

# **STICKERS ON POLITICS. THE POWER OF A BRAND IS ITS WEAKNESS – A CASE OF ACTIVISM AND SUBVERTISING**

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## **Introduction**

City life is busy, filled with movement, people, colour, light and sounds that give places a lively atmosphere. With the clutter of all these stimuli, it is easy to miss a few stickers randomly glued to walls, doors, poles, traffic lights, bus stops. This article is about stickers that manage to stand out from the city's overcrowded surfaces, attracting attention from citizens, politicians and the media. They were carrying a powerful message: "Morto." [Dead.].

This all happened in Porto (Portugal) in 2017, but some contextual information might help to understand this case.

## **The City**

Porto is the second city of Portugal, located in the north of the country. Famous for its port wine, it has been adding several other reasons for popularity in recent years, with a proportionate growth in reputation: a number of prizes and awards attest to its international recognition as a success story, namely as Europe's Best Destination in 2012, 2014 and 2017.

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Experiencing a period of economic growth, Porto has been witnessing a long-term strategy of structural improvements, including an international airport that attracted low-cost airlines, serving as a gateway for millions of tourists who came to revive the city business and therefore attracted investment. There have also been notable events, namely Porto European Capital of Culture 2001 (European Commission, 2011), which triggered significant rehabilitation and the emergence of iconic buildings such as Casa da Música (Marmelo, 2011) which have helped to put Porto on the map.

### **The Brand**

Following the positioning of the city as a destination of excellence, a communication strategy was conceived, propelled by the creation of a new brand and graphic identity for the city in 2014. The brand has a curious peculiarity, since the logo also functions as a slogan: “Porto.” [Porto period] (Fig. 1), or, as Porto’s mayor stresses in his presentation of the city brand identity manual, referring to the full stop: “The smallest tagline in the world” (Aires, 2017, p.3). The brand’s concept highlights the city’s uniqueness and diversity and won several branding and design awards, namely a double Graphics Awards (Silver and Print Branding) in 2016; Double gold (best brand implementation and best of the show) at the European Design Awards (2014); a Graphite Pencil in the Design and Advertising Awards (D&AD, 2015).



Fig. 1. – “Porto.” brand; Source: Manual de Identidade do Porto. (Aires, 2017, p.11)

## The Context

In the summer of 2017, there was a pre-election atmosphere in the country and the city (local elections were scheduled for October 1st). Although the summer is frequently poor in terms of news value and local politicians all over the country were fighting for media attention, one particular event stood out, enlivening the debate and providing the media with valuable content during the silly season. Randomly placed throughout the city, stickers were mimicking the city's brand "Porto.". They were sending a disturbing message: "Morto.", which means literally "Dead." (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. – "Morto." stickers (Summer 2017); Source: (Moreira, 2017)

By subverting the original message of the city's logo to broadcast a counter power message, the stickers were a case of *subvertising* and of paradoxical activism, simultaneously enhancing love and hate messages towards the city and its brand.

Apparently anonymous, the campaign would have remained low profile, perhaps having a slight impact on the minds of the passers by, if it were not for the action of the mayor himself who, by placing an inflammatory publication on his official Facebook page, captured the attention of both the citizens and the media, triggering a political and civic controversy that exposed local idiosyncrasies.

## Theoretical approach

This research case can be framed within the theoretical work of territorial communication, namely some models that provide both structural and contextual understanding of the phenomenon. We summon the model of the territorial brand hexagon (Anholt, 2006), the stakeholder-based branding theory (Gaio & Gouveia, 2007) and the line of thought of humanized and holistic place marketing (Rainisto, 2003; Rainisto & Kotler, 2007; Kotler, 2010; Anholt, 2016; Kavaratzis, 2012, 2017).

To complete the theoretical structure, we have included a set of conceptual universes of participation (Carpentier, 2011; Gumpert, 2017), activism (DeLaure, Fink & Dery, 2017; Bakardjieva: 2003, 2009) and subvertising (Matsu, 1994; Melo, 2011) but also storytelling (Pera, 2017) and co-creation (Woodside, Sood & Miller, 2008; Woodside & Megehee, 2009).

