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The 2016 Elections on Brazilian Regional Newspapers' Fan Pages: Facebook as a space for distribution and visibility of news on the campaign

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Abstract

This article discusses how communication developed by the press from Northeast Brazil on Facebook during the 2016 elections was configured. The research involves two theoretical aspects: one about the centrality of electoral coverage and other about social media as a space for distribution and circulation of journalistic contents. Based on this discussion, we analyze the content published on the fan pages of 9 newspapers – O Estado do Maranhão (MA), Meio Norte (PI), O Povo (CE), Tribuna do Norte (RN), A Tarde (BA), Jornal da Paraíba (PB), Diário de Pernambuco (PE), Gazeta de Alagoas (AL) and Jornal da Cidade (SE) – during the 2016 election, totalizing 9,993 posts. The objective is to identify the visibility given to elections and which sub-themes on campaign were published. The main results indicate the prevalence of entertainment news, which indicates a moderate space for political issues and, consequently, for elections. Concerning the political campaign, posts were focused on the candidates' agendas and routines of this period, evidencing similarity with the coverage profile through traditional media i.e. few changes in the configuration of journalism since the advent of social media.

Keywords

Journalism; social media; political campaign; content analysis; Brazil.

Introduction

This article[1] discusses the configuration of communication developed by news media from Northeastern Brazil on Facebook during the 2016 elections. We analyze this phenomenon through content analysis of these newspapers' posts on their fan pages. In this research, social media are understood as spaces for journalistic content distribution and the coverage of elections is understood as central in the political run, mainly because it provides informational subsidies to voters and visibility to candidates. Thus, it is important for journalism, especially for political journalism, to understand how such spaces should be used[2] and which content should be selected for distribution through them. Although social media have emerged as a platform for promoting interpersonal relationship, journalistic companies have used fan pages as a space for distributing information, so this new practice may be investigated in order to understand its configurations. This feat becomes even more important because one can easily spread information through social media and this possibility allows the circulation of electoral content about local campaigns published on regional newspapers.

Despite the possibility of using social network sites as a potential space for political campaigns, we believe that public interest issues increasingly need to share space with entertainment topics. This "competition" tends to be stronger on Internet, so distributing which is considered more attractive news becomes relevant (García-perdomo et al, 2017). Then, newspapers choose featuring entertainment and celebrities' life instead of politics once those topics have potential for engaging more people. In the context of social media there is an emphasis on the conflict between the value of "public interest" and "entertainment", which achieves a new configuration due to the characteristics of the new platform.

In the context of dispute for the readers' attention, the use of social media can be an important action for the transmission of political information, mainly on elections time. During the campaigns, traditional news media constitute a space both to give candidates visibility and to offer informational subsidies for discussing proposals and assisting the opinion formation (Shaw, 1999). The studies about coverage on traditional media reinforce the relevance of this variable to the electoral process (Aldé; Mendes; Figueiredo, 2007; Mundim, 2014).

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[2] The focus of this work, therefore, is not on the constitution and the characteristics of the network formed through the pages of newspapers. We analyze the kind of content offered by journalistic institutions in order to be shared through social media.

Based on this discussion, we analyze 9,993 posts published on Facebook pages of nine newspapers from Northeastern Brazil – *O Estado do maranhão (MA), Meio Norte (PI), O Povo (CE), Tribuna do Norte (RN), A Tarde (BA), Jornal da Paraíba (PB), Diário de Pernambuco (PE), Gazeta de Alagoas (AL) e Jornal da Cidade (SE)* – during the 2016 elections. The research aims to identify the visibility[3] afforded to the 'theme' elections and its 'approach' on posts.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) recognizes that political issues, especially those connected to local political campaigns, achieve more space on the fan pages of regional newspapers than entertainment, considering the electoral context and the proximity of local elections to the constituents. This hypothesis allows us to identify the configuration of the use of social media by regional newspapers once previous research was mainly focused on national newspapers (Zago; Bastos, 2013; Massuchin; Carvalho, 2016; Johnson, 2015). It is expected that local themes, like elections, also appear on social network sites, contrasting the discussion about the prevalence of entertainment.

The second hypothesis (H2) recognizes that political coverage on newspapers' fan pages on Facebook brings few innovations compared to political coverage on traditional media, centralizing the content in candidates' agenda and in what Porto (2004) calls 'horse racing'. These points are connected to the few qualitative changes on journalism since the advent of use of social media, which would be directly reflected on the electoral coverage. Elections demand continuous coverage and could offer substantial gains to the audience.

Both hypotheses reflect the understanding of the logic of regional journalistic production turned to social media on newspapers less focused by communication studies in Brazil. Furthermore, the second hypothesis offers insights to understand the dynamics of coverage no longer on traditional news media but on the digital platform, which brings new insights to the area.

