

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE PARLIAMENT OF MONTENEGRO**

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### ***Apstrakt***

*Ovaj rad istražuje uticaj kvaliteta sadržaja, segmentacije ciljne publike i diverzifikacije objava na angažman korisnika na društvenim mrežama, sa posebnim fokusom na Skupštinu Crne Gore. Oslanjajući se na anketu sprovedenu među 85 zaposlenih u Skupštini i analizu sadržaja sa zvaničnih naloga ove institucije na društvenim mrežama, studija ispituje na koji način personalizovane digitalne strategije mogu doprinijeti jačanju povjerenja i podstaći učešće građana. Nalazi naglašavaju značaj raznovrsnosti sadržaja - poput video-materijala, infografika, prenosa uživo, vebinara i Q&A sesija, koji omogućavaju dvosmjernu komunikaciju i otvaraju prostor za smislen dijalog s javnošću. Takođe, segmentacija usmjerena ka specifičnim ciljnim grupama, uključujući mlade i profesionalce, povećava i relevantnost i efikasnost komunikacije. Integracija savremenih tehnologija, uključujući chatbotove i analitiku podataka, podržava personalizovanu interakciju i omogućava Skupštini da bolje razumije i odgovori na potrebe građana, čime se jača demokratski legitimitet u savremenom digitalnom okruženju.*

**Ključne riječi:** društvene mreže, angažman, parlament, segmentacija, povjerenje

### ***Abstract***

*This paper examines the impact of content quality, target audience segmentation, and content diversification on social media engagement, with a specific focus on the Parliament of Montenegro. Drawing on a survey of 85 staff members of the Parliament, combined with an analysis of its official social media channels, this study examines how tailored digital strategies can build public trust and stimulate citizen participation. The findings highlight the importance of content diversity, including videos, infographics, live streams, webinars, and Q&A sessions, which enable reciprocal communication and foster meaningful dialogue with the public. In addition, segmentation directed at specific audiences, such as young people and professionals, increases both the relevance and effectiveness of communication. The integration of emerging technologies, including chatbots and data analytics, supports personalised interaction and enables the Parliament to better understand and respond to citizens' needs, thereby reinforcing democratic legitimacy in the digital era.*

**Keywords:** social media, engagement, parliament, segmentation, trust

## INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the role of social media as a contemporary marketing tool in institutional communication, with a specific focus on the Parliament of Montenegro. It examines how content quality, audience segmentation, and content diversification influence user engagement, as well as how digital communication strategies support two-way interaction and help build public trust in parliamentary institutions. As noted by Leston-Bandeira and Bender (2013, p. 2), social media can transform information sharing into deeper understanding, identity formation, and ultimately, active participation.

Social media plays a central role in institutional outreach and public visibility, reshaping how institutions engage with citizens. Although the Montenegrin Parliament uses digital platforms to disseminate political information, interactivity and citizen participation remain limited. This represents a valuable opportunity to reinforce participatory culture through more dynamic and personalised communication.

This study explores the relationship between digital communication and institutional transparency, advocating for inclusive and interactive models of parliamentary engagement. By adopting strategies that include high-quality content, targeted messaging, and technological tools such as data analytics and chatbots, parliaments can better identify and respond to citizens' needs, thereby reinforcing institutional credibility.

Digital tools, including social networks, websites, and email, are increasingly used to personalise political messaging and support civic involvement (Chadwick, 2013, p. 122). These platforms enable content creation and exchange within online communities (Obar and Wildman, 2015), while interactive profiles empower users to generate and disseminate information (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Gardašević et al. (2018) highlight the significance of understanding these networks as central to modern communication and marketing practices.

The choice of platform and communication strategy depends on institutional objectives (Krstić and Đurđević, 2017). Contemporary political communication increasingly relies on social media, which are used by government officials, political organisations, and citizens to interact and shape influence (Ignatova, Ivichev, and Khusnoiarov, 2017). These platforms also enable surveillance, propaganda, and opinion evaluation, redefining the relationship between citizens and the state (Qin et al., 2011; Marić et al., 2017). To preserve neutrality and institutional integrity, parliaments, following Canadian recommendations, should adopt clear guidelines and ethical standards for staff use of social media, ensuring that boundaries between private expression and official communication are maintained (Armitage, 2012, pp. 36–39).

Integrating social media into parliamentary operations increases transparency and enables direct interaction (Coleman and Blumler, 2009; Griffith and Leston-Bandeira, 2012). Facebook and YouTube currently dominate user engagement (Anadolija, 2024; Čavić, 2025), while TikTok and Instagram are emerging as platforms with growing political relevance. Recent trends, including authentic content, artificial intelligence, and digital community-building, further highlight the democratic potential of these tools (Loopia, 2024).

Parliaments in the United Kingdom and the European Union increasingly recognise the role of social media in fostering civic participation (Digital Democracy Commission, 2015; IPU, 2019). A consistent and strategic approach, rather than ad hoc use, is essential for building trust and improving citizen interaction. The UNDP's digital governance initiative further suggests that digital platforms can enhance institutional resilience and public confidence (UNDP, 2016).

Even though parliaments differ from commercial brands, political marketing plays a critical role in shaping public perception. When used strategically, social media enable parliaments to embody transparency and facilitate two-way communication (Park, Hyun, and Thavisay, 2021; Parliament of Montenegro Research Centre, 2020).

Ahmad (2017) builds on Lees-Marshment's framework, which identifies three political marketing models: product-oriented, sales-oriented, and market-oriented. The last of these, which focuses on dialogue and adapting institutional practices to citizens' needs, is most applicable to parliaments seeking to revitalise democratic interaction (Lees-Marshment, 2003, 2004, as cited in Ahmad, 2017, p. 76). As Petrović (2016, p. 399) notes, social media facilitates political participation by activating new actors and encouraging real-world involvement, thereby directly supporting democratic development.

Parliamentary institutions today must maintain relevance while enabling meaningful democratic participation. Despite widespread interest in politics, especially among youth, there is increasing evidence of a decline in political efficacy (Prior, 2022). This coincides with a rise in informal and accessible forms of political expression via social media. Yet fewer than 20 per cent of parliaments actively use digital forums and debates (Serra-Silva, 2018). While the United Kingdom has embraced targeted consultations, Portugal relies on permanent forums with limited citizen uptake.

Germany's Bundestag exemplifies best practices by using social media not only to inform but also to foster dialogue and support the formation of public opinion. It operates across various platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Mastodon, Bluesky, and X, and is guided by principles of neutrality, professionalism, and inclusiveness (Konzept des Deutschen Bundestages für die Kommunikation in sozialen Medien, 2023, pp. 1–3).

Estonia and New Zealand offer further insight. Estonia employs AI tools in its e-Parliament systems for transcription and legislative analysis, while New Zealand uses Instagram and YouTube to deliver youth-oriented, multilingual content. These examples highlight how digital innovation can enhance accessibility and boost engagement, particularly among younger audiences.

The Montenegrin Parliament has made important strides in digitalisation, including live streaming, e-petitions, and AI-driven tools such as the AI Lex system (Skupština Crne Gore, 2025). However, interactivity remains limited. Practices from Estonia suggest that influencer collaboration and authentic formats can expand reach. Miltsov (2022) notes that TikTok, for example, helps adolescents express opinions and shape their identity.