Territorial communication is still undergoing a construction process with much conceptual discussion (Papadopoulos, 2004; Kavaratzis, 2005; Hanna & Rowley, 2008). Among its idiosyncrasies is the fact that it emerges from diverse, transversal and yet complementary universes, namely, geography, marketing (Kotler & Gertner, 2002), branding, and political and diplomatic communication (Dolea, 2015).

In order to study place branding and the territorial range of the concept, whether a city or a nation, several models have been proposed, designed and updated. From Kotler's 4 Ps of traditional marketing (product, price, place and promotion) to specific place marketing proposals (Kotler, 2002; Rainisto, 2003; Rainisto & Kotler, 2007), concepts and strategies have been disrupted and adapted to fit the place branding and the territorial marketing realm. Furthermore, operational mandatory procedures such as territorial strategic plan evaluation, including the communication dimension, as well as ratings and city rankings, led to a quest for adequate analysing frameworks applied to territories.

Therefore, different settings, models and conceptual instruments from the communication universe have been evolving and leaving a mark on territorial marketing and communication as well. Recent paradigmatic shifts, from a promotional culture (Wernick, 1991) to a participatory and convergent culture (Jenkins, 2006) and from a functionalist approach, based on efficacy and performance, to an interpretative approach focused on social impact and public space have also forged new perspectives and critical reflection on place branding.

Anholt (2006) developed a model based on six variables (presence, place, potential, pulse, people and prerequisites) that became a classic model for evaluating city marketing effectiveness. It has become known as the city brand hexagon. But for the assessment of a territorial brand's value and impact, more communicational and symbolic criteria are to be taken into consideration.

Mihalis Kavaratzis published a number of works advocating that both corporate and product branding add valuable contributions to city branding but do not manage to comprehend it entirely (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009). Stressing the common bias of looking to place brands through the inadequate prism of traditional marketing, limiting it to the variable of promotion, and frequently to the visual elements of a logo, a slogan and some advertising, Kavaratzis points out that “branding does not equal promotion and brand management cannot be limited to promotional activities. Branding needs to be thought of as a complete and continuous process interlinked with all marketing efforts” (Kavaratzis, 2009, p.29). Furthermore, he argues that although corporate branding provides approximate conceptual tools, cities appear to be more complex than corporations, not only because of the lack of control over some variables and the multiplicity of stakeholders, but also because “the adoption and projection of a single clear identity, ethos and image by cities is deemed more difficult (...) if desirable at all” (Kavaratzis, 2009, p.30).

The struggle over control is also implied by the author in the separation he advocates between intentional and unintentional communication, with the latter being related to the effects of non-communication targeted actions: landscape, infrastructures and organizational strategies and what Kavaratzis describes as the city's behaviour, including leaders' vision, financial support and the types of events that take place in the city.

Therefore, a complex mix of tangible as well as intangible variables defines the city and its brand in parallel with a humanized version of the place, frequently mentioned as if it had human attributes such as personality or behaviour.

The stakeholder-based branding approach gets inspiration from the strategic and organizational framework according to which "Any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p.46) is to be taken into account as relevant. This inclusive approach conceptualizes a vast number of actors with interest and influence in a territorial brand and has been used as a framework for several place branding studies with an impact perspective (Cerdeira-Bertomeu & Sarabia-Sanchez, 2016).

From the communication viewpoint, territorial branding has followed trends of organizational and strategic communication, namely, more holistic and symbolic approaches centred on the creation of meaning through brands as living entities, narratives and storytelling, broadcast and social cast experiences, capturing "the ways in which value, meaning and self-understanding are made" (Aronczyk, 2008, p.46) and envisaging that "nation branding as a discourse privileges the logic of value exchange, while concealing alternative possibilities for narrating the nation" (Kaneva, 2011, p.12)

Other interpretations and approaches to territorial branding are being taken into account, namely the ones dealing with identity issues (global, national, regional, local); feelings of belonging, self-awareness and projection of

communities, “historicizing the texts and practices of nation branding and exposing their linkage to relations of social power” (Kaneva, 2011, p.128) and therefore exposing issues of confidence, legitimacy, and power: “(...) country promotion can be seen as the social construction of discourses about the country: both as social process (of socially constructing discourses) and as outcome (the discourses themselves) that are subject to power relations within society” (Dolea, 2015, p.275).