Centrality of journalistic coverage during elections

Since 1990's, the literature on elections has presented a systematic monitoring of electoral coverage in Brazil (Aldé; Mendes; Figueiredo, 2007; FUKS; Cervi, 2000; Mundim, 2014). The reasons to explain the constituents' behavior are diverse and also connected to journalistic coverage on elections (Shaw, 1999;

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[3] This text does not analyze the potential for replication of published contents. We are analytically worried about how Facebook is used by journalistic institutions. Even though the engagement explains the logic of consumption, the reach and visibility of news published on social media and being related to the use of them by communication enterprises, this feat constitutes another discussion that is out of the remit of this article.

Figueiredo, 1991). This motivates the development of political communication studies, in order to understand the way that communication tools address political disputes and candidates, on traditional or digital spaces.

During electoral cycle, information from parties, candidates – without passing through the traditional media filter – and journalistic enterprises are all references. Media coverage offers a rising number of contents to feed the informational repertoire of citizens (Cervi, 2010; Aldé; Mendes; Figueiredo, 2007), providing cognitive resources (Miguel, 1999), even though exerting direct relevance over the vote decision depends on several contextual facts (Mundim, 2014).

Lippmann (2010) says that the media is responsible for constructing images in our head and Tuchman (1980) recognizes that news are the window to the world. Then, we can make this fit with information concerning the electoral cycle and the media coverage of politics. Despite the proximity and relevance, campaign events are often only available to citizens in terms of content that arrives through media coverage. According to Aldé, Mendes & Figueiredo (2007, p. 155), the electoral run "imposes itself as agenda because of the calendar and the information market dynamics". This feat is related to the news values intrinsic to facts (Harculp; O´neill, 2001), i.e. relevance, notoriety of the evolved, presence of elites' power, magnitude, proximity and public interest, which are historically important to the understanding of the political news selection process.

However, digital communication shifts the news values interpretation, and complementarily establishes a new logic: the viral character of contents (García-Perdomo et al, 2017). Horan (2012) analyzed tweets and realized that they provide more information about entertainment than on public interest. Thus, it involves content that is produced by the media, which is taken by these news values. García-Perdomo et al (2017) studied Brazilian, US and Argentinian newspapers and concluded that entertainment tends to be more recommended on Facebook, but on traditional media news about the government, politics in general and crimes are more shared. The logic of interactivity shifts media processes because according to Trilling et al (2017) it is possible to foresee from newsworthiness criteria which content can engage more the public.

So, choosing to cover more or less the political run is a decision influenced by editorial policy, economic issues and news production routines (SHOEMAKER; VOS, 2009). This process has become even more complex, because it increasingly incorporates new questions, especially those related to the public and economy. Shoemaker *et al* (2010) also identified that the audience is more interested on unusual or scary content. It also impacts directly the selection of themes by the media.

The difference between 'hard news' and 'soft news' emerges, even though it is a controversial classification (Reinemann et al, 2011; Tuchman, 1980; Baym, 2008). The presence of news considered soft news (*fait divers*, infotainment) has characterized national and international journalistic production (Massuchin; Tavares, 2015; García-avilés, 2007) and are nowadays prevailing. Despite conceptual differences that the literature presents, there is more information on varieties, celebrities, sports, curiosities and unusual facts, which can be characterized as a type of "tabloidization" (Chagas, 2016).

Even though Reinemann et al (2011) points out several dimensions that define news as "hard" or "soft", in this article news analysis is based on the 'theme' (*topic dimension*) and the 'approach' (*focus dimension*), operationalizing the research according to García-Avilés (2007) and Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky (2010). The justification is on the consideration of distinct news groups, which is constantly mentioned on the literature, as identified by the mapping in Reinemann et al (2011). The second dimension (*focus dimension*) is considered in order to analyze dubious news, for example, when it is focused on a celebrity but s/he talks about racial prejudice. We recognize the advancement of the literature and the proposition of new frames through intermediate categories (Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010). However, the dichotomy hard *versus* soft news is used on the research only to relate to and oppose media coverage on political issues (hard news, according to literature) and entertainment (soft news*)*.

Thus, while soft themes gain space others lose prominence[4]. This ends up with a replacement of public interest issues for those in which the audience is interested. This change in production logic and producer interests is related to economic issues and increased audience (Chagas, 2016) and also has impact over the electoral coverage. The issues related to political campaign and political institutions (hard news) achieve few space on the media according to Miguel (1999), when the author studied *Jornal Nacional*'s[5] coverage and highlighted the 'empire of *fait divers'*. The issue "political campaign" has its repertoire of news values intrinsically connected to the events of the elections, which generates the expectation of achieving visibility on news coverage. However, the expansion of soft news competition among journalistic enterprises contradictory generates the visibility of politics (Miguel, 1999).

