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VIRAL CONTENT ON *FACEBOOK*:

a case study on the run-up to the Brazilian 2018 presidential elections

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ABSTRACT – For this paper we collected and analyzed manipulated content intended to go viral on *Facebook* and thus influence public opinion during the pre-election period in Brazil. Posts from 10 *Facebook* pages were collected over the course of 2017 from Brazilian organizations known to have produced false or manipulated news; we selected a total of 50 of the most-shared posts from those pages. The results showed that the posts receiving the most shares have three characteristics in common: content format, language strategy and information source. Impact phrases, public figures commenting on political facts out of context, and the sensationalist approach were all resources identified in texts, videos and photographs; formats which are commonly used for propagation purposes.
Key words: Fake news. Journalism. Spreadability. Content. Social networks.

CONTEÚDOS VIRAIS NO *FACEBOOK*:
estudo de caso na pré-campanha das eleições presidenciais brasileiras 2018

RESUMO – Neste trabalho coletamos e analisamos conteúdos manipulados com o objetivo de se tornarem virais no *Facebook* e, dessa forma, influenciarem a opinião pública durante o período pré-eleitoral no Brasil. Ao longo de 2017, foram recolhidos os posts de 10 páginas do *Facebook* de organizações brasileiras conotadas com a produção de notícias

falsas ou manipuladas, tendo sido selecionadas 50 publicações que correspondem às mais partilhas em cada uma das páginas. Os resultados permitem verificar que os *posts* com mais compartilhamento têm algumas características comuns em três quesitos: formato de conteúdo, estratégia de linguagem e fonte de informação. Foram também identificados em textos, vídeos e fotografias, formatos habitualmente usados com esta finalidade de propagação, o recurso à frases de impacto, a utilização descontextualizada de figuras públicas comentando fatos políticos e a abordagem sensacionalista.
Palavras-chave: Notícias falsas. Jornalismo. Espalhamento. Conteúdos. Redes sociais digitais.

CONTENIDO VIRAL EN *FACEBOOK*: estudio de caso en la precampaña para las elecciones presidenciales brasileñas de 2018

RESUMEN – En este documento recopilamos y analizamos contenido manipulado para volverse viral en *Facebook* y así influir en la opinión pública durante el período preelectoral en Brasil. A lo largo de 2017, se recogieron 10 publicaciones de páginas de *Facebook* de organizaciones brasileñas relacionadas con la producción de noticias falsas o manipuladas, y se seleccionaron 50 publicaciones que corresponden a la mayor cantidad de publicaciones compartidas en cada página. Los resultados permiten verificar que las publicaciones que comparten más tienen algunas características comunes en tres aspectos: formato de contenido, estrategia de lenguaje y fuente de información. También se identificó en textos, videos y fotografías, formatos comúnmente utilizados para este propósito de propagación, el uso de oraciones de impacto, el uso descontextualizado de figuras públicas que comentan hechos políticos y el enfoque sensacionalista.
Palabras clave: Noticias falsas. Periodismo. Difundibilidad. Contenido. Redes sociales digitales.

1 Introduction

A study developed for Pew Research Center, Shearer & Gottfried (2016) found that 67% of the adult population in the U.S. gets their daily information from social networks, 45% of that information coming from *Facebook*. While it is true that some of this information bears the qualitative stamp of traditional media, most is of a personal or unknown origin, paving the way for the circulation of false information. The problem comes from the fact that most users are unable to identify fake news, or they only read news headlines (Gabielkov et al., 2016), which are often sensationalist in nature or contain decontextualized information. After quickly reading the content, users then share said content on their profiles, thereby increasing the impact of these publications. Added to this is the fact that the posts registering the highest number of likes and comments

are also the ones that are shared the most (Thorson, 2008); we have the ability to turn unverified or false information into viral content.

Social networks are so massive, decentralized and poorly controlled, couple this with a media illiteracy which spans across the generations (November, 2016) and we have the conditions for the circulation of false information. All this, combined with fake profiles and *bots* designed specifically to increase the speed at which this kind of news is spread, provides us with a potentially dangerous ecosystem for the normal functioning of democracies.

Reaction to the manipulated circulation of information started out slow and disorganized, but quickly increased due to the important elections occurring in several of the Group of Seven (G7) countries. Germany, for example, approved stringent legislation against those who produce or spread false news, something that is also being considered by other countries.

The social networks themselves have tried to combat fake news; *Facebook* repeatedly alters its algorithm so as not to be linked to the spread of this kind of false information. In 2016, the social media and networking company reduced the amount of questionable news and, in 2018, announced *meaningful interactions*, changing its news feeds to show fewer *posts* from organizations in favor of *posts* from friends and family.

Alphabet, the parent company of *Google*, has also partnered with the Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) to change its search engine algorithm in order to eliminate false news from searches.