The Parliament of Georgia's strategy for the period 2019 to 2020 serves as a valuable reference point. It emphasises targeted promotions, platform-appropriate content, and transparency through performance monitoring. It also advocates for youth-focused communication, including internship

posts, open calls, educational videos, and behind-the-scenes material (Parliament of Georgia, 2019, pp. 4–21).

These comparative insights inform strategic recommendations for enhancing the Montenegrin Parliament's digital communication. Crucially, digital transformation must address both technical infrastructure and communicative strategy. Tools such as Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), AI analytics, and chatbot interfaces can help sustain long-term civic engagement and institutional credibility.

The paper is structured into six interrelated chapters. The first outlines the theoretical and conceptual framework, with a focus on digital democracy, political marketing, and institutional communication. The second details the methodology, including mixed-method approaches, sampling, and statistical techniques. The third analyses current communication practices. The fourth presents findings from the empirical study. The fifth explores broader implications and comparative models. The sixth offers strategic conclusions for strengthening transparency, participation, and public trust in legislative institutions.

*Ultimately, the key question remains: Are parliaments truly ready not only to provide access to information but also to offer genuine opportunities for active citizen participation?*

## **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH**

Social media has become a key tool in redefining the relationship between legislative authorities and citizens, particularly in the context of institutional communication through digital technologies. This study aims to analyse the role of the Montenegrin Parliament's social media presence in fostering civic engagement and building public trust. Special attention is given to three factors: content quality, audience segmentation, and post diversification, which are examined through the lens of contemporary institutional digital communication.

These factors were operationalised through variables measuring perceptions of communication efficiency, interaction quality, and barriers to two-way communication. These variables serve as indicators of content quality, segmentation, and diversification. Demographic characteristics, such as age and education level, and behavioural patterns, for example following official institutional accounts, were also considered as potential factors influencing these perceptions. Although no formal moderation analyses were conducted using regression models with interaction terms, inferential statistical tests, including the Chi-square test, the Kruskal–Wallis test, and the Mann–Whitney U test, were applied to examine group differences and assess potential moderating effects.

The central research question derived from these objectives is: Do content quality, audience segmentation, and post diversification on the Montenegrin Parliament's social media platforms influence citizen engagement and trust in the institution?

The methodological approach combined quantitative, qualitative, and theoretical-comparative methods. The quantitative segment included a survey conducted in February 2025 with employees of the Parliament of Montenegro's Professional Service. The questionnaire covered perceptions of efficiency, openness, and perceived limitations in digital communication with citizens. The sample

included 85 respondents, and the data were analysed using SPSS software, focusing on correlational and inferential statistics. Spearman's correlation analysis explored relationships between variables. The Chi-square test assessed associations between age and perceived efficiency. The Kruskal–Wallis test examined differences in interaction quality by education level, while the Mann–Whitney U test compared responses based on whether participants followed institutional accounts. Descriptive analysis was used to summarise average ratings and standard deviations regarding digital interaction and communication constraints.

Additional insights were drawn from a previous internal study involving 62 employees of the Montenegrin Parliament.<sup>1</sup> This study included questions about the integration of MPs' digital profiles on the Parliament's website and the perceived role of artificial intelligence in enhancing engagement. These findings complemented the main study and provided a deeper understanding of institutional capacities, digital literacy, and readiness for strategic digital transformation.

The qualitative component involved content analysis of posts from the Parliament's official social media accounts, namely Facebook, Instagram, and X, published between 1 and 28 February 2025. The analysis focused on post frequency, content formats, visual elements, and levels of user engagement.

Based on the findings, a SWOT analysis was conducted to identify key dimensions of the Parliament's communication via social media, specifically its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Additional depth was provided by comparing practices in Estonia and Georgia.

The theoretical framework integrates political marketing models (Lees-Marshment), digital democracy principles (Coleman and Blumler), theories of personalised political communication (Chadwick), and modern perspectives on digital engagement (Prior, Serra-Silva). This interdisciplinary approach supports a multidimensional interpretation of institutional communication.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in advancing theoretical approaches to public sector communication through social media, particularly within parliamentary institutions. Its social relevance is reflected in its potential to improve democratic processes and citizen participation through digital channels. Furthermore, it provides empirical insight into how parliamentary institutions in Southeast Europe, amid EU integration, approach social media use.

Although the sample is not representative of the general public, the fact that participants are directly involved in parliamentary operations adds specific value to the findings, offering insight into practical challenges and opportunities in institutional communication. Limitations related to sample size and composition highlight the need for future research involving citizens and focus groups as end-users of parliamentary services. While this is not a longitudinal study, the three-

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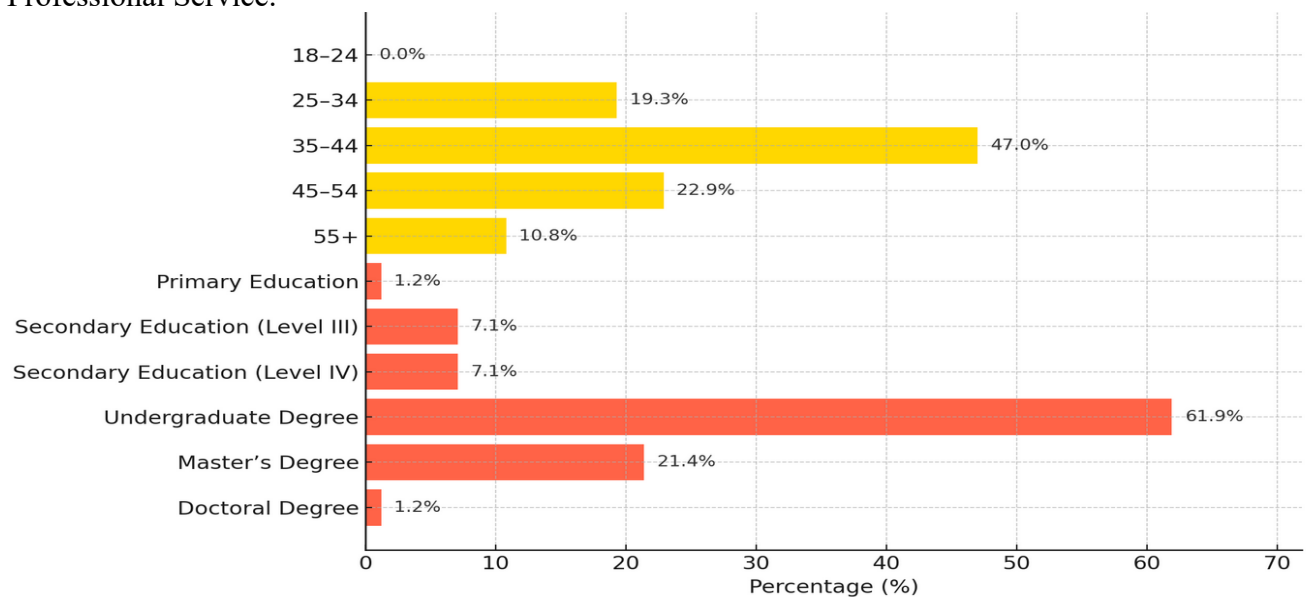
<sup>1</sup> The internal research conducted between December 2024 and February 2025 was carried out by the author using a survey instrument entitled *Perceptions of Digital Tools and Integrated Marketing Communications in the Parliament of Montenegro*, as part of the broader research project *Integrated Marketing Communications in the Digital Age: How Digital Platforms Are Transforming Parliamentary Engagement with Citizens*. The author is employed by the Parliament of Montenegro as Head of the Web Presentation Department.

month research period provides sufficient methodological consistency for a reliable analysis of communication patterns.