On the other hand, when political themes appear there are also deficiencies on the approaches, which are very limited to candidates' agenda (Fuks; Cervi,

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[4] In order to observe the relationship between politics and entertainment of other works, it is important to emphasize the approach from the point of view of the theme, as it was also accomplished in these works.

[5] A TV news program that achieves a broad audience in Brazil.

2000), or is based only on the results of electoral polls. It defines basically the 'horse racing' model (Porto, 2004)[6], leaving in the background the coverage on candidates' proposals and the debate on public interest issues. When media coverage do not shed light on political campaigns the analytical level of facts is not featured as well (Porto, 2004). In addition, there is a reductionist view of politics when media focus mainly on campaigns' routines and candidates' agenda. Emphasizing opinion polls also reduces the political run to 'horse racing'. This typical traditional media practice has been reproduced on media coverage of elections through social network sites.

To sum up, we need to firstly understand that in a context of political run any space is important (Borges, 2002) and this observation justifies the analysis on how media coverage of elections is made through newspapers' fan pages on social media, in Northeastern Brazil, once online coverage (similarly to offline) is "an operation of framing and constructing facts" (Azevedo, 1999, p. 11).

Social network sites and the flow of news

In the late 1970's, Tuchman stated that when the media disseminate content, they contribute to the circulation and construction of knowledge. It has always been one of the aims of communication enterprises on traditional or digital news. However, digital technologies intensify this process (Machado, 2008) especially social media, which is our research object. If information was previously distributed more slowly – and from an only center (Machado, 2008) – and each platform distributed different content, since the media convergence process started there is an increasing of informative content circulation and a mixture of contents that appear in different supports (Deuze, 2006), a kind of reutilization, reuse and redistribution. These contents are now interconnected and denominate what is called "network journalism" (Heinrich, 2008).

Even though social media have the aim of connecting individuals, they can be used for an infinity of functions, among them circulating information. But it is not about any kind of information. Traditional media, more specifically newspapers, are among the pages and public profiles no social media, which now compose newsrooms routines related to reunite, disseminate, select, and filter content, and also to alter relations with readers (Hermida, 2010; Recuero, 2011). Furthermore, newspapers are still considered trustable sources or at least more trustable than

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[6] This concept is taken as a component of the 'approach' variable, because we stated a category for postings that highlight polls results, even if there is not the variable 'framing' in the analysis. Due to the posts particularities, we chose to compose a new variable for aggregating other adapted categories.

other pages that also spread information (Recuero, 2011).

Studies on the use of social media by journalism have multiplied in Brazil (Zago; Bastos, 2013; Massuchin; Carvalho, 2016; Recuero, 2011) and other countries as well (Ferreira; Rodrigues, 2016; Hermida, 2010; Hong, 2012). Research shows that there are several reasons to explain newspapers' use of the online platform. The first one is the fast content circulation (Hermida, 2010), which complements information on traditional media. Furthermore, due to the decreasing of the volume of readers[7], the use of news portals and the migration to social network sites is an innovative way of attracting new readers (Hong, 2012). Social media act like a 'bridge' to portals and news websites through *links*, which is directly and indirectly a strategy (Zago; Bastos, 2013) for achieving more access and guaranteeing receipt (Hong, 2012).

Newspapers moved to the online platform and count on social media as a space for improving their content distribution. Hong (2012), for example, called attention to the increasing of newspapers access on the web and to the sharing of journalistic content by users, who proportionate an additional process that can be named 'recirculation' (Zago; Bastos, 2013; Recuero, 2011), i.e. content replication by sharing, liking or commenting on postings, which increase their distribution.

If social media are considered auxiliary tools for traditional means – e.g. printed newspapers – and serve to increase content circulation, we can say that they act simultaneously by giving visibility to certain issues – which are posted by newspaper companies – and blocking the distribution of content from other enterprises (Zago; BastoS, 2013; Primo, 2011). This feat has direct relation with the importance of publications about the electoral cycle, which would give space and visibility for this theme among potential readers. However, when the web open space for politics, we can identify the invisibility of the theme. There is a process of choice (similarly to traditional media) related to what will be echoed on the web (Recuero, 2011).

Even though this looks like a simple decision, there is still an attempt of calling public attention in order to receive more 'clicks', which interferes with the choice of themes and distribution of facts (Trilling et al, 2017; Jonhson, 2005; García-Perdomo et al, 2017). Readers interest is heavily taken into account in the process of journalistic choices, which points to a coexistence of the gatewatching and the gatekeeping (Primo, 2011), according to Trilling et al (2017). There is an endless amount of information on the web and users need to choose (Heinrich,

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[7] According to the Brazilian Institute of Circulation Verification (IVC), Brazilian printed newspapers versions lost between 8% and 15% of their readers in 2016. Data on the Brazilian Media Research also showed low access to printed newspapers and magazines, in this country. Pew Research Center pointed to a fall between 7% and 4% of readers since 2010, in the US.