The changes introduced to the algorithms for a number of partners, whether search engines or social networks, meant identifying the characteristics of the manipulated content, that is, the elements that can help the machine distinguish from what is true and what is fake. This identification can be made based on a wide range of criteria, ranging from the origin of the information to its content, as well as the format, language and the way it is disseminated. There are now dozens of websites[1] that help users identify this kind of false information.

This investigation concentrates on the content and format of fake news, aiming to identify patterns in messages originating from sites that produce/disseminate manipulated information. The focus of this research was to analyze language and content format patterns produced by newer media outlets in Brazil, ones that emerged between President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment process and the run-up to the election of Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro. The

Facebook pages of the media outlets analyzed in this paper reached a large audience and, shortly before the election, those pages, along with a dozen other pages, were removed due to a large number of clickbait articles[2] they contained. The results presented here show that the posts receiving the most shares have three characteristics in common: content format, language strategy and information source.

2 Fake news and democracy

Fake news is not a new phenomenon. According to Darnton (2017), one of the earliest cases occurred in the sixth century, when the historian Procopius, through his text "Anecdota", resorted to fallacies to call into question the reputation of Byzantine Emperor, Justinian the Great. Darnton also refers to the case of Pietro Arentino who, in the 16th century, affixed satirical and untrue poems to the first of the talking statues in Rome: Pasquino.

The great impetus for false information comes from the appearance of the Gutenberg press in the fifteenth century, when many news stories about monsters were published for years, which frightened the population. The Lisbon earthquake in 1755 also sparked the publication of false news: some attributed the disaster to natural causes, while others attributed it to divine punishment against sinners. In 1835, John Herschel, an astronomer, claimed to have built a powerful telescope that allowed him to see the moon from South Africa. His daily chronicles in the *New York Sun* dramatically increased the newspaper's sales from 8,000 to 19,000 copies[3].

Thus, it can be said that fake news has existed throughout the history of journalism. At times, it has helped the media gain a competitive edge over competition by increasing its circulation, and at other times, it has resulted in political pressure from government powers. The cases mentioned have mainly commercial intentions behind them, but they also have political objectives, as in the case of the Lisbon earthquake. And that is precisely the most dangerous aspect of the phenomenon.

False information has been used in all major armed conflicts, so it is not surprising that one of the primary aims of any invader is local media. For example, information was a deciding factor in the two Great World Wars, with Nazi propaganda heavily based on false information which was used in its favor.

In the field of recent politics, the election of Donald Trump (United States) and the vote in favor of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union (Brexit) were two events that put false information, referred to as fake news, at the center of the debate. Politicians, businessmen and researchers have realized the importance to fight attempts at manipulating public opinion as it has a direct influence on election results.

Knowing that democracies depend on the free and informed vote of voters, any action that restricts their choice, whether by force or misinformation, threatens the quality of democratic systems. This is why the free press plays a key role in western societies.

Democratic theory attributes two fundamental components to journalism: monitoring political establishment and providing citizens with information that enables them to make decisions that have an impact on society (Traquina, 2002). Although new theories have been developed that call the independence of journalism into question, it should be stressed that the evolution of journalism, the adherence to deontological ethics and the fine-tuning of press laws have reinforced the importance of having an independent press that monitors the various establishments.

3 Fake news: concept and typologies

The word fake news has gained great social importance. In 2017, the *Collins English* dictionary named it "word of the year". Of course, the concept has garnered a variety of definitions ever since scientific research started to focus on it. Levy (2017, p. 20) says that "fake news is the presentation of false claims that purport to be about the world in a format and with a content that resembles the format and content of legitimate media organizations". Allcott & Gentzkow (2017, p. 213) say that fake news is "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers".

The means in which false information is disseminated is a variable that some authors draw attention to in their definitions. Klein & Joshua (2017, p. 06) state that fake news is "the online publication of intentionally or knowingly false statements of fact", thereby establishing a link between fake news and the nature of the medium in which it circulates: online.

This is something that Gelfert (2018, p. 108) refers to when he says that "fake news is the deliberate presentation of (typically)

false or misleading claims as news, where the claims are misleading by design". "*By design*" refers to what is new in today's fake news – Web 2.0, particularly social networks – thus reinforcing the ideas of the above authors. While fake news is a phenomenon which has existed long before online social networks, we cannot dispute that the internet has accelerated the rate at which false information is propagated and that Web 2.0 has made it easier for this type of information to be produced.

False information can also be described as "deceptive reviews provided with an intention to mislead consumers in their purchase decision making, often by reviewers with little or no actual experience with the products or services being reviewed" (Zhang et al., 2016, p. 457). In contrast to the previous definitions, there is the other, more benign classification, like the one proposed by Wardle (2017) in which the so-called "misinformation" mentioned by Zhang et al. (2016) is an inadvertent dissemination of false information, resulting from the producer's lack of experience. Her idea of "disinformation", on the other hand, is that someone intentionally produces and disseminates false information; thus we have the two ends of the classification spectrum.