This multidimensional methodological design supports the formulation of strategic guidelines to strengthen public trust and participatory democracy. It also enables a comprehensive assessment of how content quality, audience segmentation, and post diversification influence perceptions of communication efficiency, interaction, and institutional trust.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION - A CASE STUDY OF THE MONTENEGRIN PARLIAMENT

To assess the communicative potential of the Montenegrin Parliament on social media, a survey was conducted in February 2025 among 85 participants, comprising employees of the Parliament's Professional Service.

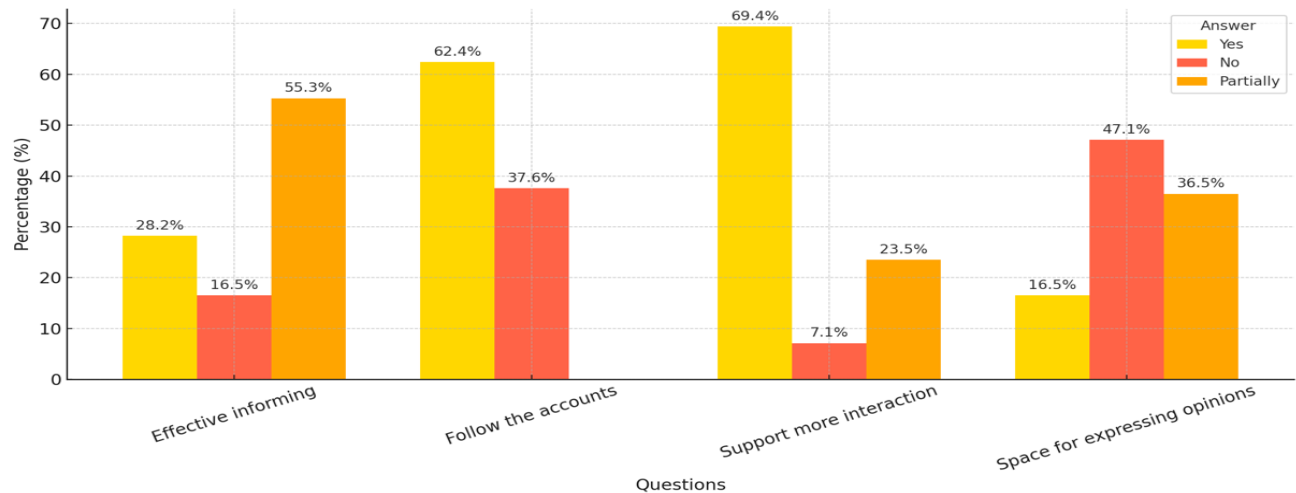


**Figure 1.** Distribution of respondents by age and education level (expressed as percentages)

The focus of the research was on the perception of the efficiency, interactivity, and impact of digital channels on citizen engagement and trust.

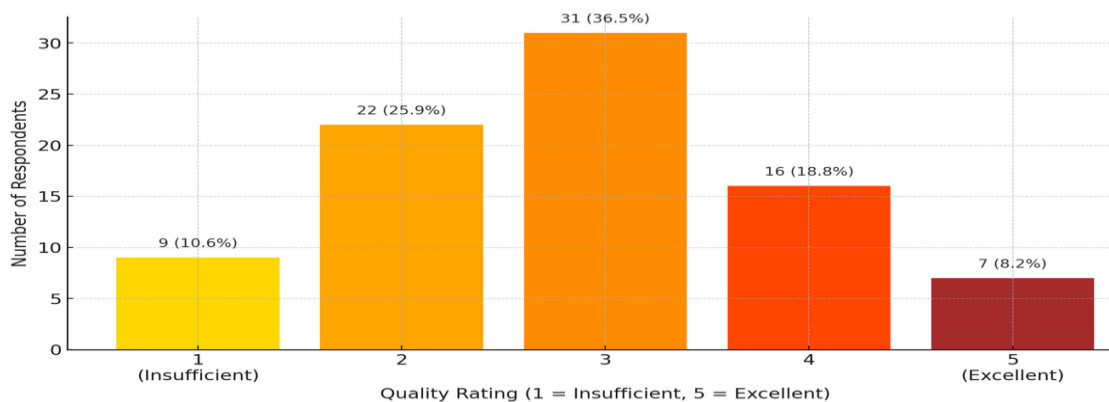
The results indicate a moderate level of trust in social media as sources of information about the institution's work. More than half of the respondents (54.2%) believe that social media partially enables citizens to access information, while 28.9% consider these channels to be effective. However, a certain segment (16.9%) remains sceptical, highlighting the limited impact of the current digital content.





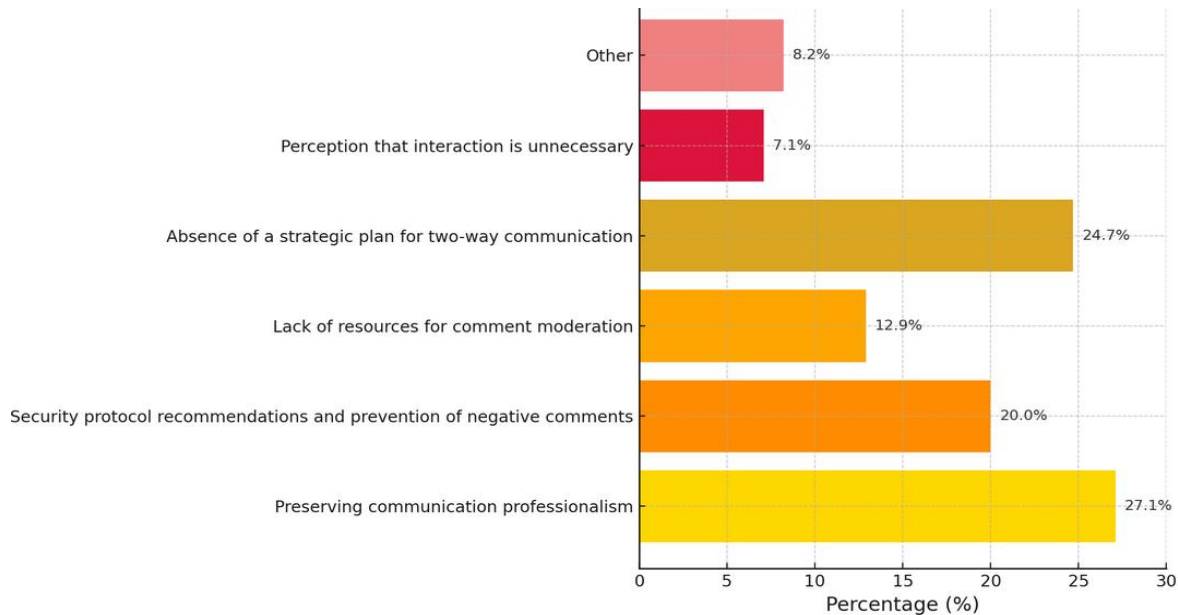
**Figure 2.** Respondents' views on the informational function and interactive potential of the Montenegrin Parliament's social media presence

The findings reveal clear ambivalence in respondents' perceptions regarding both the effectiveness of institutional communication via social media and the extent to which these platforms facilitate citizens' expression of opinion. Although a majority report following the Parliament's official accounts, the results point to prevailing scepticism towards existing mechanisms for interaction and two-way communication. Importantly, the data reflect a strong demand for more substantial digital participation, as well as widespread support for the development of advanced interactive formats aimed at enhancing citizen engagement. The perception of limited bidirectional communication is particularly troubling, as it reflects a continued reliance on unidirectional messaging - an approach fundamentally misaligned with the core principles of digital democracy, which prioritise interactivity, institutional responsiveness, and reciprocal exchange. It is also characteristic that a significant number of respondents do not follow the accounts, which implies that the content is not sufficiently engaging, even for internal audiences.