2008), so the media use strategies to call attention and achieve more accesses. By knowing the positive relation between online traffic of information and receipts (Hong, 2012), offering what the public wants to read becomes a strategy.

Methodology

This article analyzes content daily posted on Facebook pages of nine newspapers from Northeastern Brazil: *O Estado do maranhão (MA)*, *Meio Norte (PI)*, *O Povo (CE)*, *Tribuna do Norte (RN)*, *A Tarde (BA)*, *Jornal da Paraíba (PB)*, *Diário de Pernambuco (PE)*, *Gazeta de Alagoas (AL) e Jornal da Cidade (SE)*. We chose one medium per state from that region. We also considered the history and circulation of each newspaper based on Brazilian Association of News Companies (ANJ) data.

The postings were collected from Facebook through the app *Netvizz*, and the corpus is formed by 9,993 messages. Data collection started in 16 August 2016 when political campaigns officially began and finished on the day of elections, 2 October 2016. They were analyzed according to a coding book[8] based on Bauer (2002) and the methodological technique adopted was a quantitative content analysis. The quantitative approach was taken due to the high amount of *posts* and the large analysis period (Cervi, 2009). The variables analyzed were 'theme' and 'campaign approach' of the posts.

The variable 'theme' has the following categories: Political campaign or political parties (only related to elections); Political Institutions; Economy; Health; Education; Minorities; Urban infrastructure; Environment; Violence and Security; Accidents and tragedies; Ethics/moral (linked to corruption); Varieties and culture; Curiosities (posts on unusual content); Sports; Other, when none of the other categories was covered in the post; and Missing journalistic information (MJI), when posts do not present any theme and there is no news content, mostly informal interaction posts (for example, "Good morning, dear readers! Have a nice day!").

The variable "campaign approach", coded only when 'theme' was 'political campaign or political parties', had the following categories: "campaign agenda", in which candidates' events and activities were considered; "proposals and themes", proposals presentation or thematic discussion among candidates; "campaign

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[8] The codification was made by a team of seven undergraduate students of Journalism, who were previously trained for collecting and then passed through a test from a sample of 49 posts, in order to identify problems on the understanding of variables and their categories. Based on this sample, we run a simple liability test considering the cohesion on the codification. All variables and categories were evaluated separately and achieved more than 80% matches between pairs.

information", related to rules of the electoral run; "electoral justice", on electoral justice decisions and illegality; "electoral polls/results", data on the polls or the final results; "simultaneous coverage", when the fan page covers events simultaneously; "declaration/candidates' opinions", based on candidates' speeches bits; and "other", when posts could not be classified into one of the characteristics listed above[9].

Electoral themes and differences among newspapers

This section presents the distribution of posts and 'themes' among the newspapers analyzed. Table 1 shows data related to the number of posts published by the nine fan pages aiming to understand if social media appropriation is balanced among these companies. However, data show that some newspapers post more, the case of *O Povo* (2,114), *Diário de Pernambuco* (1,558), and *A Tarde* (1,263), which are also the biggest companies focused. On the other hand, there are disruptive cases, e.g. *Meio Norte*, which is not among the biggest ones, but published 1,553 times during the period analyzed.

TABLE 1. Distribution of Posts by Newspaper

	N.	%	Med.
O Povo	2,164	21.7	45.1
Diário de Pernambuco	1,586	15.9	33
Meio Norte	1,523	15.2	31.7
A Tarde	1,263	12.6	26.3
Gazeta de Alagoas	1,171	11.7	24.4
Tribuna do Norte	664	6.6	13.8
O Estado do Maranhão	608	6.1	12.7
Jornal da Paraíba	581	5.8	12.1
Jornal da Cidade	433	4.3	9
Total	9,993	100	

The table shows that *O Estado do Maranhão* (608) and *Jornal da Cidade* (433) are on opposite sides concerning the frequency of use of Facebook for sharing content (Zago; Bastos, 2013). These differences – which can be explained among other reasons by the size of newsrooms, for example – show that it is not only the presence of technology that changes the way of content production and distribution in news companies. However, it is necessary the interest on have possible benefits from it, as circulation (Machado, 2008) and expansion of the

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[9] Some categories were established based on the debate over framing (PORTO, 2004). However, we added other categories in order to adapt the analysis to social media. So, the variable is labeled distinctly.

public (Hong, 2012), understanding the interconnection between traditional space and social media.

