NETWORK INFORMATION PRO AND CONTRA BOLSONARO'S DISCOURSE ON CORONAVIRUS

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the information sources of a corpus made of 135,000 tweets with the hashtags #Bolsonarotemrazão and #OBrasilprecisapararBolsonaro. By analyzing and categorizing the hyperlinks in these messages, the study investigates the information sources used in the construction of opposing discourses about the coronavirus, identifying the types of sources mobilized in both positions. The results indicate that while pro-Bolsonaro discourses prevail in alternative media, those containing hashtags opposing him come from diverse sources, especially traditional media. Drawing on the notion of mediation, the article argues for understanding information sources as an essential part of how the Twitter discussion about the coronavirus pandemic mediated this event for the two different hashtag publics.

Keywords: coronavirus; information sources; mediation; Twitter.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus pandemic introduced yet another layer to the problem of anti-scientific discourse in Brazil. Although discourses such as flat-Earth theory and climate change denialism were already circulating in Brazilian society and could be pointed to as evidence of an epistemic crisis (Benkler, Faris, Robert, 2018; Gomes, Dourado, 2019), the coronavirus inaugurated a new episode of denialism, one with more serious and immediate consequences than previous cases. In this context, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro became a central actor by opting to further radicalize his disbelief in science and his attack on institutions. Bolsonaro defended actions that went against all medical and scientific organizations, as well as the vast majority of international experience[1].

Bolsonaro's statement to the nation on radio and television on the night of March 24, 2020, was a milestone in the positioning adopted by the politician towards the disease. In a speech that attacked the press and mentioned no source external to the government itself, the president advocated the end of social isolation by urging people to return "to normality," calling coronavirus "a little flu or little cold."[2] Bolsonaro's denialist stance towards the pandemic was reinforced in many moments, but that speech remains a reference point for understanding his position. This paper focuses on the moment following the announcement, when social media, particularly Twitter, became the scene of tens of thousands of messages about the speech. That focus allows me to analyze how people reacted to the President's speech and how it was incorporated into societal debate, online.

The day after the announcement, the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão (Bolsonaro is right) appeared among the country's trending topics, which soon led to the creation of the hashtag #OBrasilprecisapararBolsonaro (Brazil needs to stop Bolsonaro), both of which were widely used to share messages with clearly opposite goals. Against this backdrop, this paper is interested in the differences between the information sources mobilized by the publics that formed around each of these two opposing hashtags. To this end, 135,000 tweets containing the hashtags were analyzed considering the information sources they promoted. The paper argues that amidst a strong attack on scientific institutions, certain information sources functioned as mediators in the construction of different discourses about the coronavirus. Before presenting the results, I shall briefly discuss the notion of mediation and its relationship with the analysis of the information sources.

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[1] The first case of coronavirus in Brazil was confirmed on February 26, nearly 2 months after the first reported case in China and weeks after the first cases in European countries such as Germany, Italy, and France. One might think that the different preventive measures adopted by these countries would allow Brazil to know the various routes of the disease transmission; on the contrary, the president positioning despised or discredited these prior experiences as valid information.

[2] The full transcript of the speech is available on the official government website: https://www.gov.br/planalto/pt-br/acompanhe-o-planalto/pronunciamentos/pronunciamentos-do-presidente-da-republica/pronunciamento-em-cadeia-de-radio-e-televisao-do-senhor-presidente-da-republica-jair-bolsonaro.

2. MEDIATION AND INFORMATION SOURCES

Analyzing the information sources of different positions in a political debate allows us to understand an important part of the communication dynamics in that debate. Yet, I believe that such analysis is not merely a matter of indicating which information sources are used the most by which groups. Rather, I adhere to the idea that the digital environment entails a complex and diverse "mediation process" (Santos, 2020). This means that due to the multiplicity of actors within the digital environment, social groups can attribute legitimacy to information sources in different ways, thereby generating distinct degrees of visibility for different media messages.