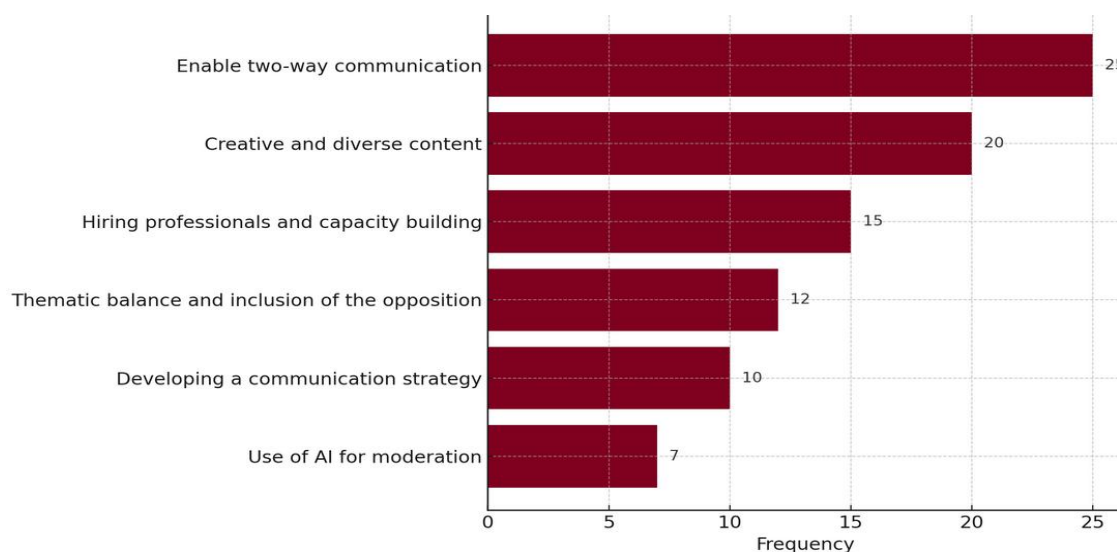
**Figure 3.** Evaluation of citizens' perceptions of the quality of interaction with the Parliament of Montenegro via social media

The assessment of the current level of citizen engagement is low, with an average score of 2.88 (on a scale from 1 to 5), with the most frequently assigned scores being 2 and 3.



**Figure 4.** Perceptions of barriers to enabling two-way communication on the Parliament's social media channels

The presented data indicate that respondents predominantly perceive technical and organisational constraints as key barriers to enabling two-way communication via the Parliament's social media platforms. Concerns regarding the potential misuse of comment sections and a lack of human resources for moderation emerge as the most frequently cited reasons. These perceptions indicate a cautious institutional stance on open digital formats and highlight the need to develop strategies that balance transparency with responsible digital content management. In this context, the findings reaffirm the challenges identified by Coleman and Blumler (2009) in the transition from one-way information dissemination to participatory digital democracy, where it is essential to ensure both institutional control and citizen engagement.



**Figure 5.** Recommendations identified through qualitative analysis of open-ended responses



The qualitative dimension of the research was further enriched by an analysis of responses to an open-ended question aimed at identifying ways to enhance two-way communication and content delivery via social media platforms. The following key themes systematically emerged from the data:

1. **Facilitating open interaction with citizens:** A majority of respondents emphasised the need to enable comment functionalities, citizen-led inquiries, and participation in discussions - thus overcoming the limitations of unidirectional information dissemination.
2. **Professionalisation of digital communication:** The employment of experts in digital marketing, communication, and moderation is viewed as a necessary step towards a more effective and substantively enriched institutional presence.
3. **Content and visual innovation:** Suggestions included the use of infographics, video materials, live broadcasts, event announcements, and educational posts covering topics relevant to diverse target groups, including youth and the general public.
4. **Thematic inclusivity:** Respondents underscored the importance of incorporating opposition perspectives, fostering pluralism of opinion, and ensuring balance in the presentation of parliamentary activities, in order to address and reduce perceptions of political bias.
5. **Formulation of a digital communication strategy:** A clear need was expressed for the development of a comprehensive strategic document to define guidelines for interaction, comment management, moderation, and publishing standards.
6. **Technological innovation:** Some participants recommended the use of artificial intelligence for automated content moderation, aiming to enhance transparency while preserving the security of the digital environment.

This research reveals a significant opportunity to improve the institutional presence on social media through the implementation of two-way communication, the professionalisation of communication practices, and the strengthening of transparency. Such developments would make Parliament more accessible to citizens and reinforce its function as a public service institution in the digital era. Accordingly, the findings confirm that employees themselves recognise those very dimensions of digital strategy that are both theoretically grounded and empirically linked to higher levels of civic engagement and public trust.

**Table 1.** SWOT analysis of strategic potentials and challenges in the digital communication of the Parliament of Montenegro via social media

Strenghts	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active presence on social media platforms</li> <li>• Official YouTube channel broadcasting all sessions and events live</li> <li>• Use of Flickr as a key platform for archiving and sharing photographs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identical content across all platforms</li> <li>• Lack of content diversity</li> <li>• One-way communication without comment functionality</li> <li>• Absence of dedicated accounts for parliamentary working bodies</li> <li>• Discontinued activity of the official Viber community</li> <li>• Underutilisation of the educational and institutional potential of communication materials</li> <li>• No presence on LinkedIn</li> <li>• Lack of interaction through the official YouTube channel</li> <li>• Absence of a storytelling approach in communication</li> <li>• Limited use of interactive formats (e.g., webinars) aimed at both MPs and citizens</li> <li>• Lack of "behind-the-scenes" content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of two-way communication via social media</li> <li>• Platform-specific communication strategies</li> <li>• Introduction of AI-based moderation and comment filtering tools</li> <li>• Improving technical infrastructure for the application of artificial intelligence</li> <li>• Aligning digital policies with legal frameworks</li> <li>• Launch of the Archibot 3.0 tool</li> <li>• Establishment of a dedicated section for public Q&amp;A with MPs</li> <li>• Educational content as a tool for civic engagement and reputation building</li> <li>• Expansion of the "Barbara Prammer" network of democratic workshops</li> <li>• Opening a public platform for strengthening citizen engagement</li> <li>• Monthly and semi-annual digital communication reports</li> <li>• Integration with the e-Parliament system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapid evolution of social media and emerging platforms</li> <li>• Inadequate professional management of digital content</li> <li>• Spread of disinformation and inappropriate comments</li> <li>• Open comment sections perceived as risky</li> <li>• Risk of misinterpretation of information</li> <li>• Delayed or absent responses to negative comments</li> <li>• Data protection and privacy concerns</li> </ul>

In response to the need for a more comprehensive evaluation of the communication potential of the Parliament of Montenegro on social media, a SWOT analysis was undertaken, grounded in previously presented survey findings and qualitative insights. The objective of this analysis is to systematically identify the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the institution's presence on social media, thereby enabling a more precise definition of strategic directions for improvement. Furthermore, this analytical framework offers an opportunity to refine and clearly delineate the conceptual foundations of the study, contributing to a deeper understanding of the specific challenges and prospects within the digital communication landscape.

