AGENDA-SETTING EFFECTS ON TWITTER IN BRAZILIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2018

T. Santos [1] , J. Louçã [1] , H. Coelho [2] .

(1) Department of Information Science and Technology, (ISTA), ISTAR–Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Lisbon, Portugal, (2) Department of Informatics of the Faculty of Sciences, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

The present study concerns the media influence on Twitter during the debate leading to the 2018 presidential election in Brazil. We observed that the dominance of traditional media is effective in this social network, but not without the challenge of alternative media. The distribution of the media can be explained, simultaneously, with preferential-attachment and maximum entropy attachment dynamics. The dominance of traditional media can also be explained by preferential-attachment mechanisms, which are the result of their popularity and institutionalization. Moreover, the presence of alternative media at the top of the distribution seems to indicate the presence of a maximum entropy attachment dynamics. This hypothesis is reinforced by the finding that most of the emerging and partisan media has a significant part of their presence generated by bots, around 25% in the case of partisan media, which thus have the ability to challenge the dominant position of traditional media.

Studying the Euclidean distances between media articles and tweets, we notice that the titles of the articles are more similar to tweets than their texts, a characteristic that may derive from the structural similarities between the titles and the 280-character anatomy of the tweet, or even from the fact that some browser extensions and social network management applications use the page title when sharing webpages. In the case of bots, this distance is smaller, which suggests that the automation of sharing the link with the article title is being used to amplify political messages present in the media articles. Regarding the similarity between the media message and the entire corpus of tweets, we observe that the text of the articles is generally more representative of the users' opinions. Here, media with a greater distance to user opinion are closer to universal opinion. This property seems to indicate a complex opinion dynamic on Twitter and led us to speculate on several hypotheses that were not tested in this study, but could serve as a basis for future work.

These results are in line with our previous study on Brexit [1], which leads us to believe that there are inherent characteristics of the electoral debates on Twitter, that tend to reflect the influence of alternative media election coverages shrouded in partisanship, political polarization, and disinformation, as previous research has shown [2 - 4].

References

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