Wardle (2017) proposes a classification scale ranging from the most benign – the maximum level of "misinformation" – to the most malignant – the maximum level of "disinformation". It starts with "satire or parody" (the use of humor to describe certain events), followed by "false connection" (when titles or other elements are not consistent with content), "misleading content" (inaccurate information to contextualize something), "false context" (truthful content conveyed in a false context), "imposter content" (imitating authentic sources), "manipulated content" (truthful information manipulated deliberately with the intent to mislead), and lastly, the maximum level of manipulation, "fabricated contents" (information that is 100% false, produced to cause harm or damage).

To reach this kind of typology, Wardle (2017) says one must understand the ecosystem in which this phenomenon occurs. She analyzes three elements: the types of content produced/disseminated, the motivations behind those who produce them, and the forms in which they are disseminated. Our research focuses on the first element (the typology of produced content) and, more specifically, on the characteristics that make said content go viral; the other two elements, the motivations behind those who produce the content and their forms of dissemination have already been defined by choosing the object of study.

4 Changes to how journalism is practiced
and the concepts of viral information

Keeping in line with the saying "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em", traditional media tried to gain their place in social networks by shaping the news in order to gain greater relevance wherever the audience moved to. In addition to the usual process of collecting and processing information, media was forced to reshape the news for mass circulation on social networks, seeking a greater impact with the public. Finding an effective way to balance public interest with the sheer need to gain visibility has become a major challenge for *mainstream media*.

While some of the information circulating on social networks may actually be produced exclusively for these platforms, a significant part of this information is taken from information websites or is based on news published in traditional media. This is why it is essential to address the journalistic phenomenon and the transformations it has undergone due to the rapid evolution of technology.

Pavlik (2000) argues that new technologies have led journalism to change in several areas: the way journalists do their work, the type of news content, the structure of newsrooms, and the relationships between news organizations, journalists and their audiences. Franciscato (2010, p. 12) confirms this trend when he states that technological innovation in journalism is "a contribution that changes the routines and work processes of journalists, as well as the profile and quality of the journalistic product".

Indeed, the work of journalists in terms of the types of content produced and the structure of newsrooms has changed immensely since the digitalization of the sector (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). Faced with this new reality, newspaper companies have opted for different paths: a) the stronger media outlets have invested in change by adhering to research in Media Labs, more in-depth productions or technological innovations; b) the weaker or digitally-skeptical media structured themselves in a simple logic of traditional production; c) the new, exclusively digital projects count on small-scale innovation, propose new textual styles, new formats and new forms of distribution aimed at the distribution/circulation (*spreadability*) of their products, thus seeking to win over new audiences.

Producing content for public viewing and discussion has always been the goal of media and journalists. With the growth of the

online sector, this trend has intensified as it has now become possible to monitor in real time. Newsrooms now have teams that continually measure audiences and participate in the news production process in order to become more visible, for example, by suggesting themes or words that, if included in the headline, could get more reads (Canavilhas et al., 2015).

This massive distribution depends on the characteristics of the content, but also on how that content is distributed and the possibly of it going viral; reaching the maximum level of distribution/circulation. This is because social networks function on a hybrid model that combines two types of strength: that of content producers (based on commercial and editorial interests) and that of users (Jenkins et al., 2013). Raquel Recuero (2009) adds that social actors (users) have motives and that their decisions to pass information to networks depend on social capital. She believes there are two types of constructed values: primary and secondary. Here's an example which utilizes humor: a social actor publishes something funny with the intent to make people laugh (primary value), but also expects that the act of publishing something funny will make readers believe him to be a happy person (secondary value). Combining these two values increases the overall value of a publication which leads to more users sharing it; the public ultimately ends up promoting the product and the producer.

What happened with the U.S. elections and the referendum on the United Kingdom leaving the European Union is a result of the circulation of false information, but there is also an extremely important role that social networks play in this circulation process. As Guess et al. (2018, p. 11) stated: "*Facebook* played an important role in directing people to fake news websites – heavy *Facebook* users were differentially likely to consume fake news, which was often immediately preceded by a visit to *Facebook*".

This study focuses on the Brazilian elections, looking at how some communication projects in Brazil have used this network to circulate false information that has mobilized millions of users and generated a significant amount of income. Most of the companies that have disseminated this kind information hold either one political position or another, right or left, and were classified as fake news distributors by traditional Brazilian media[4], by investigation[5] or by fact-checking agencies.

5 Methodology and results

In this paper we study the formats of viral content, with a particular focus on publications that have reached a high level of reader-interaction (engagement), especially as it relates to content sharing. The objective is to identify which types of content are used in the distribution/circulation process (*spreadability*) and whether this viral content share any common characteristics.