In the context of an epistemic crisis, beyond understanding each media's role, one must thoroughly understand which media are recognized and legitimized as information sources according to different social groups. Because journalistic parameters are no longer the only ones in effect, it is important to explore how the authorization of information takes place in the context of networked communications. As Sonia Livingstone (2009) argues, analyzing "mediation processes" essentially reveals changes related to the interactions between social structures and agents, more than processes that relate to media, themselves. I understand mediation as a process that takes place between information and citizens, thus allowing us to analyze important phenomena that make up the current communication and political scenario in a non-fragmented way. Such a perspective has also been adopted by recent Brazilian studies that highlight the role of communication mediation processes and information sources in structuring a democratic debate (Lemos, 2020; Lycarião, 2014; Moraes; Adghirni, 2012; Silva; Mundim, 2015)

Thus, identifying information sources goes beyond knowing media relationships or where a URL directs a reader. Information sources act as mediators to whom one may resort as authorities in information dissemination. As I see it, these relations of legitimacy, visibility, and authority – pillars that also underpin democratic representation – are key to understanding communicative flows and their current political impacts. Although further highlighted by the pandemic context and the politicization of this theme in Brazil, these issues are not restricted to this historical moment and can provide essential clues to understanding contemporary political processes.

Mediation [3] originally emerged simultaneously with mass media, when visibility processes were no longer limited to the here and now and started being mediated (Thompson, 2005). Thus, mediation outlines the possibility of obtaining knowledge from information emerging not from one's experience, but rather from a communication system. For a long time, the discussion about mediation was tied

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[3] Here, we attribute no intrinsically negative meaning to the mediation process (Santos, 2010), which is understood as part of the construction of reality and not as a process that involves a loss of in relation to the real (Rubim, 2002).

almost exclusively to the role of journalists and traditional media as the legitimate social actors selecting what should be disseminated to the general public, thus giving them the role of information gatekeepers (Meraz; Papacharissi, 2013; Segerberg; Bennett, 2011; Shoemaker, 2001).

With the emergence of Web 2.0 and the new actors who make up the polyphony of voices in digital networks (Lemos, 2008), this debate becomes more complex and gives rise to new interpretations of the phenomenon of mediation, which can be grouped around three central lines. The first focus of analysis centers on the fact that certain audiences can be addressed without the need for journalistic institutions, which would culminate in a so-called "disintermediation." This debate gained momentum in the first decade of the 2000s, with blogs (Aldé; Escobar; Chagas, 2006; Penteado, Santos, Araujo, 2009; Santos, 2010), and continues to develop with social media (Eldridge II; García-Carretero; Broersma, 2019; Gerbaudo, 2012) and instant messaging applications, always focusing on the possibility of a supposed direct communication between a given sender and its audience, without the action of traditional media. This formulation introduces widely used concepts such as "mass self-communication" (Castells, 2009) and "personal publics" (Schmidt, 2014).

Stemming from this discussion, a line of analysis emerged to analyze new media forms. Since traditional media no longer have near-exclusive control of the sphere of public visibility, the question that arises is: who are the new actors capable of generating social visibility and how do they emerge? (Bastos; Mercea, 2015; Garcia; Trere, 2014; Rodríguez; Ferron; Shamas, 2014). Finally, a third interpretative line focuses on understanding the role of mediators as going beyond that which emits or disseminates information. These studies address the role of a series of technological elements that become part of mediation processes, such as platforms and their algorithms (Lemos, 2020; Hepp, 2020), but also the new roles that people themselves start to play in the processes of information dissemination (Gomes, 2016; Santos, 2019).

Separating these three lines helps in understanding the different analytical approaches to the phenomenon of mediation in the context of digital media's rise. Empirically, though, their intertwining has been more frequent. Several studies show that traditional media continue to play an important role in the media ecosystem, including disseminating messages from leaders and organizations that communicate essentially via social media (Mitozo; Costa; Rodrigues, 2020; Newman et al., 2019; Stier; Schünemann; Steiger, 2018), so that the role of alternative mediators may be restricted to certain social circles. Thus, rather than considering the digital environment as a horizontal source, we should understand the specificities of the new types of verticalities that emerge from inequalities within digital dynamics (Gerbaudo, 2020; Joathan, Alves, 2020).