Despite the broader observation of data about intensity of fan pages use, we cannot say yet if issues on public interest or entertainment. The centrality of communication media on electoral disputes can be moved to the online platform only if there is content distribution that strengths (and offer subsidies for) public debate. So, graph 1 indicates the 'themes' distribution during the period in analysis. There is a prevalence of news related to varieties and culture (14.9%) – celebrities' life, soap operas, concerts, beauty etc. According to Zago & Bastos (2013), this profile achieves more potential through social media, where newspaper companies want to achieve more clicks, since these are themes that call readers attention (Shoemaker et al, 2010) and generates engagement (Trilling et al, 2017).

GRAPH 1. Distribution of 'Themes'
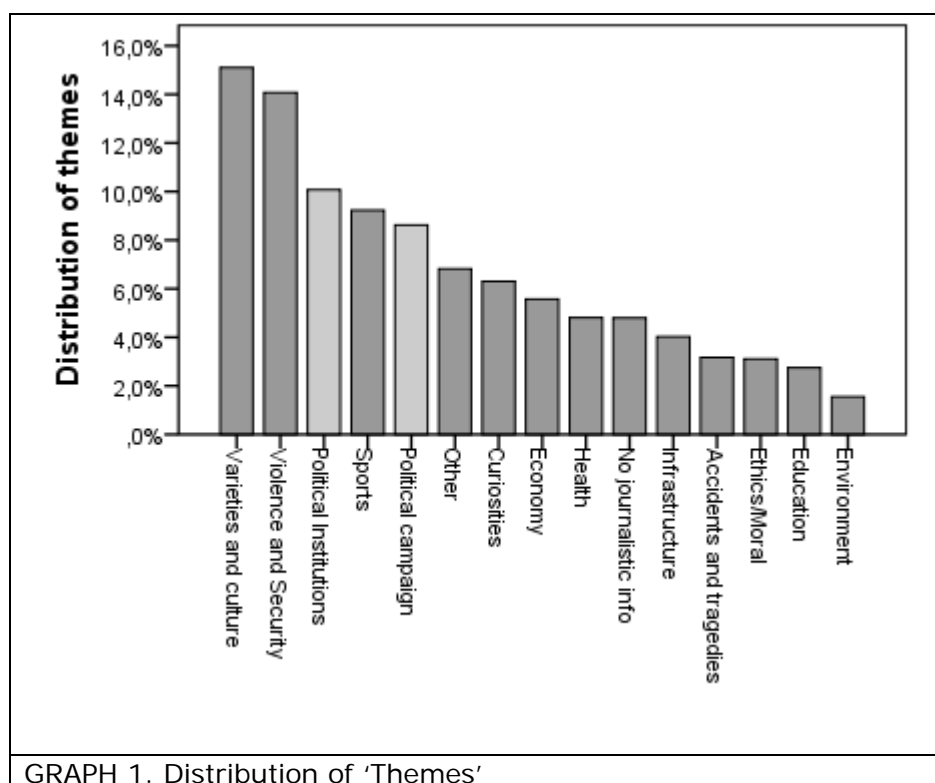
By choosing the electoral period, we assume as proxy a moment when there is less chance of soft issues to be featured. We estimate that in other moments there is probably a super estimation of this kind of "tabloidization" (Chagas, 2016) of regional quality papers. This attitude is similar to the national newspapers coverage. However, the presence of soft themes during the electoral run is not new, because the tendency of "tabloidization" was already identified by Miguel (1999) on television coverage.

The themes that can be considered 'infotainement', from the concept designed by Baym (2008) – varieties and culture, sports and curiosities – achieve

at least 30% of all publications analyzed. This reinforces the journalistic attempts (regional newspapers included) of producing and giving space to this content profile. Violence and security is covered on 13.9% of total publications, which can be connected to the context of these newspapers because many of them are from capital cities with high levels of violence. According to the centrality of the news value "proximity", especially in local or regional newspapers, this issue tends to be highlighted. On the other hand, we add the possibility of sensationalism and the pursuit of scary news (Shoemaker et al, 2010).

It is remarkable that all the other social themes – except those related to politics and 'violence and security' – have very low percentiles among contents posted on fan pages, which is the case of education (2.7). Thus, there is an occlusion of public interest themes on contents selected to circulate on social media, which makes them invisible (Miguel, 1999). They do not seem to foster engagement, so are not highlighted by newspapers (Trilling et al, 2017).

We concluded by the analysis of political themes that elections (political campaigns and political parties) constitute the fifth most frequent theme on news coverage on fan pages. 'Political institutions', which means political questions unrelated to local disputes, occupies the third place. Beyond electoral run, the impeachment process against Dilma Rousseff (the former President of Brazil) had many unfolding events during the period analyzed. This fact probably helped political themes to achieve so many publications on the regional newspapers fan pages.

The amount of posts on political issues reaches 18% of the total. They have an intermediate visibility concerning the hierarchy of circulation on social media but have less space than entertainment topics (30%). When we aggregate data, the first hypothesis is not confirmed. Then, soft topics does not appear only on national newspapers (Massuchin; Carvalho, 2016; Johnson, 2015) but regional ones also use the logic of calling readers attention by covering themes that achieve more engagement.

