	17,031	448	0%
2nd Military Region	90	8,179	91	0%
1st Military Region	33	2,329	71	0%
3rd Military Region	7	766	109	0%

Source: Own elaboration.

These findings suggest that while high posting frequency contributes to visibility, the type of content and its resonance with audiences may play an even larger role in driving engagement. To better understand this, we now analyze the formats and thematic focuses used across the FACV's social media content.

4.2. Content types and formats used

Examining the types and formats of content published provides insights into FACV's content strategy and its potential appeal to different audience segments. Each region showed distinct preferences in both the content style and the themes conveyed. Each region displayed distinct preferences for content format:

- Text + Photo was the most common format across all regions, particularly in the 2nd Military Region (47 instances), suggesting a preference for visually driven posts.
- The general FACV page and 1st Military Region experimented with a broader mix, including Text + Photo + Video and Text + Photo + Link formats. This diversity could indicate an attempt to attract different audience segments or address varied informational needs.

Interestingly, despite the broader format range, pure text posts were the least utilized format across all pages. This implies a strong institutional preference for multimedia content, which typically garners more engagement on social platforms.

To further analyze the FACV's engagement strategy, it is also crucial to consider the thematic focus of each post. Each theme may evoke unique responses from the audience, offering deeper insight into what types of content resonate most strongly

4.3. Engagement metrics by post content

FACV's Facebook posts covered a variety of themes, classified as: a) Public Information: General updates on FACV activities or events. b) Engagement: Efforts to directly connect with the audience, often using content that encourages likes or shares. c) Recruitment: Posts focused on military recruitment events or initiatives. d) Tragic News: Updates involving incidents, often somber or emotionally charged, like memorial announcements. And e) Mission: Content directly showcasing military operations, training, or institutional accomplishments.

Table 2. Frequency of content type by Region

Region	Public information	Engagement	Recruitment	Tragic News	Mission
Cape Verde Armed Forces	8	4	5	15	1
1st Military Region	3	3	0	0	1
2nd Military Region	5	56	0	2	2
Erd Military Region	4	0	0	0	0

Source: Own elaboration.

From the table, it is clear that Tragic News posts, especially on the general FACV page, attracted significant interactions, suggesting strong emotional resonance with the audience. In contrast, Engagement-focused posts in the 2nd Military Region also performed well, indicating that interactive content types may stimulate more public participation. The Recruitment category, however, was underutilized across all pages despite its potential to attract younger demographics interested in military careers.

While the FACV's posts receive varied engagement, another important factor in social media performance is the institution's responsiveness to user interactions. The FACV's lack of response to comments represents a missed opportunity for building a stronger, dialogic relationship with its audience.

4.4. Lack of response to user engagement

Across all regions, FACV's social media presence shows an absence of direct engagement with followers. There were no responses from FACV personnel to user comments, which suggests a missed opportunity for two-way communication and for building a reciprocal relationship

with the community. The absence of feedback may lead to a perception that the FACV is disinterested in public opinion or queries, potentially affecting trust and transparency.

4.5. Content timing and audience reach

Analysis of post timing reveals a strategic choice by FACV to post during and outside of office hours. However, posts published outside regular hours—such as evenings and weekends—were relatively few. This pattern indicates that while the FACV posts consistently, they may not be optimizing posting times for maximum reach. A more structured approach to timing, aligned with peak social media activity periods, could potentially boost engagement levels further.

- In short, the results indicate that although the FACV maintains an active presence on Facebook, there is room for strategic improvement: Increased Interaction: Adopting a more interactive communication style, including response to comments, could foster a stronger sense of community.
- Content Diversification: Diversifying content themes and formats may help reach varied audience demographics more effectively.
- Optimized Posting Times: Posting at high-traffic times could enhance visibility and user engagement.

5. DISCUSSION

This project set out to analyze the performance of the Cape Verdean Armed Forces (FACV) on Facebook, guided by two central research questions: RQ1: To what extent does FACV's presence and effectiveness on social media contribute to transparency, public trust, and accountability to civil society? RQ2: What type of content does the FACV share on its Facebook page, and how does it interact (or not) with its followers?

The following discussion interprets the key findings in light of these questions, drawing both theoretical and practical implications, and proposing recommendations to enhance the FACV's digital communication strategy.

The analysis of FACV's presence on Facebook reveals a structured but predominantly unidirectional communication pattern. While the institution demonstrates consistent activity, it largely employs Facebook as a platform for broadcasting rather than interaction. This aligns with Santos' (2015) framework, where institutional content tends to emphasize protocol and ceremonial functions rather than participatory or dialogic strategies.

Posts related to tragic events and operational missions generated significantly more engagement than those centered on formal ceremonies or recruitment drives. This confirms Minayo's (2001) assertion that emotionally charged and symbolically dense messages have greater power to resonate with audiences. Moreover, the strong public response to specific regional posts - particularly those from the Second Military Region - suggests that proximity and community-specific relevance enhance digital performance.