Furthermore, efforts to change attitudes and behaviours related to a territory through communicational efforts and branding strategies are a common occurrence (Pike, 2009).

Currently, the value of a territorial brand is frequently assessed by a complex mix of components, for example, by their tangible and intangible dimensions; attractiveness and fixation potential; ability to identify and project a vision; the relationship with different stakeholders; interpretation and transmission of the residents’ relationship with the territory and its values. It is not assessed by its positioning performance and efficiency.

Nonetheless, along with the battle for a space in the hearts and minds of its publics, or targets, as strategic communication advocates (Trout & Ries, 2001), the capacity of a territorial brand to address the expectations of multiple groups of stakeholders – whether they are tourists, investors or residents – is perhaps its foremost challenge. It involves competitive identity, reputation and image management (Anholt, 2007; 2016) and it depends on strategic decisions and definitions; it relies on a territory positioning as a destination (Olins, 2004) or a location (Kerr, 2006); it depends on the vision for the brand and the city, on communities’ self-perceptions and, not the least, on political commitment to the territorial cause beyond short term ambitions: “How can local politicians be persuaded to engage in a complex and demanding process that will bring results only long after their four-year term has expired?” (Kavaratzis, 2009, p.36).

Furthermore, the case of the stickers should be analysed as a participatory and activist approach. It is certainly a case of activist participation in the form of appropriation both of the physical and symbolic public space of the city and of the city's public space expanded to the digital world, a case of participation in the media and through the media (Carpentier, 2011). Different levels of involvement and participation should be considered, as well as the framework of participation as a form of cultural resistance (DeLaure, Fink & Dery, 2017; Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2013; Jenkins, 2012).

Resistance through art is common in intervention actions in the city space. Coined as culture jamming (DeLaure, Fink & Dery, 2017), subvertising or brandalism (Lekakis, 2017), these actions traditionally express antagonistic or alternative messages by subverting symbols and codes embedded in institutional networks, whether they are brands, corporations or, in this case, a city, a territorial brand.

Moreover these co-creative outputs have increased engagement potential (Melo & Balonas, 2013), not only because they involve several participants but mainly because their subversion and disruption resonates with the audiences involved in their everyday lives. Participation then becomes a form of sub-activism (Melo 2011), a concept coined by Bakardjeva (2003, 2009) that explores forms of daily activism that are less visible or demanding.

Last but not the least, storytelling theory may help to explain these phenomena, particularly in the cases when brands are driven into dialogue (Woodside, Sood & Miller, 2008). By adding new meanings to existing messages, in subvertising actions or even in candid random tourist activities, participants create alternative narratives to the mainstream, spreading them through their own networks and on their own terms (Pera, 2017; Woodside & Megehee, 2009).



## **The research method**

We use a combined research method based on a case study approach, interpretative hermeneutics and content analysis.

As it is intended to reach a deep understanding of the phenomenon (Yin, 2017), the case study emerged as suitable, mainly “because the context is part of the study” (Yin, 1981, p.59) and its framing and idiosyncrasies are quite relevant.

Furthermore, we rely on theoretical framing related both to territorial communication management and branding, participation and activism and subvertising and storytelling to provide a conceptual structure.

As mentioned above, interpretative hermeneutics and the procedures of content analysis will be central to understanding this case.

We will study the main messages present on the Facebook page of the mayor of the city of Porto, Rui Moreira, including 1) the mayor’s post (06.08.17) and 2) the comments that followed.

As a guideline to the research we tried to understand: 1) What issues emerged from the conflicting forces in debate? 2) What stance did the mayor and the citizens take towards: the city, the brand, the stickers and the politics? 3) What was the impact of the stickers?

The corpus of the research can be found on the Facebook page of the mayor of the city of Porto. Nevertheless, for ethical reasons, comments’ authors are not unveiled in this publication to protect their identities. The mayor’s post is identified since he is a public person subject to public scrutiny.