In this scenario, Chadwick (2013) proposes an especially interesting approach, which conceives this new media ecosystem as a space of coexistence and interaction between various means and communication logics. For the author, the

novelty introduced by this environment emerges not from the technology itself, but from the different possible combinations between new and old communication logics that interact within this new environment. This means to say that discussing the current mediation processes implies considering them as a complex intertwining of actors with various logics, functioning as an intermediate instance between people and how they perceive the world.

As aforementioned, thinking about communication mediation at a time of epistemic crisis becomes even more challenging. In a context where reaching consensus about who is able to produce knowledge and establish the truth is a complex task, information sources become central elements, for they allow us to investigate both the role of traditional media and the valorization of possible new mediators that start to serve as a basis for certain discourses. Thus, analyzing what are the information sources mobilized by people in a public debate is a promising starting point for understanding the current processes of mediation in a networked environment.

3.   METHODOLOGY

Operationalizing mediation processes presents a series of challenges related to either the construction of analytical instruments or the possibility of obtaining data that enables a more comprehensive analysis of the informative path. This study intends to deepen the debate around these challenges by examining links used in messages posted on Twitter.

Although still quite restricted, examining the hyperlinks shared in a given social network indicates a series of processes. Meraz and Papacharissi (2013) assume a networked gatekeeping within social media, which would incorporate a multilevel process with new actors of diverse levels of power. Yet another difference from the traditional gatekeeping concept – where journalists act as the main social mediators - is that such reinterpretation of the concept considers sociability as a new variable in the information flow. Meraz and Papacharissi categorize the different actors interacting in this information selection process as elite and non-elite, introducing the novel insight that non-elite actors have more possibilities of decision in relation to the information flow.

Segerberg and Bennet (2011, p. 202) offer an alternative for approaching the combination of mediation processes at work, stating that Twitter flows, at the same time, "incorporate and are incorporated into gatekeeping processes." That is, while Twitter has its own mediating processes – defined by the platform itself, its organization and filtering algorithms, and the social networks established there, – the communicative flow of tweets depends on external mediators who will provide the content shared on the platform.

Considering these two approaches, understanding how links are shared on Twitter allows us to understand multiple processes underlying the choices users make about which information to share. Specifically, this study aims to understand

mediation in two different levels: a) at the point where information is produced, understanding who are the actors that are being referred to in the discussion; and b) at the platform level, approaching Twitter's role as a mediator and how it works specially through tools such as retweeting and hashtagging.

This communicative environment was chosen not with the intent of analyzing it in isolation or deeming it as representative of the entire media system; on the contrary, we recognize the urgent need not to consider media in isolation, as well as to understand the logics driving current media functioning (Chadwick, 2013). Being a communication environment especially used for political debate and real-time exchange of political messages[4], Twitter served as the starting point of our investigation.

The data I analyzed was collected by gathering messages that contained either one of two hashtags. The first hashtag search produced a corpus consisting of 98,141 messages with the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão, posted between 10:00 pm on March 25, 2020, and 11:00 am on March 27 of the same year (37h-period). The second corpus is comprised of 37,573 tweets with the hashtag #OBrasiltemquepararBolsonaro. That hashtag emerged later than and in response to the first one. These messages were collected between 8:00 pm on March 27, 2020, and 9:00 am on March 29 of the same year (37h-period). These two hashtags were chosen for being widely used, featuring among Twitter's trending topics, and representing opposing positions in relation to President Jair Bolsonaro's statement to the nation, on March 24.

