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THE 'TRUMP EFFECT' ON POLITICAL CONTENT BY FAR-RIGHT AUDIENCES ON PORTUGUESE-LANGUAGE YOUTUBE CHANNELS

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Introduction

In 2024, the United States was one of nearly 40 countries holding elections, and Donald Trump, a major symbol of the far right and a key figure in dangerous conspiracy theories such as QAnon, defeated Democrat Kamala Harris in the presidential election. Since 2016, Trump's first term, far-right ideology has become increasingly visible in society, in part due to the availability of toxic political speech and the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation on digital platforms (Barkun, 2017). Since then, Trump's radical populist approach has legitimised the tactics of other radical right

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populists, empowered global conservative think tanks and ultra-liberal grassroots activists, and has changed online political information and news consumption (Ozawa et al., 20-23).

This study seeks to investigate the resonance and use of Trump-related political content among far-right YouTube audiences in Portugal and Brazil. We assume that the impact of misinformation and disinformation is global, suggesting that Trump's electoral campaign claims can influence realities beyond the U.S. However, the local impact of dangerous and extremist speeches has contextual and historical determinants related to racial, ethnic, and religious dynamics in countries affected by colonialism (Udupa, Dattatreyan, 2023). Understanding the far-right in the Lusophanic community is essential to unravel the intricate historical, social and cultural dynamics, but also to shed light on how the population that has access to the Internet interacts in a sphere delimited by the Portuguese language, but in a multicultural environment. Therefore, this study seeks to understand how political content and narratives related to Trump resonate and are used by far-right YouTube audiences in Portugal and Brazil.

Brazil and Portugal are confronted with the advance of the radical right in the public and institutional spheres. On the one hand, in Brazil, since the far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro (2018-2022), ultra-conservative values have emerged at the centre of society as part of the demands of the 'New Right'. On the other hand, the advance of the far right in Portugal has become more relevant since 2019, starting with the Chega party, the third largest parliamentary group in the 2022 legislative elections. Chega is part of an alliance of European far-right parties called Identity and Democracy, founded in 2014, and its main leader is André Ventura, known for his xenophobic positions. However, there is a lack of studies that examine the exchange of message flows among users of radical right networks in Brazil and Portugal. We want to contribute to the understanding of whether and to what extent these two ecosystems share common references, in a cross section of what could be the cohesion of the international far right.

We aim to answer the following research questions: RQ1. How frequent and relevant is the Trump case for far-right YouTube audiences in Brazil and Portugal? RQ2. Does YouTube's search ranking algorithm favour far-right content? What types of narratives are used in videos discussing Trump in both contexts? RQ3. What sources of information about the Trump case do far-right YouTube viewers rely on?

Data collection was based on the term "Trump" and was carried out daily, with a limit of 500 search results, between 15 October and 6 November 2024, using the digital tool YouTube DataTools (DMI Amsterdam), with Portuguese defined as the preferred language. Using our own codes written in the R language, we built a database of 9,852 search results in 22 days, with 2,746 unique videos from 569 different channels (on YouTube, the videos presented can be from previous years). Using the same tool, we collected cases where users commented on more than one video, structuring a network of videos with common commentators, which helps us to understand niches within the platform.

Based on this data collection, the study examined the evolution of views of all the videos obtained during the 22 days, identifying the channels with the greatest increase

in views during this period. The 20 Brazilian channels with the greatest increase in visibility between 15 October and 6 November 2024 were selected, taking into account the increase in visibility during this period, their ability to generate engagement, the textual patterns in their comments and their relationship with videos from international channels on the topic (identified through networks of co-commentators). Considering the number of videos produced on the topic over the years, we separated the views generated since the beginning of the data collection from the views accumulated by the videos in recent years. For example, the video "Man gets shocked while trying to remove Trump sign from home in the US trump placatrump" from BM&C NEWS had 2,017,340 views at the end of the data collection period, but only 167,180 views on election day, the period analysed.

Among the Portuguese-language channels, those with the highest visibility of Trump focused on economic liberalism and financial prosperity. Themes related to moral conservatism were absent from the videos. In the comments, the interpretation that escaping the attack would indicate God's preference for Trump over Kamala (associated with the devil and the left) suggests that support for the Republican candidate is based on the belief that "the chosen will be persecuted" but will win. The link to the attack on Jair Bolsonaro is repeated in the comments of the videos, as is the idea that Trump would be better able to dialogue with Putin and avoid war, which is interpreted as a form of salvation.

The videos with the highest visibility during this period are short (less than thirty seconds) and vertical, suggesting an orientation towards the use of YouTube's short video format and short video platforms for mobile devices. Legacy news channels perform well in the visibility rankings. Among the videos with the highest overall visibility is a top 10 video from the Itatiaia channel on the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), which also follows an informative format with interviews and commentary on finance and investment. The comments include attacks on the so-called "Brazilian press" and traditional media, which are described as "garbage" and "communists". These comments express support for Trump and celebrate his victory. Kamala is seen as someone who would not be able to dialogue with international leaders such as Vladimir Putin and is associated with the devil (in the interpretation of Trump as a saviour), or even compared to Dilma Rousseff as an option that would not have worked in Brazil.

References

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