The SWOT analysis of the Parliament of Montenegro's social media engagement provides a comprehensive overview of the institution's existing capacities and identifies the principal factors shaping its online presence. Among the most notable strengths are the institution's active presence across multiple platforms and its utilisation of multimedia tools—such as YouTube and Flickr—which enhance transparency and promote public access to parliamentary activities.

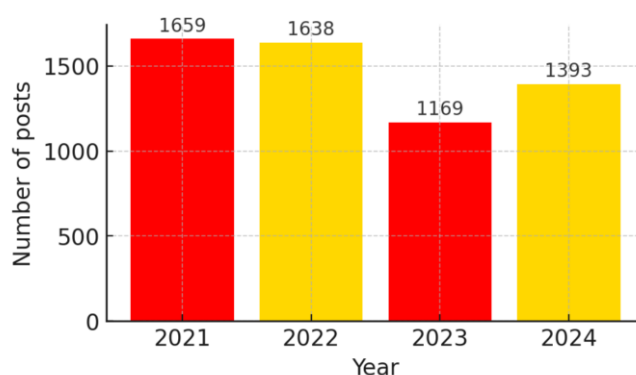
At the same time, the analysis reveals several structural weaknesses, including content uniformity, limited interaction with citizens, inadequate adaptation to platform-specific features, and the

absence of a presence on professional networks such as LinkedIn. These limitations constrain broader public engagement and impede effective citizen participation in legislative processes.

Conversely, the identified opportunities signal considerable potential for enhancing digital communication through two-way interaction, the implementation of personalised content strategies, the application of artificial intelligence, and integration with systems such as the e-Parliament, which is already developed and operationally viable.

Nevertheless, the threats associated with the rapidly evolving social media environment necessitate a cautious institutional approach—highlighting risks related to disinformation, algorithmic manipulation, excessive automation, and legal concerns surrounding data protection. These issues present significant challenges to institutional credibility and the maintenance of public trust.

In sum, the SWOT analysis affirms that, while the Parliament of Montenegro's social media presence constitutes a valuable digital asset, it remains an underutilised resource for advancing democratic participation and fostering trust between citizens and public institutions. By further clarifying these conceptual dimensions and assessing their strategic implications, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the evolving interface between institutional communication and digital public engagement.



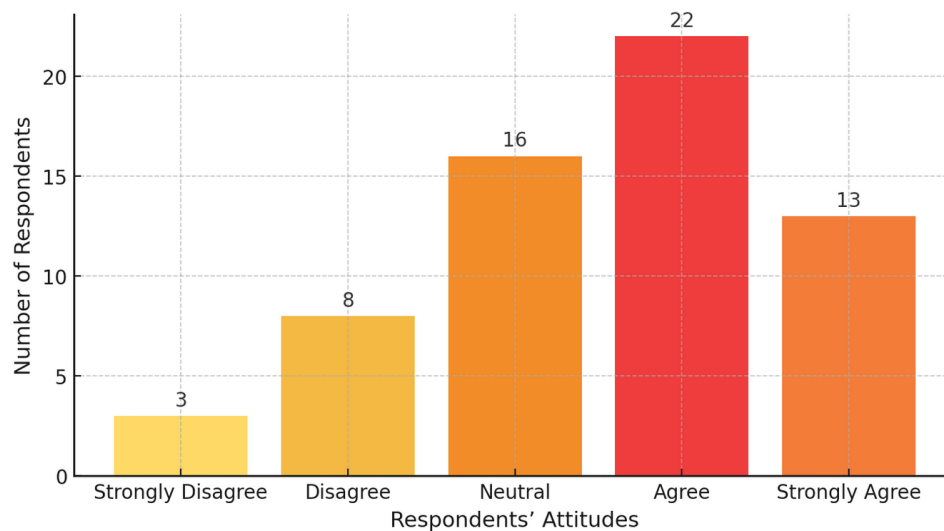
**Figure 5.** Number of posts on the social media accounts of the Parliament of Montenegro, 2021–2024.<sup>2</sup>

In light of the research findings, an overview of the number of social media posts from the Parliament of Montenegro between 2021 and 2024 has been included. Although the overall volume of posts reflects a certain level of institutional activity, the data reveal a pattern of stagnation, with no sustained upward trend. The decline observed in 2023, followed by a modest recovery in 2024, indicates that posting frequency on its own is insufficient to encourage deeper citizen engagement. The absence of two-way communication and a lack of visually engaging content have been identified as key limiting factors. Accordingly, it is recommended that future efforts prioritise content quality, platform-specific adaptation, targeted communication, and the development of more innovative and interactive formats.

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<sup>2</sup> The internal analysis of the digital activities of the official accounts of the Parliament of Montenegro, conducted by the author, who is employed at the Parliament of Montenegro as the head of the Department for Internet Presentation.

*Insights from the previous internal study:* As part of a broader research framework focused on the digital transformation of the Parliament of Montenegro, a prior internal study titled “*Perceptions of Digital Tools and Integrated Marketing Communications in the Parliament of Montenegro*”<sup>3</sup> was conducted. The research was carried out using a structured survey, which was administered to a sample of 62 employees from the Parliamentary Service, covering diverse age and educational profiles. This composition provided a representative insight into institutional perceptions concerning digital tools and strategic communication. Among other topics, the questionnaire featured two items specifically focused on the perceived role of social media and artificial intelligence in promoting transparency and facilitating interaction with citizens.

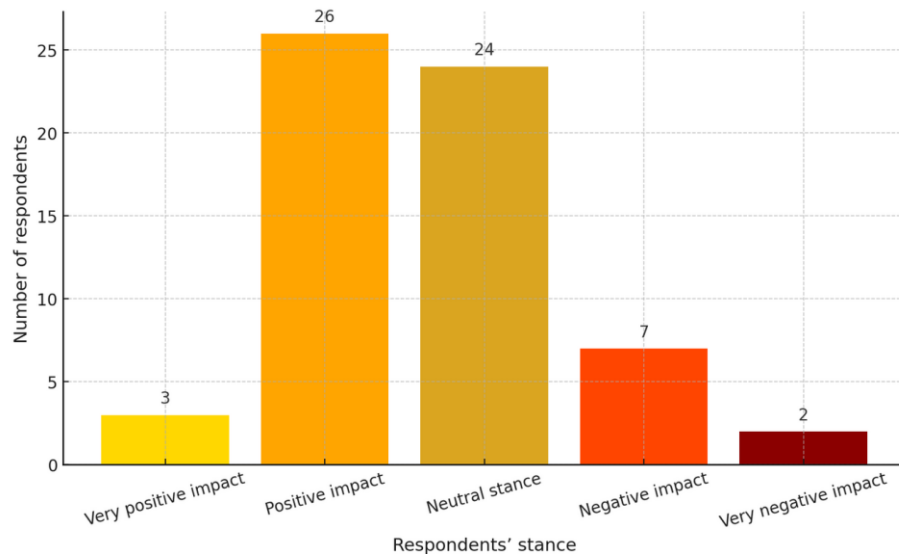


**Figure 6.** Respondents' views on including links to MPs' digital profiles on the Parliament of Montenegro's website

The research shows that more than half of the respondents (56.5%) express a positive attitude towards the integration of hyperlinks to MPs' digital profiles on the official Parliament website. This result reflects institutional awareness of the need to enhance the accessibility of elected representatives and to transition from unilateral, formalised modes of communication to more open and personalised digital formats. It also affirms the perception that MPs, as legitimate representatives of the citizens, should not limit their communication to traditional press releases, but rather establish more direct and transparent digital channels of interaction with the public - thereby contributing to strengthened democratic accountability and increased public trust in institutions.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 7.** Respondents' stance on the effects of artificial intelligence on transparency and communication with citizens<sup>4</sup>

The results show that the largest number of respondents (29 individuals, or 46.8%) express a positive attitude towards the effects of artificial intelligence on transparency and communication with citizens. A neutral stance accounts for nearly the same proportion (38.7%), indicating a degree of caution and a need for further information on the potential and limitations of AI technologies. Negative attitudes (14.5%) are less prominent, yet they reflect concerns regarding the ethical, legal, and communicative aspects of digital automation. These findings suggest a complex picture of institutional perceptions, characterised by a moderately favourable view, but also underscoring the need for further reflection and the formulation of strategies for responsible digital transformation.