Even though political issues do not have centrality on news production, their intermediate visibility may be highlighted comparatively[10] to other public interest questions, which appear only in around 5% of postings. The justification for this positioning is the presence of traditional news value as relevance, magnitude and elites' power (Harculp; O´neill; 2001), which represent the first requisites for political facts to achieve journalists attention.

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[10] Even though we do not know how much the postings can reach the audience, which is out of the remit of this article, the first step for content circulation is to be produced and prioritized on posts by the newsrooms.

Moreover, the campaigns dynamics – daily facts – fed the proposal of instantaneity of social media and 'last minute' news. Campaign themes are probably "approved" by *gatewatching* (the readers) and by traditional *gatekeepers* (Primo, 2011) even if it is still necessary to call readers attention by using entertainment in other postings.

Since now, data were presented in an aggregative way, which is important for comparing and verifying differences between newspapers, because in some of them this dispute scenario between politics and entertainment can be shown distinctly. Table 3 shows the standardized residuals and chi-square tests in order to achieve the relation between themes and newspapers. Achieving almost 18% of political news through Facebook is not a pattern, and some newspapers treat more while others cover less these issues. This result allows us to think about grouping these newspapers according to their choices and aims, considering distributed content. The thesis of invisibility of politics, like on the coverage of elections in 1998 and 2000 on traditional media (Miguel, 1999; Fuks; Cervi, 2000), seems to be corroborated by some newspapers, whilst others highlight more this theme.

TABLE 2. Distribution of themes by newspaper

|	A Tarde	Diário de Pernambuco	Gazeta de Alagoas	Jornal da Cidade	Jornal da Paraíba	Meio Norte	O Estado do Maranhão	O Povo	Tribuna do Norte
Political campaign	0.7	-7.2	2.3	3.1	4.9	-7.4	7.5	3.6	-2.5
Political Institutions	2.1	0.2	-4.1	3.0	0.7	-8.3	8.8	1.4	1.0
Economy	0.9	-0.7	0.9	3.9	1.2	-5.3	2.2	-0.5	1.2
Health	-2.3	1.6	-1.6	1.6	-1.4	2.4	1.3	-1.5	0.6
Education	-2.3	-0.6	-1.7	0.4	1.1	-3.3	0.8	3.5	3.0
Minorities	0.6	3.1	-1.3	-0.8	-1.7	-1.4	-0.6	1.7	-1.9
Infrastructure	0.8	-0.3	-1.9	2.3	-0.2	-5.6	3.6	1.7	2.1
Environment	-1.0	-0.5	0.5	1.7	-0.6	-0.5	0.2	0.2	0.9
Violence and Security	-2.9	-3.8	12.4	1.8	1.2	3.7	-1.0	-6.8	-1.5
Accidents and tragedies	0.5	-0.1	3.4	2.3	1.1	2.9	-3.2	-3.9	-2.4
Ethics/Moral	2.1	3.6	0.0	-1.7	0.7	-4.2	2.9	-2.1	-0.3
Varieties and culture	-0.9	7.5	-4.9	-4.2	-1.7	6.7	-6.9	-0.2	-2.0
Curiosities	-6.2	4.2	-4.6	-5.0	-4.5	21.7	-5.8	-2.7	-6.1
Sports	**7.1**	-2.3	6.6	-4.7	-5.1	-7.8	-5.6	3.2	4.8
Other	-0.9	0.7	-4.6	-2.4	6.8	-1.5	1.7	1.3	0.0
No journalistic info	1.3	-4.1	-6.8	1.6	-3.3	4.6	-3.5	3.8	4.9

X^2: 2,314.579 sig: 0.000 (Except by the theme 'minorities', which had cells with less than 5 cases).

Table 2 shows that five of the nine newspapers aggregate more news on politics: *O Estado do Maranhão, Jornal da Paraíba, O Povo, Jornal da Cidade* e

Gazeta de Alagoas. Even though *O Estado do Maranhão* is one of those to publish less content on its Facebook fan page, it concentrates the most posts on politics. This result shows that posting more is not necessarily making available contents of public interest. *Jornal da Cidade* and *A Tarde* are among those newspapers that also focus on political institutions.

The proposal of contribution of social media for the circulation of electoral content was identified only on part of the newspapers investigated. Even though the idea of presence of the political run over entertainment, it is not a pattern in all newspapers. Editorial interests, audience profile and other questions interfere on the way that enterprises deal with Facebook as a space for content circulation. The strict relation with political groups in the state could explain the high interest of *O Estado do Maranhão* in political and electoral themes. Similarly, *Gazeta de Alagoas* and *Jornal da Paraíba* have political attachs. However, it is necessary to conduct interviews or observe internally the news offices in order to understand better the logic of the particular interest by these themes, which was not our point in this research.