## **Content analysis**

As part of the methodological mix, we have adopted content analysis, understanding that this is a common designation “for multiple ways of analysing

the relationship between meaning and language, as well as its social and political repercussions” (Carvalho, 2000, p.143). Discourse therefore constitutes an important component in the social construction of reality as this case intends to show.

Within the possibilities of analysis proposed by several authors, we will adopt van Dijk’s perspective (1988) – the macrostructures assumption, meant to identify the fundamental thematic structures of each text, which is a reduction of information to central semantic aspects. “Such reduction is done with the aid of what he calls ‘macro rules’, which can be, for example, the removal of redundant information or the summary of several propositions into a more general one. In this way, van Dijk reconstructs the texts in the form of thematic skeletons” (Carvalho, 2000, p.143).

In short, for van Dijk, macrostructures are “organized sets of propositions” (1988, p.32), with macro rules, “semantic mapping rules or transformations, which link lower level propositions to higher level macropropositions. (...) Deletion, generalization, and construction [are] the major macrorules that reduce information of a text to its topics.” (Dijk, p.32).

Finally, as Carvalho points out, macrostructures, like any semantic structure, can be organized into a set of categories, such as causes (of an event), antecedents or consequences (2000, p.147). This seems to be the methodology that best suits the case under study.

As an analytical tool, we follow the concept of framing proposed by Entman (Carvalho, 2000, p.16). According to Entman, framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (1993).

This set of guidelines will guide our analysis and conclusions. In addition, we seek interpretations at textual level, taking into account the text itself and not the intertextual level (references to other texts). Despite this, we

will consider extratextual aspects, that is, influences that the text may have received from political, economic or cultural contexts.

In the end, the aim is to understand how meaning is encoded in the text and how it is received, with the analysis centred on one moment in time.

Furthermore, we have included in the analysis of the text the four dimensions related to the context: (1) the city, (2) the brand, (3) the stickers, and (4) politics and politicians (Fig. 3)

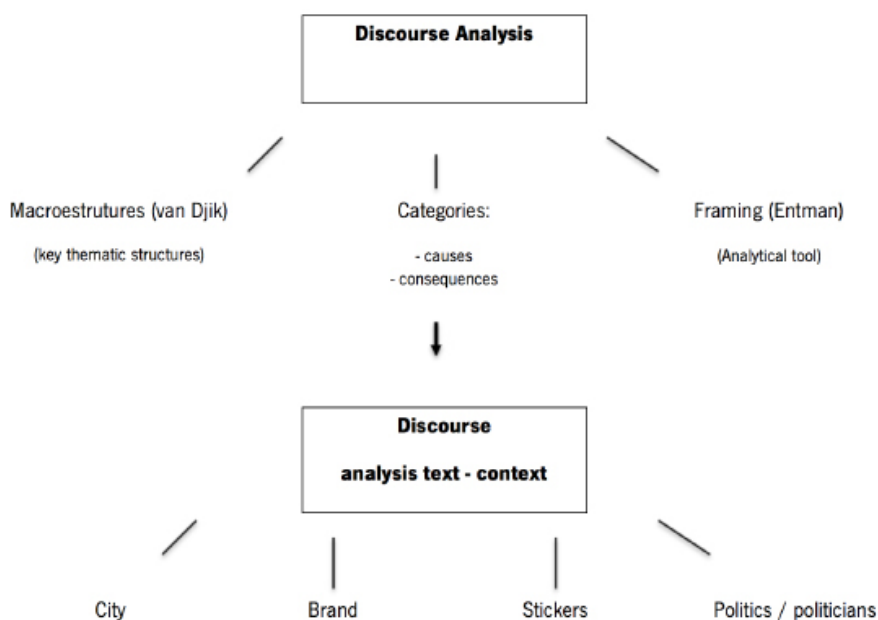


Fig. 3. – Content analysis structure scheme – methodological options

### The study

The city of Porto’s mayor, Rui Moreira, published a post on the “Morto.” stickers on August 6th, 2017. At the time of this research there were 964 comments and 694 shares.