*The role of social media in youth political engagement: A comparison between Estonia and Montenegro:* In the context of digital transformation, social media plays a pivotal role in shaping political engagement, particularly among younger demographics. Estonia stands out as a country that employs innovative approaches to digital communication, whereas Montenegro has only recently begun to integrate social media into its institutional communication strategies, with full integration still lacking.

The Estonian Parliament has acknowledged the significance of maintaining a presence on platforms favoured by younger generations. A prominent example includes its collaboration with Goal Marketing and influencer Roosabanaanike, aimed at increasing the number of young followers on Instagram and Facebook (Tooming, 2024). This campaign adopts a direct, personalised approach, incorporating humour and everyday themes to portray members of parliament as accessible and connected to the community. Such efforts aim to reduce the perceived distance between institutions and young citizens, aligning with broader trends in digital democracy.

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<sup>4</sup> Internal survey conducted among employees of the Parliament of Montenegro, December 2024 – February 2025, based on institutional insights and research carried out by the author in her official capacity.

Beyond institutional campaigns, research indicates that young Estonians utilise social media to express political views in ways that may not be explicitly political but are rather creative and symbolic—for example, through parody, humour, and memes (Thorson, 2014). However, despite high levels of digital literacy and technological integration, limitations persist. Young people often avoid direct political expression due to concerns about misinterpretation and social repercussions. Social media thus functions not only as a space for freedom of expression but also as a complex environment requiring a balance between authenticity and self-regulation.

The Estonian case study, as presented by Allaste and Saari, illustrates that social media enables specific forms of political expression, particularly among youth who tend to favour indirect forms of engagement such as humour, parody and suggestive posts. This form of "subactivism" allows participation in political discourse without direct confrontation, a factor especially significant in contexts marked by low institutional trust. Approaches that blend emotional relevance and personalised content contribute to greater civic engagement and a heightened sense of inclusion, thereby affirming the importance of content quality and form in institutional communication on social media (Allaste & Saari, 2020).

In contrast, Montenegro only established a social media presence for parliamentary communication at the end of 2020, yet without enabling reciprocal interaction. While there is a digital presence, actual engagement remains limited. Posts on social media predominantly focus on the activities of the Speaker of the Parliament, the Vice-Speaker, and the three Deputy Speakers, with these posts being identical across all platforms, including the official website of the Parliament of Montenegro<sup>5</sup>. Meanwhile, key content such as educational materials, reports, session broadcasts, and inclusive programmes are notably absent, thereby missing the opportunity to foster an active and informed citizen community, particularly among young people.

In this regard, the Estonian model demonstrates how digital marketing and the strategic involvement of influencers can attract attention and potentially increase political participation. Nevertheless, even in Estonia, engagement often remains at the level of "clicktivism,"<sup>6</sup> where political participation is reduced to liking and sharing content without deeper involvement (Amin, 2010, as cited in Allaste & Saari, 2020).

In both cases, it is evident that the mere presence of social media is insufficient - what matters is how institutions use these platforms and the extent to which they enable authentic, transparent, and bidirectional dialogue. Montenegro, therefore, has ample room for developing strategies that target young audiences more effectively, fostering greater openness and interactivity in its parliamentary social media accounts. Particular attention should be given to content themes relevant to youth, using formats and language that resonate with their everyday experiences, as exemplified by Estonia.

*Evaluation of institutional communication on social media:* An analysis of engagement and two-way communication on the Parliament of Montenegro's social media platforms reveals substantial

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<sup>5</sup> [www.skupstina.me](http://www.skupstina.me)

<sup>6</sup> Clicktivism - also known as slacktivism or lazy activism — primarily refers to activities such as 'liking' or 'following' on social media platforms. This form of activism is also regarded as a type of pseudo-activism (Petrović, 2016, pp. 401–402), representing a distant and passive form of support and engagement.



limitations in citizen interaction, despite the institution's presence on several digital channels. Although the Parliament uses these platforms to disseminate information, communication predominantly flows in one direction, with very low levels of user engagement. A quantitative and qualitative analysis of activity on Facebook, Instagram, and X during the period from 1–28 February 2025 confirms a significant imbalance between the follower count and actual user interaction. On Facebook, only two comments were registered across 31 posts, while Instagram and X saw no comments during the same period. The number of likes varied minimally (from 0 to 21), indicating a passive reception of the published content.

The Parliament's content is largely homogeneous and institutionally focused, emphasising the activities of presiding officials, which may appear detached from the broader public. Furthermore, although X has the largest follower base, it shows the weakest engagement metrics. Video content is almost entirely absent, even on Instagram, further diminishing the platform's potential for civic involvement. The lack of content tailored to the specificities of each platform, combined with the absence of a strategic digital approach, significantly undermines the reach and relevance of the posts.

To improve outcomes, comparative insights from the Parliament of Georgia suggest the value of strategies that include posts encouraging interaction, online surveys, digital campaigns, educational materials, and paid promotional methods (e.g., Facebook Boost) (Parliament of Georgia, 2019–2020, pp. 11–15). It is also recommended to introduce formats such as Q&A sessions, "behind the scenes" content, live streams with MPs, and content adapted to the unique features of each platform. These measures could significantly increase the visibility of parliamentary work, enhance trust, and foster a sense of inclusion among citizens.

The analysis of specific indicators and content limitations confirms that there is considerable potential for enhancing the digital communication of the Parliament of Montenegro. Communication goals must be redefined in line with contemporary public administration practices as well as citizens' expectations in the digital realm, with an emphasis on interactivity, visual diversity, and institutional transparency.

## **EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PERCEPTION OF DIGITAL INTERACTION**

Although the Parliament of Montenegro has, for several consecutive years, been recognised as the most transparent legislative body in the region, thanks to initiatives such as the regular publication of semi-annual activity reports, the implementation of e-petitions, and a high level of administrative transparency (Parliament of Montenegro, 2024)<sup>7</sup>, there remains a need for further advancement in the use of social media as a key component of public communication.