Despite these spikes in engagement, the FACV does not interact with user comments or feedback. This omission weakens its potential to foster public trust and accountability, especially in a context where citizens expect responsiveness and transparency from public

institutions (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Fearn-Banks, 2016). It also contradicts the affordances of platforms like Facebook, which are designed for two-way communication (Toffler, 1980; Jenkins, 2006; Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Content-wise, the predominance of long-form posts with photos indicates a preference for descriptive communication. However, the underuse of interactive formats - such as videos, polls, or Q&A sessions - limits the institution's ability to connect emotionally and cognitively with followers. Incorporating more diverse formats and interactive techniques would help fulfill the strategic potential of social media.

The five analytical dimensions - Activity, Community, Interaction, Format, and Strategy - offered an enriched understanding of FACV's digital narrative. They revealed not only the thematic focus of posts but also the absence of audience segmentation and the low strategic use of media formats.

5.1. Theoretical implications and practical recommendations

This case highlights the challenge faced by military institutions in adapting their hierarchical communication logic to horizontal digital environments. While it is understandable that certain constraints apply, the opportunity cost of silence - especially in times of crisis - is high.

Integrating models like the Conversational Human Voice (CHV) (Kelleher, 2009; Huang & Ki, 2023; Holmgreen, 2024) could bridge this gap by humanizing institutional discourse. The CHV approach emphasizes warmth, openness, and responsiveness in organizational communication - qualities that build legitimacy and foster trust in digital spaces.

The theoretical framework of Santos (2015) also proved useful in categorizing and interpreting the objectives behind each post, demonstrating that a dialogic typology can be adapted to military institutional contexts. Moreover, the five transversal axes provided analytical depth that could serve future research models in public sector communication.

Emerging technologies such as AI-driven chatbots offer promising avenues to support basic interaction needs without compromising military protocol. As Jayakumar et al. (2024), Morsi (2023), and Adam et al. (2020) suggest, such tools can support responsive, scalable communication in public institutions while reducing human resource constraints.

Based on the evidence gathered, several practical improvements can be proposed: 1) *Develop a strategic digital communication plan* that goes beyond content dissemination and includes dialogic engagement tactics. 2) *Train communication personnel* - both centrally and regionally - in digital strategy, storytelling, and public engagement tools. 3) *Diversify content formats* to include videos, interactive visuals, and participatory posts (e.g., Q&A, live updates, surveys). 4) *Create editorial guidelines* to help standardize tone, voice, and segmentation across FACV's different regional pages. 5) *Pilot AI-supported interaction tools*, such as chatbots or automated replies, to test controlled engagement pathways. And last 6) *Monitor and analyze audience responses more systematically* (including reactions beyond likes: love, sad, angry, care), to refine message strategy. *Such steps would not only enhance FACV's transparency but also contribute to the construction of a stronger, more responsive digital institutional identity.*

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to understand how the Cape Verdean Armed Forces (FACV) use Facebook to communicate with the public, improve institutional image, and promote transparency and trust. It was guided by two core research questions. The mixed-methods analysis of 168 Facebook posts over a seven-month period revealed that the FACV maintains a strong but largely one-way digital presence. While engagement levels were high - particularly on posts related to tragedy and mission - the lack of two-way communication and feedback limits the platform's potential for relationship-building.

The most effective posts were those with emotional content and community significance, such as the death of soldiers or the celebration of military activities. These posts aligned with Santos' (2015) framework, showing that content evoking shared values or emotional responses resonates most with the audience.

However, the institution's failure to interact with followers, to respond to comments, or to personalize its messages indicates a gap between its communication efforts and the dialogic expectations of digital users. This undermines opportunities to strengthen public trust and project transparency in a meaningful way (Archer, 2019; Lu et al., 2021; Kim & Park, 2023).

At a theoretical level, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about institutional communication in digital contexts—especially for military organizations—by validating the applicability of dialogic and rhetorical models (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Huang & Ki, 2023; Holmgren, 2024) to hierarchical institutions.

Practically, the findings offer a roadmap for improvement: diversify content formats, invest in training for communication teams, implement interaction strategies, and consider the use of AI-based tools to scale engagement (Morsi, 2023; Wahab, 2023; Jayakumar et al, 2024). Monitoring audience reactions and segmenting content by region and public profile would also refine the institution's strategic communication efforts.

In conclusion, the FACV's current use of Facebook reflects a traditional institutional mindset anchored in information dissemination. To fulfill the democratic potential of social networks, a paradigm shift is required - one that embraces listening, exchange, and co-construction of meaning with the public. In doing so, the FACV would not only enhance its public legitimacy but also set a benchmark for other military institutions navigating the demands of transparency and citizen engagement in the digital age.

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