Concerning content analysis, we will follow the suggested method explained above, based on van Dijk’s macroestruturas and on Entman’s framing analytic tool. The aim is to understand the meaning of the mayor’s discourse and

to compare it with the citizens' reaction, taking the four categories of the context into account: city, brand, stickers and politics.

### Analysis of the mayor's post

Macrostructure analysis: the mayor's post (official Facebook page)

<b>Macrostructure analysis: the mayor's post (official Facebook page)</b>	
<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>"Stickers all over the city."</b>
<b>Tone</b>	denunciation
<b>Attitude</b>	"defender" of the city
<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>"I do not know who finances them nor their goal, but it has to do with the elections and my opponents."</b>
<b>Tone</b>	accusation
<b>Attitude</b>	victimization
<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>"Thousands of stickers.", (brand) "Admired worldwide, hated here."</b>
<b>Tone</b>	dramatization
<b>Attitude</b>	encouraging indignation
<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>"Whoever does it hates Porto.", "Onwards.", "My Porto knows – I always knew – how to respond."</b>
<b>Tone</b>	instigation
<b>Attitude</b>	promoting indignation
<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>"The Porto brand. Recognized in the world today." "Capitals of large countries ask us for help to apply systems like ours."</b>
<b>Tone</b>	emotional
<b>Attitude</b>	promoting a sense of belonging and relevance

Fig. 4 - Macrostructure analysis: the mayor's post

As the analysis points out (Fig.4), the mayor’s post uses emotive speech that intends to provoke citizens and lead them to take a stance on the arrival of the stickers, understood by Rui Moreira as a political attack that harms the city and the Porto brand. Therefore, the mayor’s speech constitutes an attempt at social construction of reality. This intended effect operates through six categories of communication tones: denunciation, accusation, dramatization, instigation and emotion.

Rui Moreira’s post reached 8,880 likes. So far, we have focused on causes. We will now look at the consequences, taking into consideration the citizens’ comments following the proposed method.

### Analysis of the comments

#### Macrostructure analysis: the citizens’ comments

Due to the size of the sample (964 comments), the selection and salience criteria (following the framing concept) were combined with an optional Facebook tool that allows us to access the “most relevant” comments.

<b>Macrostructure analysis: the citizens’ comments</b>	
<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>“Those who do not have ideas and political strategy act like this.”</b>
Tone	criticism (of stickers action)
Attitude	“defender” of the mayor
<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>“It seems to me that it was Rui Moreira himself, just so he could play the victim.”</b>
Tone	criticism/sarcasm
Attitude	against mayor’s speech

<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>"Instead of insulting and claiming that these stickers are a direct attack on your 'brand', [the mayor] should make a more responsible reading and think about why there are people who have come to the conclusion that Porto is dead."</b>
Tone	criticism
Attitude	criticism of the mayor's politics
<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>"In my opinion, it may have to do with the fact that Porto has stopped belonging to the <i>Portuenses</i>..."</b>
Tone	soft criticism
Attitude	criticism of the mayor's politics/gentrification
<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>"Porto is not a brand, it is not for sale. Porto is a city, a culture, a feeling and home to many people who make it a living organism (...)"</b>
Tone	criticism
Attitude	criticism about confusing the city brand with the city itself
<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>"I love Porto, the city where I was born and raised and now I see it being transformed into a brand for tourists."</b>
Tone	sadness
Attitude	sense of belonging and loss
<b>POST CONTENT</b>	<b>"Isn't the Mayor able to accept what is clearly an appropriation of a symbol to satirize the present situation of the city?"</b>
Tone	criticism
Attitude	the right to freedom of expression

Macrostructure analysis: the citizen's comments

The citizens' comments must be analysed as a consequence of the mayor's discourse. The identification of the fundamental thematic structures of each text, as shown above (Fig. 5), allows us to find five categories of communication tones: criticism, sense of belonging, protest, sadness, emotion. The comments have also shown a strong sense of belonging towards the

city. Related with this sentiment, the citizens' discourses reflect indignation about reducing the city to a brand.