Hashtags are used to broaden the audience of a particular tweet far beyond the initial circle of followers of a particular user, besides identifying messages addressing a given issue and helping organize the conversation around important topics. Moreover, it "signals a wish to take part in a wider communicative process" (Bruns, Moe, 2014, p. 18), thus bringing together different audiences around the same topic. Regarding hashtags associated with certain political or social events, the timeline can act as a certain narrative of the event, constructed by different and multiple information and opinions (Bruns, Moe, 2014). However, members who use a hashtag do not necessarily follow that keyword conversation timeline, meaning that doing so may function as a bookmark more than as engagement with a cause.

Data were collected using the Get Tags[5] tool, which extracts tweets from the platform API, thus implying limitations as to the number of messages. Extractions were performed at every hour, considering the limit allowed by the API. The corpus does not claim to represent the totality of messages on the subject, but rather a

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[4] Due to space limitations, we will not be able to resume track record of Twitter as a preferred platform for political debates and real-time coverage. An in-depth debate on the subject can be found in the book Twitter and Society, edited by Katrin Weller, Axel Bruns, Jean Burgess, Merja Mahrt, and Cornelius Puschmann, and published in 2014.

[5] https://tags.hawksey.info/get-tags/ (Accessed on: July 21, 2020).

sample of them. Data processing, analysis, and visualization were performed using the Tableau and R software, with the aid of Microsoft Excel.

The research question regarding information sources used as mediators of discourses on measures to combat the spread of coronavirus was answered by means of a two-step analysis. The first step consists of investigating the types of hyperlinks in the messages, considering that links play an important role not only in information flow, but also in the organization forms of certain discourses (Segerberg, Bennett, 2011). Links also connect different actors in the communicative ecosystem, allowing an analysis that goes beyond the media itself.

To verify the information sources, links used in the two corpora were analyzed and separated into six categories. Each media was coded by the author and then presented to peers in order to discuss the pertinence of the categorization.

- Traditional media: all websites linked to large media companies with at least one television, newspaper, magazine, or radio vehicle. For example: all media from Globo company and the newspapers Folha de S. Paulo and Estado de São Paulo.

- Alternative media: those produced outside traditional media institutions and networks[6] (Atton, Couldry, 2003). If, on the one hand, some of these media can be deemed as strengthening the relations between media and civil society (Waisbord, 2009), on the other, they have been considered as important actors in disinformation processes, especially when characterized by hyperpartisanization (Recuero, Soares, 2020). For example: Jornal da Cidade Online, Folha Política, Diário do Centro do Mundo, Brasil247.

- Regional media: as highlighted by Peruzzo (2005), the history of local and regional media approaches that of community media, given their importance for building a sense of community. Thus, considering the specificity of their relations with local network, which differ from vehicles of national amplitude, these media were deemed as a separate category (non-classifiable as traditional or alternative). For example: O Tempo, O Povo, Rondônia ao Vivo.

- Social media: categorized from the classic definition formulated by boyd and Elisson (2007), which states that social media sites "allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 211). In face of the exponential growth in these media use from mobile devices (Canavilhas, Rodrigues, 2017), the investigation also included access to these platforms by means of applications. For example: Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

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[6] The choice for a broad concept of alternative media does not aim to disregard the long tradition of studies in this field or the efforts to characterize the relations of these media with traditional media, social movements, and the overall society in a more precise way. For further reading on this debate, see Ferron, 2010; Waisbord, 2009; Suzina, 2019. This work approaches the presence of these media in the analyzed corpus – which will certainly have to be refined later, both due to the diversity of websites and the challenges that their models represent for the traditional categories of this research field.

- Organizations: websites of state institutions or civil society organizations, including those of political parties or politicians. For example: the Senate, ministries, CUT and Lula's Institute.

- Others: those that did not fit into any of the aforementioned categories.