On the other hand, not all the newspapers studied drive visibility to political themes. Some of them prefer to post more soft and attractive themes (Shoemaker et al, 2010), which could increase the number of readers (Hong, 2012). If the aim is to achieve more clicks through links, this action is economically relevant, which happens specifically on *Diário de Pernambuco* and *Meio Norte*. It does not mean that there is no political themes on their fan pages, but that they are expressed in few posts compared to other themes and other newspapers. The graphs below (2 and 3) illustrate differences between two of them and show that they are on opposite sides related to themes priority on Facebook posts, mainly evidencing the centrality or not of electoral issues.
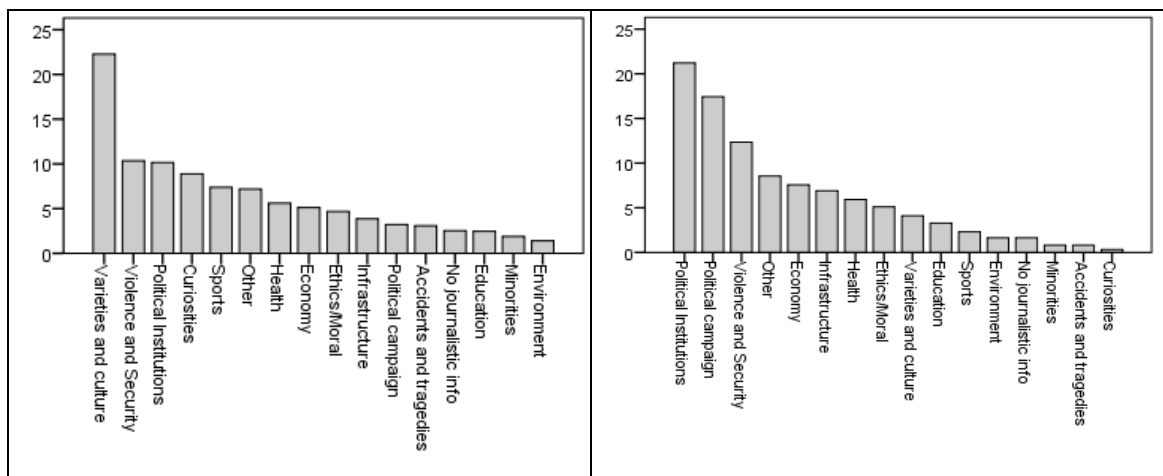
Graphs 2 and 3 – Distribution of themes on *Diário de Pernambuco* (left) and *O Estado do Maranhão* (right)

Some newspapers choose not to drive high visibility to politics, for example *Diário de Pernambuco*, which had more than 20% of posts on varieties and culture, contrarily to *O Estado do Maranhão*, which has almost 40% of its content about politics. This reality is also expressed on traditional news, as Fuks & Cervi (2000) had already found on some newspapers from Paraná during elections. The presence of certain news values and the proximity of elections are not necessarily determinant – even though they are relevant – for opening space to themes related to the political run, because economic questions and those of readers' interest have more decisive power (Shoemaker; VOS, 2009), as well as facts pointed out by Trilling et al (2017) and García-Perdomo et al (2017).

Even though entertainment has more space than political issues in general, which configures the fan pages use by Northeastern newspapers in Brazil even in electoral periods, data show that the prioritization of local disputes is worth noting. Then, it is important to understand political coverage through fan pages.

Dependence on agendas and speeches

This part of the analysis considers only 8.5% of total coverage, represented by 852 posts on elections. These postings specifically on campaigns were analyzed based on a specific categorization to understand the kind of electoral content that was more visible. Firstly, according to table 3, daily information on campaigns (dates, rules and events strictly related to the campaign) appears more. It achieves 25.8% of posts. "The meeting with coalition components happened last Friday (26) without any deal" (*Jornal da Paraíba*) is an example of this kind of content that generates continuous information on the dispute. This result is positive and meets the conclusions on Borges (2002), because it would give a sensation to the readers of knowing "details" about the political run. On the other side, they are strictly daily information, which does not lead us to any contextual and wider understanding of elections.

TABLE 3. Approach on posts about elections (n=852)

	N.	%
Daily information on campaign	220	25.8
Candidates' agenda	152	17.8
Electoral justice (problems with campaigns)	105	12.3
Polls/Final results	96	11.3
Instantaneous coverage	80	9.4

Other	80	9.4
Speeches/opinion of candidates	73	8.6
Proposals and themes	46	5.4
Total	852	100

Despite the invisibility on some newspapers (Miguel, 1999) and the obstruction of electoral issues on social media, electoral coverage is facilitated by several reasons. One of them is media centrality for candidates, who consider it a relevant factor for the dispute. So, campaign teams work to assist the media and share information (Lipinski; Neddenriep, 2014), which guarantee some space on the coverage. This attitude is evident on the 17.8% of electoral coverage focused on candidates' agenda, based on releases sent by their offices and the spaces that their advisors create to attend media demands. It constitutes almost a third part of every content on campaign through social media and points to how media 'follow' the electoral process and does not dominates it: on the contrary, it is dominated by it.