Accordingly, a study was conducted involving 85 respondents, all of whom are employed within the Parliamentary Service of Montenegro. Given the professional roles of the respondents as advisers within the Parliamentary Service of the Parliament of Montenegro, their insights represent a relevant source for identifying key challenges and opportunities for improving institutional communication.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.skupstina.me/me/clanci/skupstina-ponovo-najtransparentniji-zakonodavni-dom-u-regionu><https://www.parliament.ge>

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping perceptions of institutional digital communication, the study was guided by the research question: *“Do content quality, target audience segmentation, and content diversification on the Parliament of Montenegro’s social media platforms influence citizen engagement and trust in the institution?”* The methodological framework combined both correlational and inferential statistical analyses, encompassing not only the relationships among variables but also the differences in perception across various respondent groups. Spearman’s correlation analysis identified associations between key indicators, while Chi-square, Kruskal–Wallis H, and Mann–Whitney U tests were used to examine how demographic factors (such as age and education) and behavioural patterns (e.g. following official accounts) influenced perceptions of digital interaction. This multidimensional analytical framework enables the reliable mapping of the determinants of civic engagement and institutional trust within contemporary institutional communication practices.

**Table 2.** Spearman’s correlation results for key variable pairs

Variable Pair	Spearman $\rho$	p-value
Efficiency – Interaction	0.73	< 0.001
Interaction – Limitations	0.57	< 0.001
Efficiency – Limitations	0.43	0.0003
Interaction – Support for Interaction	0.045	0.72
Limitations – Support for Interaction	-0.25	0.048

Spearman’s correlation analysis revealed that the perception of the effectiveness of social media in informing citizens strongly correlates with the assessment of current interaction ( $\rho = 0.73$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as well as with the evaluation of limitations in two-way communication ( $\rho = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, a higher perception of interactional limitations was associated with lower support for two-way communication ( $\rho = -0.25$ ,  $p = 0.048$ ). These findings confirm that perceptions of content quality and openness are directly related to how institutional interaction is experienced and to support for its improvement, underscoring the role of qualitative dimensions in digital strategy.

The study also examined the relationship between age and the perception of the effectiveness of the Montenegrin Parliament’s use of social media for communication with citizens. Given the categorical nature of both variables (age group and perceived effectiveness: “yes”, “partially”, “no”), a Chi-square test of independence was applied. The test produced a value of  $\chi^2 = 5.10$ , with a p-value of 0.531 and six degrees of freedom. This result indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in perceived effectiveness across age groups, as the p-value exceeds the conventional threshold ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Although age did not emerge as a significant factor in this study, which is understandable given that the respondents are employed within the Professional Service of the Parliament of Montenegro, prior research highlights pronounced generational differences in digital platform preferences. Younger individuals tend to prefer dynamic and visually-oriented formats, such as TikTok videos, Instagram Reels, and content with interactive features, while older users are more likely to rely on Facebook as a source of political information and as a platform for analytical discussion.

Studies by Manning (2013, 2015) show that older citizens use digital platforms not only for accessing information but also for active political participation. Facebook, due to its structural features and capacity for focused discussions, facilitates deeper analysis of political topics and promotes more sustained engagement, particularly when content is delivered through personal narratives and case studies.

In this context, although demographic variables were not decisive within this specific sample, they remain relevant when designing and distributing institutional content for broader citizen audiences. These insights suggest that while demographic segmentation may not be decisive in all institutional settings, the development of digital strategies should prioritise content relevance, accessibility, and functional design.

To assess the impact of education level on the perception of interaction between the Parliament and citizens through social media, the Kruskal-Wallis H test was employed. This method was selected due to the ordinal nature of the dependent variable and the failure to meet the assumptions required for parametric testing. The test examined the interaction ratings (on a scale from 1 to 5) across education categories: primary ( $n = 1$ ), secondary ( $n = 12$ ), undergraduate ( $n = 52$ ), master's ( $n = 18$ ), and doctoral ( $n = 1$ ). The test produced a value of  $H = 10.23$  and a p-value of 0.069, indicating that there are no statistically significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ), though the p-value is close to the threshold, suggesting a latent difference in perception among the various educational backgrounds. This implies that respondents with higher levels of education may associate the quality of interaction with satisfaction, reinforcing the need for audience segmentation. Given that all participants are directly involved in institutional communication, their responses provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of current strategies.

The study also explored whether following the official social media accounts of the Parliament influenced perceptions of interaction quality. Participants were divided into two groups based on whether they followed the accounts, and their ratings of interaction were compared using the Mann-Whitney U test. The test produced a U value of 998.5 and  $p = 0.157$ . As the result was not statistically significant, it suggests that simply following official accounts does not affect perceptions. Rather, the perceived quality and interactivity of content are more influential. This supports a shift in strategy towards improving content quality and fostering engagement, rather than focusing solely on increasing follower numbers.

**Descriptive analysis of digital interaction perception:** A descriptive analysis was conducted to evaluate the views of employees of the Parliamentary Service of Montenegro regarding institutional communication via social media. The analysis focused on two key indicators: assessments of current interaction with citizens and evaluations of limitations in two-way communication, such as the inability to comment and limited dialogue options.

**Table 3.** Descriptive analysis of respondents' attitudes towards the interaction between the Parliament of Montenegro and citizens via social media (n = 85)

Survey Item	Mean Value	Standard Deviation
Assessment of interaction between the Parliament of Montenegro and citizens via social media	2.88	1.1
Assessment of limitations to two-way communication on the Parliament of Montenegro's social media	2.32	1.3

*Descriptive Analysis of Digital Interaction Perception:* A descriptive analysis was also conducted to examine the views of employees within the Professional Service of the Parliament of Montenegro regarding institutional communication via social media. The analysis focused on two key indicators: the assessments of the current interaction with citizens and the evaluations of the limitations in two-way communication, such as the inability to comment and the restricted opportunities for dialogue.

The mean rating of current interaction was moderate ( $M = 2.88$ ;  $SD = 1.10$ ), while the score for two-way communication was lower ( $M = 2.32$ ;  $SD = 1.30$ ), reflecting perceived limitations. These findings align with earlier statistical results and reinforce the need for improved accessibility, relevance, and engagement in content.

Open-ended responses underscored three priorities for enhancing communication: content quality, audience-specific adaptation, and format diversification. Suggestions included enabling comments, hiring communication professionals, using creative multimedia formats, incorporating diverse perspectives, and creating a coherent communication strategy. These insights, grounded in institutional experience, validate the research question by confirming the relevance of key digital strategy components.

A previous internal study, entitled "Perceptions of Digital Tools and Integrated Marketing Communications," involved a sample of 62 employees within the Professional Service of the Parliament of Montenegro. The survey included questions regarding the integration of MPs' profiles with the official website of the Parliament, as well as the use of artificial intelligence in communication between the Parliament and citizens. More than half of the respondents supported linking digital profiles as a means of enhancing transparency, while 42% viewed the role of artificial intelligence positively and 39% adopted a neutral stance. Although conducted on a separate sample, these findings further reinforce the conclusions of the main study concerning the importance of innovation and trust-building.

Based on the SWOT analysis addressing the central research question, several conclusions emerge:

- Despite being present on multiple platforms, the Parliament's communication is hindered by content uniformity, limited interactivity, and insufficient platform-specific adaptation, all of which weaken engagement and trust.
- Opportunities lie in platform-tailored content, educational and interactive formats, integration with e-Parliament features, and the strategic use of AI tools.

- Ultimately, content quality, diversification, and strategic segmentation are essential to making social media a functional tool for democratic dialogue.

*Posting frequency data from 2021 to 2024* shows that high activity levels alone do not guarantee engagement. While 2021–2022 saw more posts, 2023 saw a decline, with a slight recovery in 2024. However, interaction remained low. This confirms that the quantity of content, without relevance and interactivity, has a limited effect. It also indicates that frequency of posting alone does not suffice to foster engagement. Future efforts should focus on personalisation, strategic targeting, and the relevance and quality of content.