### **Comparison of discourses**

When comparing the mayor's speech and the comments that it gave rise to we concluded that there is no correspondence either in the tone of communication or in the attitudes. There is a gap between the discourse of the politician and the discourse of the citizens. It can be concluded that the political expectations have not been fulfilled, since criticism is a significant category in the analysis of citizens' comments. On both sides, the tone is highly emotional, but the intended effects are the opposite. Also, indignation is present in both analyses but not about the same subject. The mayor's angry speech is focused on the stickers action, while citizens' anger is mainly about the political inability to stop gentrification and the mix up between the city brand and the city.

To sum up, the mayor's post caused social and political reaction allegedly not expected by the politician. Moreover, it exposed crucial issues in terms of territorial communication from the perspective of its inhabitants.

### **Analysis of the discourse in context**

As previously stated, the study also focuses on the speech in context. Four axes emerged from the debate: (1) the city, (2) the brand, (3) the stickers, and (4) politics. These are the major variables considered below.

#### **- The mayor's post categories**

The text reflects the mayor's strong emotional involvement with the theme. Rui Moreira brought the stickers to social media, expanding their visibility. Before that, the stickers were unknown to most of the citizens and not mentioned in the media.

#### **- City/City Brand**

The text expressed its anger towards those that hate the city. But the discourse mixed up the city and the brand. Most of the text is dedicated to

praising the brand, won several design awards and has been recognised internationally.

. Stickers

The “Morto.” stickers are presented as massive action spread through the city by anonymous or suspected political opponents. This act is presented as an insult to the city and to the brand.

. Politics

This variable may help to clarify the final goal of the post. In fact, the text alludes to the context of local elections. The mayor mentions this event and casts suspicion on political opponents.

**- Comment categories**

The comments on the mayor’s post were analysed considering the objective to understand what was the citizen’s view on the “Morto.” stickers was, namely how they did position themselves towards four major variables that emerged from the debate: the city, the brand, the stickers, and politics.

. City

Comments related to the city reflected both in positive and negative stances. They expressed significantly emotive and deep relationships, like personal love and care, feelings of belonging and being part of the city. But they also expressed denunciations of gentrification, particularly related to real estate speculation, provoking the loss of the city for the locals in favour of tourists and foreign investors; the loss of the city’s authenticity and the transformation of the city into a theme park. The emergence of traditional territorial and power tensions, namely Porto vs. Lisbon and central vs local power was observed in the comments (Fig. 6).



City
• Love, belonging, being part of...
• Personal love and commitment to the city
• Gentrification: real estate speculation; loss of the city for the locals in favour of tourists and foreign investors
• Loss of authenticity
• Transforming the city into a theme park
• Emergence of traditional territorial tensions: Porto vs Lisbon, central vs. local power

Fig. 6 - Categorization of comments focusing on the city

### • Brand

The comments related to the city brand were quite contradictory. While some recognized the brand as a legitimate representation of the city and an asset to the territory, others expressed shock and indignation over the fact that the city was referred to as a brand, implying that the city as an entity is above marketing and the marketization of the city (Fig. 7)

Brand
• Recognizing the brand as representing the city and an asset
• Indignation towards referring to the city as a brand
• References to the strength of the brand to inspire the subvertising
• Alternative expressions: "Morto", "Poço.", "Horto.", "Porto.", "Porto:", "Porto"

Fig. 7 - Categorization of comments focusing on the city brand.

## · Stickers

The “Morto.” stickers themselves were the target of several comments. They were referred to as a form of creative intervention and as an action of active citizenship. The source of the stickers attributed to anonymous citizens, to the opposition political parties and to the mayor himself as a victimizing strategy to encourage voter compassion. Scepticism was mentioned about the creators and the objective of the stickers action. Even suspicion about the actual existence of the stickers was referred. (Fig. 8)

<b>Stickers</b>
• Form of creative intervention
• Citizenship and activism
• Creator issues: opposition parties; anonymous; Rui Moreira to victimize himself, to win elections
• Scepticism and suspicion about the actual existence of the stickers

Fig. 8 - Categorization of comments focusing on the stickers.