6 The political context in Brazil

Between 2012 and 2018, Brazil faced a very troubled political scenario, from the public demonstrations (2012 and 2013) that followed the same molds and contexts of Occupy Wall Street (2011) in the United States, the Movimiento 15-M demonstrations (2011) in Spain, the re-election of Dilma Rousseff as president of Brazil (2014) culminating in her impeachment (2016) and, more recently, with the new elections which saw current Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro victorious (2018). Political expressions on the web have become increasingly strong in all of these developments, and have effectively impacted politics. In this context, several online communication vehicles were born, dedicated exclusively to the political agenda, mostly with a significant presence on social networks. Most of these communicational spaces used mechanisms to make news go viral so as to publicize partisan political content in order to forge situations, discussions and results. In other words, they distributed false or sensationalist information for the purpose of impacting national politics.

Dozens of news *sites*, with pages and profiles on social networks, are mostly in favor of certain political ideologies. Just as it did in the United States elections, false or sensationalist information that carried much of the political discussion on the web in Brazil may have ultimately influenced the 2018 elections.

During the election campaign period, *Facebook* took down dozens of pages in support of then-candidate Jair Bolsonaro because, according to the company, "the ones responsible for those pages used fake accounts or multiple accounts with the same names, thereby violating the policies of authenticity and spam"[6].

7 Sample

The aim of the empirical work was to analyze content from these young Brazilian information projects (created after 2011) with large audiences on social networks (over 100,000 followers) and strong political appeal. The goal was to identify repeated patterns, formats used, and common languages in order to map out what is popular on social networks and what is not. The ten news outlets with the largest number of *Facebook* posts were selected for analysis.

Those media outlets were: *Plantão Brasil* (launched in 2013), *Jornalivres* (launched in 2016), *Correio do Poder* (launched in 2014), *Folha Política* (launched in 2013), *Implicante* (launched in 2011), *Gazeta Social* (launched in 2013), *Pensa Brasil* (launched in 2016), *Diário do Brasil* (on *Facebook* it is called *Diário do Brasil 2* and was launched in 2015), *Revolta Brasil* (launched in 2015) and *Brasil Notícias* (launched in 2017).

The review period took place in 2017 (post-impeachment and pre-election) with a total of 8,069 *posts* collected. We selected the five most shared *posts* from the *Facebook* pages of each of these media companies, giving us a total of 50 *posts* which were analyzed. The data was accessed through the *Facebook* API and collection was performed automatically using Python programming scripts. The results were saved in CSV and transferred over to the Excel program.

Once the data had been collected, we performed a qualitative analysis of each of the *posts*, and identified the elements present (text, moving image, still image) in order to look for patterns among the most shared posts.

8 Results and discussion

Once the five most shared posts from each of the ten media companies had been collected, they were then analyzed for format, number of shares and content overview.

Table 1 – Description and classification of the most shared posts.

Media Outlet	Format	Shares	Content
Plantão Brasil	Photomontage with impactful phrase.	421,755	"If Marcelo Odebrecht was arrested for PAYING, why was the receiver not arrested?" Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/PlantaoBrasil.net/posts/6494478919 07197:0>. Access on: Feb. 18, 2018.
	Photograph of public figure with impactful phrase.	101,365	Marco Aurélio Mello speaks on the imprisonment of Aécio Neves. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/PlantaoBrasil.net/posts/720163281502 324:0>. Access on: Feb. 18, 2018.
	Photograph of public figure with impactful phrase.	51,535	Satire about Teori and plane crash. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/PlantaoBrasil.net/posts/63983513286 8473:0>. Access on: Feb. 20, 2018.
	Photograph of public figure with impactful phrase.	41,631	Regarding the acts of Sérgio Moro. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/PlantaoBrasil.net/posts/71821653836 665:0>. Access on: Feb. 20, 2018.
	Photomontage	33,940	Regarding the general strike on April 28. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/PlantaoBrasil.net/posts/684340381751 281:0. Access on: Feb. 20, 2018.