As explained in this article introduction, President Jair Bolsonaro's statement on March 24 went against all recommendations widely accepted by international health agencies and disseminated by traditional media to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As shown by Nielsen and colleagues (2020), despite the increasing search for information from traditional media in the pandemic context, confidence in this type of information source tends to be lower among North American right-wing voters of President Donald Trump, whose attitude towards the coronavirus pandemic was similar to that of Jair Bolsonaro. A recent study conducted by Recuero and Soares (2020) also verified an important connection between discourse networks about coronavirus and those of political information, showing how the speeches of President Jair Bolsonaro impacted the circulation of fake news and how reaction networks were articulated. According to the authors,

> messages that belied [false] information were mainly produced by opinion leaders such as journalists and researchers, who produce more technical content, and influencers, such as digital journalism; whereas misinformation was mainly produced by opinion leaders associated with political agendas, such as politicians and political commentators, as well as hyperpartisan vehicles (p. 22, our translation).

Based on this, we assume that messages of support for Bolsonaro will rely less on general information sources and specific traditional media sources, thus resulting in our first two hypotheses:

H1: the corpus of messages with the hashtag #OBrasilprecisapararBolsonaro will provide proportionally more links than that of the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão.

H2: those using the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão will rely less on links that lead to sources linked to traditional media than those using the hashtag #OBrasiltemquepararBolsonaro.

Moreover, given the key role of "opinion leaders associated with political agendas, such as politicians and political commentators, as well as hyperpartisan vehicles" (Recuero, Soares, 2020) in reinforcing pro-Bolsonaro discourses, and considering that social media provides a space for the emergence and dissemination of voices dissenting from traditional media (Chadwick, 2013; Meraz, Papacharissi, 2013), we believe that social media will be information sources frequently cited among messages with the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão. Hence our third hypothesis:

H3: the social media category will be more relevant in the corpus #Bolsonarotemrazão than in the #OBrasiltemquepararBolsonaro.

4.   ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The first hypothesis was tested by analyzing the frequency of hyperlink use in the two corpora, verifying the domains of the most shared links within each sample[7]. By doing that, we were not interested in analyzing the sharing of specific content, but rather in identifying the recurrence of certain information sources in tweets[8].

As shown in Table 1, the rate of external links is both low, but significantly higher among tweets defending Bolsonaro's proposals, thus refuting our first hypothesis. Whereas 8.6% of messages with the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão include links external to Twitter, only 4.9% of those with the hashtag #OBrasilprecisapararBolsonaro does.

Firstly, we believe this low rate of links can account for the conversational nature of the Twitter platform. Although links may be used to share information and make statements, the dialog between users remain the center of the platform's dynamics. Secondly, such a two-fold higher rate of tweets with external links among messages in support of the President suggests that this audience recursively searches for an external validation of their arguments – a phenomenon that seems less common among those publishing messages against the President. It also shows that not only they search for validation, but also, they encounter a considerable amount of content online that is used to validate these discourses.

Table 1. Use of external links in both corpora

#Bolsonarotemrazão			#OBrasiltemquepararBolsonaro	
Tweets	98,141		Tweets	37,573
Tweets with links	8,566		Tweets with links	1,847
Percentage	8.6%		Percentage	4.9%

Then, links were classified according to the categories presented in the methodology section and analyzed. For the first analysis, all sites appearing in the

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[7] This analysis was performed according to the following stages: a) links were extracted from tweets; b) the corresponding addresses were de-shortened, since Twitter presents all links shortened, thus allowing for domains identification; and c) links were broken to compile a list of main domains, without considering subdomains and protocol markings.

[8] The "twitter.com" domain was the most common in both corpora. Links to Twitter comprise 81% of all hyperlinks among tweets with the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão, and 92% of those with #OBrasiltemquepararBolsonaro. These high rates are justified by the large number of messages citing other tweets, that is, when people refer to a message on the network itself. Such finding portrays a strongly endogenous dynamic of the platform, which is more significant among messages against the president. As discussed by Alexandra Segerberg and W. Lance Bennet (2011), gatekeeping processes in Twitter conversations can be analyzed both internally and externally. However, for now, we will focus on links to content external to the platform. To test our first hypothesis, we considered only external links.

sample were listed, grouped into categories, and analyzed as to recurrence. We identified 122 different websites in messages with the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão[9] and 129 in those with #OBrasilprecisapararBolsonaro.