*The comparative analysis between Montenegro and Estonia* reinforces the importance of content quality, segmentation, and diversified formats. Estonia's model, combining influencer campaigns, youth-oriented messaging, and strategic platform use, demonstrates effective engagement. Montenegro's current approach remains formal, with uniform posts and no audience targeting, missing key engagement opportunities. Influencer involvement and youth-focused campaigns should be considered. The example of the Georgian Parliament also highlights the importance of Q&A sessions, surveys, and paid campaigns in enhancing public visibility and trust. Both Estonian and Georgian practices offer applicable strategies for improving the digital engagement of the Parliament of Montenegro.

The final analysis confirms that the lack of diversification, personalisation, and segmentation are directly linked to weak engagement and low trust. One-way communication still dominates, with little feedback or adaptation to audience expectations. Low interaction statistics, homogeneous formats, and the neglect of video content highlight a passive approach. Adapting to the audience's language, expectations, and visual standards is essential for strategic success.

Theoretical and empirical studies support this conclusion. Market-oriented communication models stress the importance of listening to citizens and adapting accordingly. International examples (Estonia, New Zealand, UK, EU) show that rich, interactive content supported by AI and participatory tools fosters trust. In contrast, top-down models limit engagement. Therefore, embracing personalised, participatory, and innovative content is vital.

Prior (2022) further notes that content authenticity and relevance drive digital engagement, especially among youth. Despite their interest in politics, many feel ineffective, and static digital formats do little to change this. Global underuse of digital forums (Serra-Silva, 2018) confirms this communication gap.

In conclusion, the study affirms the need to prioritise content quality, personalisation, and engagement over mere output volume. This transition is crucial for building trust, fostering participation, and strengthening the legitimacy of parliamentary institutions.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The findings of the research highlight a significant need to redefine the approach to digital communication within the Parliament of Montenegro. While the institution's presence across multiple digital platforms is evident, limited interactivity, uniform content, and the lack of clearly

defined target groups represent substantial obstacles to effective citizen engagement and the building of trust.

Empirical data indicate that a high level of activity (in terms of the number of posts) does not automatically translate into a greater degree of citizen engagement. Key factors influencing perception and interaction include the quality, relevance, and interactivity of the content. This finding is supported by theoretical models that favour a market-oriented communication approach, where institutions listen, respond, and adapt to the needs of their users.

Through open responses, employees of the Parliamentary Service clearly articulate the priorities: enabling comments, professionalising communication, using multimedia, including opposition voices, and developing a comprehensive strategy. These demands align with the comparative practices of Estonia and Georgia, which confirm that targeted content, tailored to the specifics of individual platforms, combined with interactive formats, significantly contributes to strengthening democratic legitimacy and institutional visibility.

Descriptive and inferential analyses show that demographic variables are not decisive within the sample of employees but remain important for broader target groups. No statistically significant difference in perceptions of effectiveness was found based on age or social media usage habits, although the data suggest latent differences depending on education level, which implies the need for a more developed segmentation strategy.

The SWOT analysis identifies real opportunities and threats: the potential for transforming digital presence lies in high-quality, educational, and personalised content, while risks stem from disinformation, automation without control, and the neglect of the visual and linguistic standards of the digital audience.

Particularly valuable insight comes from the comparison with Estonia, whose communication model encompasses personalised campaigns, cooperation with influencers, and active youth involvement. In contrast, the Montenegrin model remains predominantly formal and one-way, which reduces the potential for developing digital democracy.

Based on the research findings, it is proposed to introduce the innovative practice of *digital parliamentary ambassadors* – specially trained institutional representatives who would communicate parliamentary work through personal profiles on popular platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. This model would combine authenticity and professionalism, providing a personalised channel for interaction with citizens, especially the younger generation. In this way, the perceived distance between citizens and the institution would be reduced, creating conditions for building trust through a personal tone, visual dynamism, and real-time interaction.

In conclusion, the implications of the research confirm that the transformation of the communication strategy must be based on content relevance, personalisation, and two-way interaction. Otherwise, digital presence remains a passive reflection of formal communication rather than a functional channel for democratic dialogue.



## CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of social media as a contemporary medium of communication between parliaments and citizens, with a particular focus on the Parliament of Montenegro. The theoretical framework, grounded in models of political marketing (Lees-Marshment, 2003, 2004), principles of digital democracy (Coleman and Blumler, 2009), and insights into personalised communication (Chadwick, 2013), enabled a deeper understanding of the relationship between content relevance, citizen engagement, and trust in institutional practices.

Empirical findings confirm that mere presence on social media, if not supported by two-way communication, remains limited in both scope and democratic impact. Content quality, audience segmentation, and format diversification emerged as essential for fostering interaction, while one-way communication, a formal tone, and uniform post structures failed to stimulate active participation. Comparative practices from Estonia, Georgia, and the United Kingdom demonstrated more effective results when social media was approached strategically, combining targeted content, interactive formats, and platform-appropriate communication styles.

A particular challenge – and opportunity – lies in establishing meaningful communication with Generation Z and Generation Alpha, whose expectations are shaped by immediacy, emotional tone, and visual dynamism. Existing institutional projects, such as the “Democratic Workshops,” can serve as a foundation, but they require expansion through modern, digital-first approaches tailored to younger audiences.

The future of parliamentary communication lies in the integration of advanced technologies – including artificial intelligence, chatbots, sentiment analysis<sup>8</sup>, and micro-segmentation<sup>9</sup> – into a broader communication ecosystem that balances automation with human connection. While digital tools can enhance efficiency and reach, lasting trust is built through authenticity, recognition, and ongoing interaction.

In response to these findings, this study proposes an original institutional innovation: the introduction of digital parliamentary ambassadors. These would be specially trained professionals from fields such as journalism, civic education, digital storytelling, and political communication, mandated to share parliamentary work through personal yet institutionally authorised social media profiles. Operating on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, they would explain complex procedures in relatable ways, document behind-the-scenes processes, conduct interactive sessions with citizens, and humanise parliamentary narratives through creative visual storytelling. By doing so, they would act as a bridge between the formal institution and diverse digital

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<sup>8</sup> Sentiment analysis is a technique that employs artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing (NLP) to examine tone, emotions, and attitudes expressed in written communication, such as social media posts, comments, or news articles - in order to understand the sentiments conveyed. This analysis helps identify how the public perceives particular topics or events, which is especially valuable for political organisations in shaping communication strategies that align with the emotions and needs of citizens (Liu, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Microsegmentation is a marketing strategy that involves dividing a broad target audience into smaller, precisely defined segments based on specific characteristics, behaviours, or interests. This process enables the creation of personalised messages that are relevant to each group of individuals. In the context of this study, microsegmentation may involve categorising citizens according to demographic data, political views, or specific interests, with the aim of delivering content that is most appropriate for each group.

communities, particularly those that feel politically excluded or underrepresented. Their role would support broader goals of civic education, youth inclusion, and democratic renewal.

Ultimately, social media are not simply channels of dissemination, but spaces for democratic negotiation. Parliaments that recognise this potential, and adapt accordingly, will not only gain digital visibility but also institutional relevance. In the digital era, a market-oriented communication strategy – one that listens, adapts, and resonates with its audience – is essential to reinforce democratic legitimacy and reconnect institutions with the public they serve.

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