Jornalivres	Media outlet's news in the text, but source came from another vehicle.	59,381	Text about the end of the legislative immunity vote. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/jornalivrebrasil/posts/13 378 06816231172>. Access on: Feb. 25, 2018.
	Media outlet's news in the text, but source came from another vehicle.	24,911	Text criticizing Globo network program. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/jornalivrebrasil/posts/141841 0131504173>. Access on: Feb. 25, 2018.
	Photograph of public figure with impactful phrase.	22,102	Actor Carlos Vereza comments on political situation. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/jornalivrebrasil/posts/1297 034 640308390/>. Access on: Feb. 25, 2018.
	Media outlet's news in the text, no source.	22,016	Regarding the poster affixed on school to prevent it from being invaded. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/jornalivrebrasil/posts /1309630169 048837/>. Access on: Feb. 25, 2018.
	Media outlet's news in the text, based on public note.	20,580	Video containing description and audio from telephone call between Aécio and Zezé. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/jornalivrebrasil/posts/ 1339030 912775429/>. Access on: Feb. 25, 2018.
Correio do Poder	Report from other media outlet with impactful phrase added.	52,796	Globo report on vandalism of public property. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/CorreiodoPoder/videos /208095 6972136959/>. Access on: Feb. 26, 2018.
	Video with impactful phrases.	52,037	Video of Gilmar Mendes jeered by stadium crowd. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/CorreiodoPoder/vide os/206124 6640774659/>. Access on: Feb. 26, 2018.
	Video excerpt from official channel with impactful phrase added.	27,875	Video of Dilma's speech about soccer ball. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/CorreiodoPoder/videos/20 58 299574402699/>. Access on: Feb. 26, 2018.
	Video excerpt from official channel with impactful phrase added.	27,290	Joaquim Barbosa opposes Gilmar Mendes. Available at: hos/20874 50771487579/>. Access on: Feb. 26, 2018.
	Amateur video of proprietor with MST members	27,093	Video of proprietor with MST members. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/CorreiodoPoder/videos/207131 603069496/>. Access on: Feb. 26, 2018.

Implicante. org	Photomontage with impactful phrase.	6,721	Dória Government – Donation of personal hygiene products. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/*Implicante.org*/posts/12467287 42062535:0>. Access on March 5, 2018.
	Video excerpt from official channel.	5,913	Justice TV video of discussion between Gilmar Mendes and Minister Barroso. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/*Implicante.org*/videos/152342 1444393262/>. Access on March 5, 2018.
	News from outside collaborator	5,326	News about Brazil's development in relation to other countries. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/*Implicante.org*/posts/124973513 5095229>. Access on March 5, 2018.
	Photomontage with impactful phrase.	4,367	Regarding the value of BNDES loan requested by Lula and Dilma. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/*Implicante.org*/posts/136813318 6588756:0>. Access on March 5, 2018.
	News from outside collaborator	3,369	Regarding cuts to education implemented by the governor of Minas Gerais. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/*Implicante.org*/posts/1444192 295649511>. Access on March 5, 2018.
Gazeta Social	Video with impactful phrase.	12,167	Deputy Paulo Pimenta defends Maduro. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/PortalGazetaSocial/videos/16085327 59231086/>. Access on March 5, 2018.
	Video with impactful phrase.	8,591	Businessperson compares prices in Brazil to the USA. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/PortalGaz etaSocial/videos/1602 408373176858/>. Access in March, 2018.
	Video shared from other media vehicle.	6,606	Regarding the ocean drying up in Florida. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/PortalGaze taSocial/videos/148422 9404994756>. Access on March 5, 2018.
	Video shared from other media vehicle.	2,494	Microsoft animation of Santa Claus. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/PortalGa zetaSocial/videos/1580 222412062121/>. Access on March 5, 2018.
	Security camera footage.	2,162	Regarding a new way cars are being stolen. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/PortalGazetaSocial/videos/1508 108589273504/>. Access on March 5, 2018.

Pensa Brasil	Amateur video of political figure.	1,611	Bolsonaro talks about Lula possibly fleeing Brazil. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/pensab rasiloficial/videos/4457653 22522500/>. Access on: March 5, 2018.
	Photograph with impactful phrase.	1,154	Photograph of Temer and Gilmar Mendes at acquittal of Temer and Dilma. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/pensab rasiloficial/posts/32715469 1050231:0>. Access on: March 5, 2018.
	Media outlet's news in the text, but source came from another vehicle.	1,014	Lula said he will name everyone involved if he is arrested. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/pensabrasiloficial/posts/44245 5892853443>. Access on: March 5, 2018.
	Shared video from other media outlet.	967	Bolsonaro talks about his inspiration to be presidential candidate Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/pensabrasiloficial/videos/4645406 20644970/>. Access on: March 5, 2018.
	Photomontage of political figures.	950	Ministers who have betrayed the nation. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/pensa brasiloficial/posts/327156 721050028:0>. Access on: March 5, 2018.
Diário do Brasil 2	Media outlet's news in the text, but information came from another vehicle.	5,687	Singer Sérgio Reis speaks about social security reform. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/diariodobrasil2/posts/903 128013162397>. Access on: March 5, 2018.
	Media outlet's news in the text, but information came from another vehicle.	3,722	Regarding the imprisonment of the creator of the Blue Whale Challenge. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/diariodobrasil2/posts/924 997140975484>. Access on: March 5, 2018.
	Media outlet's news in the text, but information came from another vehicle.	2,373	Federal Police find out Aécio made 33 calls (via *WhatsApp*) to Gilmar Mendes. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/diariodobrasil2/posts/10881 77114657485>. Access on: March 5, 2018.
	Media outlet's news in the text, but information came from another vehicle.	2,104	Regarding possible court involvement in the Car Wash scandal. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/diariodobrasil2/posts/904319 279709937>. Access on: March 5, 2018.
	Media outlet's news in the text, but no source.	1,724	Brazilian diplomat says the state is a faction member. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/diariodobrasil2/posts/8785837 42283491>. Access on: March 5, 2018.