The second analysis considered the number of times each website appeared in the sampled tweets, that is, each link replication rate. In this stage, we identified 8,566 tweets with external links in the #Bolsonarotemrazão corpus and 1,847 in the #OBrasilprecisapararBolsonaro corpus.

Regarding tweets in support of Bolsonaro, the two most frequent types of sites are those with content from alternative and traditional media vehicles (28.69%), followed by regional media vehicles (18.85%). However, when we consider the dissemination of these links (that is, the number of times they are replicated), the difference between categories becomes much more evident: alternative media accounts for 78.78% of links, traditional media for 10.26%, and regional media for 2.2%. Besides alternative media, the only other representative category when considering its dissemination are links to social media, which go from 4.29% to 8.31%.

Table 2. Categories of domains and tweets with links – #Bolsonarotemrazão

Categories	% of websites (n=122)	% of tweets with links (n=8566)
Alternative Media	28,69%	78,78%
Traditional Media	28,69%	10,26%
Regional Media	18,85%	2,20%
Others	12,30%	0,32%
Organizations	6,56%	0,13%
Social Media	4,92%	8,31%

When performing the same analysis in the #OBrasiltemquepararBolsonaro corpus, we found very similar results as to each category percentage in relation to the total

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[9] For data treatment, different domains referring to the same website were put together, thus unifying variations such as mobile sites or URLs internal sections.

sites, with only traditional and regional media presenting significant differences: while the first is higher (36.43%), the second is lower (14.95%).

However, such a similarity dissipates when we consider these links replication rates, in which case traditional media category goes from 36.43% to 48.02% and links that lead to organization pages go from 5.43% to 16.46%. Different from messages in support of Bolsonaro, this last category showed links to websites of political organizations or politicians. The alternative media category, which represents 25.58% of the total sites in the sample, represents only 22.58% of tweets with links.

Table 3. Categories of domains and tweets with links – #OBrasilprecisapararBolsonaro

Categories	% of websites (n=129)	% of tweets with links (n=1847)
Alternative Media	36,43%	48,02%
Traditional Media	25,58%	22,58%
Regional Media	13,95%	1,79%
Others	13,18%	3,09%
Social Media	5,42%	8,07%
Organizations	5,43	16,46%

The results suggest that, despite presenting similar categories of information sources, the dissemination patterns of the two corpora are quite different, thus confirming our second hypothesis. Among messages against the President, traditional media accounted for a higher percentage in relation to both the number of sites (36.43% vs. 29.69%) and the number of tweets with links (48.02% vs. 10.26%).

In turn, our third hypothesis was not confirmed. In both dimensions analyzed, the use of social media as information sources external to Twitter is quite similar between the two corpora. While the percentage of social media sites is slightly higher among messages with the hashtag #OBrasilprecisapararBolsonaro

(5.43% vs. 4.92% in #Bolsonarotemrazão), we verified the opposite when considering these links dissemination (8.07% vs. 8.31%, respectively).