Declaratory journalism is connected to this result, which is supported by candidates' speeches and opinions on free electoral publicity on TV and radio (HGPE in Brazil), events, debates and interviews that are reproduced, generating episodic journalistic production on speech clippings. This category showed up on 8.6% of postings and if we aggregate it with 'agenda' they reach 26.1% of coverage focus on candidates and their private actions.

Proposals and discussion on themes, which would be relevant on the coverage for contributing to present wider and contextual approaches on candidates opinions on specific topics, have almost no feature (5.4%). Even though this approach can be ordinary on traditional news platforms, it is not recurrent, as some studies have showed. The absence of a propositional coverage, therefore, is expanded to coverage through social media.

From these data, the hypothesis about the journalism limitations on social media is partially confirmed. Media coverage on politics has limitations inherited from offline production, because there is a considerable part of postings related to candidates' agenda and speeches, which represents the media dependency and the absence of autonomy on the coverage. The traditional media model for covering political run as a horse racing (Porto, 2004) is in decay. Furthermore, even though electoral polls generated a high amount of posts on the day they were released, they were less addressed on that platform in general.

New approaches of the coverage through social media are worth noting. One of them is the instantaneity of social media, which allows a simultaneous coverage of events. During the campaign activities, newspaper post considerable content on that, e.g. "During the candidate's interview…" (*Gazeta de Alagoas*). This attitude

allows – in a certain way – an adaptation of the 'second screen' concept (Wohn; Na, 2011) that can be applied to the specific coverage on elections. At this moment, newspapers – not necessarily the public – decide to use social media to broadcast "live" information, which is a try for approximating with the public.

Conclusions

This article analyzed how social media are used by newspapers from Northeastern Brazil to publish journalistic content. The research mobilizes literature on political campaigns and social media to discuss how these newspapers used Facebook during the 2016 elections. We analyzed 9,993 posts aiming to identify the use of this platform during elections, from evidence of political or electoral themes.

Among the main results, we highlight a broader coverage on entertainment, following the assumptions of literature related to the pursuit of clicks and the use of content that calls audience's attention as a strategic behavior. On the other side, it is worth noting that some public interest themes were featured, as violence and security, and especially political campaigns and political parties in focus on this analysis. Data lead us to conclude that newspapers' pages on social media share mostly entertainment. However, there are some differences between newspapers: some fan pages contribute more with the diffusion of information about politics, e.g. *O Estado do Maranhão*. Even though this newspaper is one of those that have few postings on social media, it has the biggest percentile of posts on political campaigns and political parties. So, it was apparently an important political actor on the disputes.

Concerning the hypotheses, we refuse the first one, once entertainment (composed by varieties and culture, sports, and curiosities) is highlighted on newspapers fan pages on Facebook, contrarily to political themes, which reach 18% of postings. Even though electoral campaign was not the most featured theme on publications, it holds an intermediate position among all themes framed. This place indicates that political campaign is still an interesting issue for journalistic companies and can achieve readers' attention, despite the huge competition with entertainment. We may highlight that among the nine newspapers analyzed, six of them were more prone to cover the electoral issues through their profile, even though it does not have the biggest space.

The second hypothesis was partially confirmed. Data showed a continuity of offline production limitations, e.g. postings centralized on "candidates' agenda", which represents dependence in relation to campaigns to keep Facebook pages up to date. Despite the distinct flow of information, the kind of content posted on the

online platform is similar to those that newspapers posted on traditional media. However, there is a difference: the reduction of the view of electoral run as horse racing, with few coverage of electoral results. Instead, there is more information on campaigns' routines. We can still highlight the live coverage of political events, which also characterized electoral coverage on Facebook fan pages, the most innovative activity for newspapers.

To sum up, even though there are some studies in Brazil about journalism and social media, this research tried to fill in some remaining gaps. We tangentially discuss the distribution of news on political campaigns and political parties through social media highlighting the debate on the perspective of political communication, which is a missing topic on the Brazilian literature. Furthermore, it is a comparative research that covers Northeastern quality papers, which constitutes a broad scenario for investigation, pointing that most work has featured national newspapers when analyzing the configuration of social media use during elections. Finally, this is a systematic research of a long period, which allows detailed results on the behavior of newspapers on social media, and dialogues with literature about entertainment and other themes.

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