Revolta Brasil	Media outlet's news in the text with impactful phrase.	1,956	Brazilians who do not pay their electricity bill will not have their service cut. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_f bid=960264544110126&id=351620978307822>. Access on: March 6, 2018.
	Media outlet's news in the text with impactful phrase.	1,369	Comparison of treatment given to drug traffickers. Available at: < https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=96 0264544110126&id=3516 20978 307822>. Access on: March 6, 2018.
	Media outlet's news using public figure to comment on political issue.	1,069	Fernanda Montenegro comments on military intervention. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbi d=10 82765691860010&id=351620978 307822>. Access on: March 6, 2018.
	Media outlet's news using public figure to comment on political issue.	905	Ronaldo Caiado teases José de Abreu. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid= 1016 782261791687&id=3516209 78307822>. Access on: March 6, 2018.
	Media outlet's news in the text with impactful phrase.	594	Sarney goes to court, asks for triple retirement pension. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fb id=10874 50574724855&id=351620978307822>. Access on: March 6, 2018.
Brasil Notícias	Reflective text, not journalistic	670,644	Reflections on life. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/BrasilNoticias1.0/posts/3248507 61325684>. Access on: March 6, 2018.
	Reflective text, not journalistic	314,939	Post asking for help to find family. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/BrasilNoticias1.0/posts/324850 761325684>. Access on: March 6, 2018.
	Reflective text, not journalistic	278,086	Regarding transit rules. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/ BrasilNoticias1.0/posts/36257 9910886102>. Access on: March 6, 2018.
	Reflective text, not journalistic	270,373	Regarding marriage and life Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/BrasilNoticias1.0/posts/34353 625945713>. Access on: March 6, 2018.
	Reflective text, not journalistic	244,656	Regarding life lessons Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/BrasilNoticias1.0/posts/32945 4804198613>. Access on: March 6, 2018.
	Reflective text, not journalistic	670,644	Regarding life lessons Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/BrasilNoticias1.0/posts/31340 2545803839>. Access on: March 6, 2018.

Source: prepared by authors.

The analysis identified three types of content that match in six ways.

TEXT

News (17 references): information with news characteristics, but uses impactful persuasive phrases. There are often no sources or uses information partly collected from other media or press releases. They often resort to public figures who may be politicians, actors, commentators, teachers or musicians, among others.

Image 1 – Example of news in text with impactful phrase.

Source: post from the "Jornalivre" page.

Non-journalistic opinion (6 references): Non-journalistic products on everyday situations, in a style similar to self-help. These are placed between the informational content.

Image 2 – Example of non-journalistic text.

Source: post from the "*Brasil Notícias*" page.

Its adoption of a journalistic-style model is what stands out most with this type of content, including its intensive use of the genre "news" as it is familiar to consumers. The use of public figures attracts the reader's attention and creates some familiarity with them as it deals with television or other medium personalities who are already familiar to the public. The idea is to create a society in which the other feels comfortable.

MOVING IMAGE

Video (14 references): proper videos or videos from others, amateur videos, or security cameras. The use of large font for impact phrases placed over the video is prevalent. Excerpts from interviews or humorous notes are used. Some cases use animations with voice overs.

Image 3 – Video from official channel with impactful phrase added.

GRAVÍSSIMO! NA VENEZUELA, DEPUTADO PETISTA PAULO PIMENTA...

GS

Gazeta Social

DEFENDE O DITADOR MADURO A MANDO DE LULA E DILMA! O BRASIL PRECISA SABER!

Source: post from the "*Gazeta Social*" page[7].

Video is the second most used type of content, and has also grown the most in terms of consumption time on the Web. The inclusion of impact phrases in large font intends to create a bridge between the "moving image" from television and the "text" that is mostly associated with newspapers and being a "news" platform.

There is also the use of images from security cameras, a feature used in television that aims to give authenticity to the images taken without human intentionality.

STILL IMAGE

Photography (9 references): photography with an impactful phrase superimposed over it. If captions are used they are equally impactful, often posing a question to the reader.

Image 4 – Example of photograph with impactful phrase.

Source: post from the "*Plantão Brasil*" page[8].

Photomontage (5 references): a collection of photographs with impactful phrases superimposed over them which, once again, pose a question to prompt a particular response that favors the content producer's cause.