Moreover, messages in support of Bolsonaro tend to replicate tweets with links to alternative media, whereas those criticizing the President show a greater replication diversity, focusing mainly on traditional media. Such a difference is also evident when considering shared domains. Among messages in support of Bolsonaro, the Jornal da Cidade Online is responsible for 73.45% of links to sources outside Twitter, being the most shared. This media became known as a non-reliable website that commonly published fake news items that were later debunked by many fact-checkers. In turn, for messages against the President, the most shared link is to the UOL portal, accounting for 20.7% of the total. It is important to highlight that this prevalence of one information source has been found by other studies (Alves, 2019; Santos, Chagas, Marinho, 2022), which shows the importance of virality of information in anti-science ecosystems.
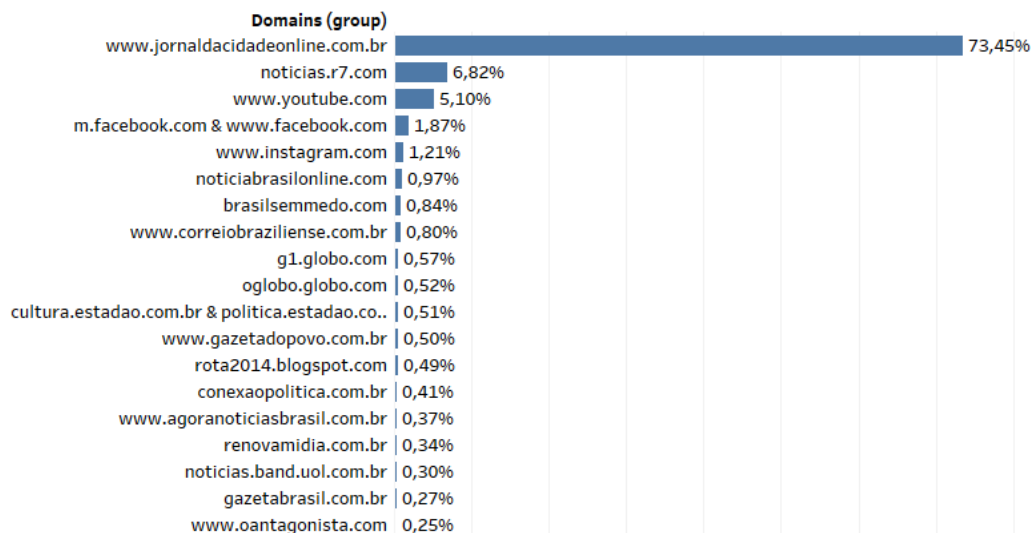

Figure 1 - Most shared sites with the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão

Such higher prevalence of alternative media in messages with the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão suggest the importance of "opinion leaders associated with political agendas, such as politicians and political commentators, as well as hyperpartisan vehicles," as key actors for this speech (Recuero and Soares, 2020). Furthermore, they are commonly referenced with links to their websites, what highlights the fundamental importance of this new media ecosystem that is not based on traditional or social media, but which has a strongly supported discourse on social platforms.

5.   CONCLUSION

This study allows us to perceive important indicators of the current Brazilian media system (Chadwick, 2013). Tweets supporting or criticizing the March 24 statement

of President Jair Bolsonaro refer to partially similar website domains. However, such similarity disappears when we analyze the number of times each source appears in the corpus. In this case, alternative media are prominent among messages with the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão (79%), while those with #OBrasilprecisapararBolsonaro show a greater distribution, mainly including traditional (48%) and alternative media (23%). Moreover, only one third of the information sources referenced are equivalent in both corpora. That not only shows that supporters of non-scientific positions search for external validation for their positions (Oliveira et al., 2021), but also that there is a variety of content that supports those views.

These results provide four important findings. The first concerns the different treatment of traditional media as mediators by audiences with different political positions. We found a smaller scale of information dissemination from these media in messages that support Bolsonaro, which seems aligned with the president's frequent and aggressive attacks on the press and journalism in general. This phenomenon is not limited to Brazil. A recent survey conducted by the Reuters Institute during the COVID-19 pandemic shows people's consumption of, and trust in, various information sources and institutions (Nielsen et al., 2020). By relating data on political positioning in the United States with data about trust in information sources, the researchers found that 70% of self-declared left-leaning individuals trusted media organizations, while this rate fell by half among those self-declared right-leaning individuals. In turn, 43% of left-leaning individuals reported trusting in their acquaintances, increasing to 48% among right-leaning.