## · Politics and Politicians

Politics in general, namely political opponents and predecessors of Rui Moreira and the Porto mayor’s political action, were regularly mentioned in the comments, with both praise and criticism. Accusations of defending private and personal interests instead of the people’s interests emerged, as well as references to political tensions and political parties. (Fig. 9)

<b>Politics and Politicians</b>
• Rui Moreira’s political action
• Private and personal interests instead of the people’s interests
• References to political tensions, political parties, political opponents

Fig. 9 - Categorization of comments focusing on politics and politicians.

## Conclusions

This research has raised some relevant issues related to the interaction between the brand of the city of Porto, its citizens and the institutions that represent them, namely the mayor. It also led us to reflect on the politicians' relationship with social media and the potential they can have to ignite debate and engage different stakeholders in discussions of marginal issues, making them central or mainstream, whether unintentionally or as part of an intricate strategy in a pre-election environment.

Whichever objective was pursued, it was clear in our observation that territorial communication is strategic and political and territorial brands serve an operational function with idiosyncratic characteristics. The theoretical framework questions its specificities and is still undertaking the quest for answers: is there a communication model for specific types of territories? Should a territory be considered more like an organization, a product or a service, in terms of communication? According to different perspectives and the particular observation of this case, we could argue that the "Porto." brand represents the "competitive identity" of the city, its citizens, its specific personality and culture and it projects a vision for the territory. Notwithstanding the fact that not all stakeholders share that vision, namely the political values and discourse of the institutional mainstream, the "Morto." case and the appropriation of the brand's codes and values provided alternative narratives that eventually suited dissenting voices, including them in the brand's dialogue.

The study also brings to the discussion symbolic visions about the city, comparing politicians and citizen perceptions. The politician's discourse provoked awareness among citizens about the relationship between the city and the brand and exposed unclear territorial contradictions. Looking at this case of territorial branding, as Kavaratzis stated (2009), cities are much more complex than corporations partly due to lack of control and mainly because of the multiplicity of stakeholders. Perhaps, the adoption of a single identity for a place has become a utopia.

Further findings, mainly in media and social networks, include diverse manipulations and subversion of the brand's message — *Morto.*; *Torto.*; *Horto.* (*Dead*; *Twisted*, *Bad tempered*, *Bent*; *Small vegetable garden*) (Cruz, 2017).

Such prolific output can partially be explained by its plasticity, its capacity to be adapted and concurrently keep its graphic structure intact. This is part of the brand's strength but at the same time its vulnerability.

The stickers case enhanced the perks of the political use of social media as the mayor's post brought visibility to the case. It was possible to observe that transferring public city space to the digital sphere replicates, enhances and propagates the issues at stake.

Results discussed previously indicate that Porto's citizens feel very strongly about their city and its territorial brand. Nevertheless, a significant number of comments explicitly mention that the city cannot be mistaken for its brand, considering this overlap offensive.

Additionally, issues related to the brand's ownership were raised in comments and media coverage as well (Dinis, 2017), feeding research with food for thought that can be studied in future investigation: who owns a territorial brand? Although the answers might be clear in a strictly legal sphere, they will be much more complex from a symbolic point of view, as some critical comments emphasize, explicitly or only allusively mentioning that both Porto's brand and the city belong to the citizens and not to politicians. The anonymity of the campaign, on the other hand, opened a path to speculation over the creators of the stickers and their motivations, namely whether they were linked to a political faction or simply to an artistic and creative form of popular expression.

Through the stickers campaign, citizens became active politicians. Finding alternative forums and creative ways to raise their voices, they deconstructed the territorial brand message and, by doing so, they placed their values on the political and media agenda.

“Morto.” stickers are thus a case of citizen activism through the de-construction of a territorial brand and the appropriation of the city public space, thereby enhancing the power of territorial brand values in aggregating motivation to active citizenship.

Our analysis and observation led to the conclusion that when citizens use (and reuse) a territorial brand, they take over its ownership, making it a democratic communication asset and therefore adding intangible value to it even when, as demonstrated in this particular case, a brand’s power can be also its weakness.

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