Image 5 – Example of photomontage with impactful phrase.

Source: post from the "*Plantão Brasil*" page[9].

Even though it is the content that appears the least, still images are still utilized because their production is simple and consumption is quick, with almost no reading involved. The use of superimposition, large font for titles and the framing of images in photomontages helps to simplify the image and build a very simplified image narrative.

In addition to the types of content/formats, this work also analyzed the symbolic aspect of language (Lage, 2011) used in publications, particularly regarding the structure of news (sources and graphic layout) and the linguistic system (headlines, titles, subtitles and news text structure). From this typology we recognized the following most common language strategies:

Impactful phrase (18 references): One in every four uses impactful phrases for the title of their *post*.

Image 6 – Example of impactful phrase used in title of the post and another impactful phrase superimposed over video.

Source: post from the "*Gazeta Social*" page.

Persuasive approach (12 references): the way the theme is presented turns the text into persuasive content, introducing credible information or evidence, or using emotions to sway the reader's opinion or attitude toward a particular issue (Rogers, 2007).

Public figures (11 references): The use of celebrities (Marshal, 1997), that is, public figures with high media visibility who comment on current affairs.

Image 7 – Example of public figure (actor) commenting on political agenda.

Source: post from the "Jornalivre" page[10].

The following are the sources of informational content:

Proper content using other communication medium as source (9 references): news and publications from other media are used, not making use of journalistic information proper.

Proper content without source (8 references): content with no reference to sources whether interviewees or documents.

Proper content based on declarations from public figures not related to the issue (8 references): content that uses public figures (actors, musicians, etc.) who have no connection to that particular political agenda but offer their comments on political issues.

Product from outside collaborator (4 references): Content produced by third party.

Proper content with sources (1 reference): Only one post had proper content containing an interview or other kinds of sources.

Observing the types of content produced and the forms in which they are disseminated enabled us to frame the analyzed content under the classification of fake news proposed by Wardle (2017).

The category "*false context*" (truthful content conveyed through a false context) is the most common and appears in 90% of the media analyzed for this paper: *Plantão Brasil*, *Jornalivres*, *Correio do Poder*, *Folha Política*, *Implicante*, *Gazeta Social*, *Diário do Brasil 2*, *Pensa Brasil* and *Revolta Brasil*.

"*False connection*" (inconsistency between the title/photo and the content) is used in 80% of the media analyzed for this paper: *Plantão Brasil*, *Jornalivres*, *Correio do Poder*, *Folha Política*, *Implicante*, *Gazeta Social*, *Pensa Brasil* and *Revolta Brasil*).

"*Imposter content*" (the use of public figures or figures that imitate authentic sources but have no connection to the topic of the news item) appear in 50% of the pages: *Plantão Brasil*, *Jornalivres*, *Folha Política*, *Pensa Brasil* and *Revolta Brasil*

"F*abricated content*" (information which is 100% false, produced to cause harm) appears in few cases, and in this study, was only identified in a few texts from the *Pensa Brasil* page. The lack of this type of content could be due to the fact that this type of information requires a more complex production and, as a result, requires more human resources and materials for its production.

One interesting discovery is the media studied in this paper which specialize in specific content typologies. Video for *Correio do Poder* and *Gazeta Social*, photography for *Plantão Brasil* and text for *Folha Política*, *Diário do Brasil*, *Jornalivres*, *Revolta Brasil* and *Brasil Notícias*. Only *Implicante* and *Pensa Brasil* presented a wide variety of content. This may be related to the idea that these media have a particular public. After analyzing publications from previous years, it was determined that each format gradually consolidated over time and gained more space.

9 Final considerations

While the world's major newspaper companies have been investing in increasingly differentiated products, focusing more on in-depth content (*long-form* content) or technology (virtual reality), the young media communication vehicles mentioned above stand out for their use of content which is simpler and faster to consume

as a way of attracting readers and followers. They seem to make use of a more direct and eye-catching format (e.g., short texts or images with impactful phrases superimposed over them) in order to spread content quickly and effectively across social networks. Some traditional media have tried to adapt their information for circulation on social networks and thus gain greater visibility, but this change has made it difficult to distinguish between trustworthy information from traditional media and false information disseminated by other mediums, like the ones studied here.

In this work we analyzed ten pages that published fake news during the Brazilian pre-election campaign to better understand the characteristics of the most shared posts. Thus, we sought to identify a set of characteristics that increase the chance of content going viral on social networks.

The results show that most of the content addresses events that actually occurred, and the user recognizes said events because they saw them on traditional media. The "false context" category (information which is initially truthful, but wrongly contextualized) is consequently the most represented. What happens is that when a user recognizes or knows that a piece of news is not false, they tend to lower their defense mechanisms. Producers of fake news know this, and they resort to tactics of persuasion and use questionable sources, misleading contexts and public figures in order to make the content less real, and ultimately lead the reader to the point of view that they wish to convey.