Even though the bi-partisan system in the US cannot be directly compared to the multi-partisan Brazilian reality, such a trend of less trust in, and dissemination of, traditional media sources among self-declared right-leaning individuals – who, in our sample, would represent those using the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazão – raises a number of questions. In the Brazilian reality historically, criticism of the media has been built as part of the Brazilian left-wing agenda, emerging with the struggle for press freedom during the military dictatorship (1964-1985) until the movements against media concentration after democratization (strongly active after the re-democratization process, from the nineties on). By 2013, this phenomenon had already spread throughout society, causing the media, especially Rede Globo, to be accused of trying to overthrow President Dilma Rousseff and, at the same time, working for her re-election (Santos, Almada, 2019). Such processes seem to have accentuated even further over recent years, increasing criticism of the traditional media on the part of the right-wing[10], which may be due to the fact that a right-wing political party has reached presidency. Although criticism of traditional media comes from both sides of the

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[10] We have no intention, here, to present the criticisms of the left- and right-wing parties to the Brazilian media as equivalent. On the contrary, in other texts, we made an effort to understand how these discursive lines differ and are guided by different types of society.

political spectrum, and considering the historical proximity of Brazilian national media and more conservative political perspectives to one another, our data shows that, today, left-leaning citizens tend to rely more on traditional media than right-leaning ones.

This criticism of the traditional media, combined with the potential of Web 2.0, leads us to our second finding: a new ecosystem of alternative media that comes to occupy a central place in the mediation process. Media built outside or in opposition to mainstream media have always existed, from fanzines to union newspapers and blogs. Thus, the issue is not in the novelty of the phenomenon, but in the magnitude and characteristics it currently acquires. These information sources appear eight times more than traditional media among messages in support of Bolsonaro, besides being the second most referenced source among messages against him – a fact that shows alternative media's central importance in the current media ecosystem. Although novel communication dynamics are often ascribed to social media, the importance of sources that feed them is unmistakable. These findings highlight the need for a more detailed analysis of alternative media sources, allowing the construction of a consistent typology.

Our third finding is that virality seems to be a central element for anti-scientific networks. That becomes clear when we compare how information sources are distributed among both groups of actors analyzed here. While there are similarities between the information sources mobilized by the groups, when we consider how these different information sources spread among the groups, the differences are huge. The virality of certain types of information sources, notably Alternative Media, is striking. More than that, there is also a high level of concentration among those alternative sources, which makes only one website responsible for more than 70% of the mentions. That is another indication of how virality is at the center of the spread of this content.

Finally, the fourth point that seems central is the broader articulation of other types of mediation than that produced by traditional journalism (Alves, 2019). In both corpora, mentions of social media represent 8% of the links, with a predominance of YouTube in both cases. Despite its relevance in determining the information sources, the social media category is too general to give an indication of the kinds of actors being referred to. Different typologies of different social media actors have already been developed (Santos, 2019; Alves, 2019), suggesting the need for an improved understanding of how this content is circulated. While the political debate is fed by a rich ecosystem of websites, communication spaces imply specific sociability, visibility, and authority dynamics that not only circulate information, but add meanings to it. Thus, it is not simply a matter of receiving information from certain sources, but of receiving it through certain social bonds (that often feed into digital media). Previous research has shown how instant messaging applications are pivotal spaces for the circulation of such messages (Santos et al., 2019), suggesting the need for further research across different platforms and communication spaces. The paper has shown the need for understanding mediation

in terms of both its complexification by various digital communicative spaces and its diverse appropriations by different social groups in their attempts to formulate their discourses.

The limitations inherent to this study include, first, the reliance on data that is limited to the Twitter platform, as well as the focus on two hashtags used at a specific moment of time. Broader analysis could potentially reveal the wider relevance of this paper's findings, and further research may help refine the analytical categories used to analyse the links in order to more accurately describe the media environment. In any case, I believe that the data and reflections presented in this study may indicate important research paths for understanding contemporary mediation processes and the social roles of mediators, be they traditional media actors or those emerging from this new media context. Such understanding seems crucial to grasp the current communication dynamics and, above all, its political impacts on democratic functioning.

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