The aim of these media companies is to present readers with a specific approach that conveys their political positioning. The truthful element of manipulated content turns out to be just the tip of the iceberg, acting as bait to attract readers. In the same line of reasoning, the second most used category, the "false connection" (discordance between the title and the image or text), uses the titles to attract readers rather than true facts, as in the previous case. Lastly, the "imposter content" (associating public figures to false issues) relies on imagery to attract users; using images of someone they recognize and then adding in manipulated information. Totally false information (*fabricated content*) appears in few cases, and usually occurs because of two reasons: an internal one and an external one.

The internal level has to do with production costs as producing original material requires more human resources and material. At the external level, the distribution of completely new

content to the reader is less attractive because traditional media does not address the same subject, and it is therefore easier to recognize this kind of exclusive content from a practically unknown media source.

The data we obtained show that the strategy that producers of false information use is to feed off of traditional media, and then manipulate and simplify the news. Doing this makes for cheaper production and, more importantly, presents a reality that users have become aware of through traditional media.

On one hand, new technologies are used to clearly differentiate their content by innovation and language. This change involves investments that do not present a short-term economic return, a situation that has led to many lesser media companies having to close down. However, in the medium and long term, this is how one can differentiate content produced by traditional media from content produced by fake news companies, which are unable to produce their own content because they require technical and human resources that they just do not have.

On the other hand, seeing as how fake news producers rely primarily on information with no sources, traditional media should stick to their traditional way of making news and always use clearly identifiable sources. Traditional media should also maintain their traditional editing visual, as most of the content analyzed for this paper relied on superimposing impactful phrases over the images, which is not something that reference media tends to do very often.

In conclusion, we can say that the strategy some traditional media use to reach new audiences – producing simplified content for greater circulation across social networks – may have added to the confusion users experience when trying to identify which information is truthful. When taken from its original context – a newspaper website, radio, or television – this journalistic information hardly differs from manipulated information due to the obvious similarities between formats and the well-known media illiteracy. That is why traditional media must keep innovating, to improve and differentiate journalistic products, and preserve the fundamental rules of journalism such as identifying sources, something that producers of false information do not do.

❘NOTES

1   Examples: https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11174; http://blogs.proquest.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Fake-News1.pdf;

2   *Folha de S. Paulo.* Facebook remove rede de contas e páginas de apoio a Bolsonaro. Retrieved from <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/10/facebook-remove-rede-de-contas-e-paginas-de-apoio-a-bolsonaro.shtml>. Access on: Oct. 22, 2018.

3   https://www.1843magazine.com/technology/rewind/the-true-history-of-fake-news

4   *Folha de S. Paulo.* Fake news ganha espaço no Facebook e jornalismo profissional perde**.** Retrieved from https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/02/fake-news-ganha-espaco-no-facebook-e-jornalismo-profissional-perde.shtml. Access on: Feb. 21, 2018. *Veja.* Me engana que eu posto: Por trás das manchetes falsas compartilhadas na web, há espertalhões de fundo de quintal cheios de tino para caçar cliques e encher o bolso. Retrieved from https://veja.abril.com.br/tecnologia/internet-noticias-falsas-me-engana-que-eu-posto/. Access on: Feb. 20, 2018.

5   Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Tecnologia e Pesquisa do Estado de SP. Estudo lista os 10 maiores sites de notícias falsas no Brasil. Retrieved from http://sintpq.org.br/index.php/blog/item/5031-estudo-da-usp-lista-os-10-maiores-sites-de-noticias-falsas-no-brasil. Access on Feb. 10, 2018.

6   *Folha de S. Paulo.* Facebook remove rede de contas e páginas de apoio a Bolsonaro. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/10/facebook-remove-rede-de-contas-e-paginas-de-apoio-a-bolsonaro.shtml>. Access on: Oct. 22, 2018.

7   This post has a political connotation and is used in the context of trying to overthrow the ruling government (which did happen in the following months). Deputy Paulo Pimenta, from the Workers' Party, is "denounced" in this post as not only a political figure, but as a way to reach his party.

8   This post refers to complaints made against Senator Aécio Neves. In a vote in the Supreme Court, Minister Marco Aurélio Mello

denied the request to arrest the senator made by the Attorney General's Office.

9   This post refers to businessman Marcelo Bahia Odebrecht, who was arrested for bribing politicians. The photos below show the politicians who were investigated for receiving the bribes, but who are still in office.

10 Carlos Vareza is a Brazilian actor who has no direct connection with any political analysis. He is used in this post to draw attention to an issue he is not involved with. Marcelo Freixo is a Federal Deputy and was a candidate for mayor of Rio de Janeiro.

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