

Bubbles, deep mediatization and disputes in the field of media in Brazil: The Brazilian far-right and the 08 January 2023

Burbujas, mediatizaciones profundas y disputas en el campo de los medios de comunicación en Brasil: la derecha política brasileña y la 08 enero 2023

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<https://doi.org/10.61283/5b0f5p58>

Recepción: 18.01.2024

Aceptación: 21.02.2024

Publicación: 30.06.24

ABSTRACT

This article explores the information and opinion bubbles of the Brazilian political far-right, in a descriptive analytical dimension, from the Brazilian context of January 8, 2023. The central idea of the work is to systematize the processes of formation and maintenance of bubbles by the political agents of the ultra-right and their strategies of dispute for the position of mediators of reality to the detriment of the vehicles of professional journalism, based on the specific modalities of the field of media (Bourdieu, 1997), pointed out by Rodrigues (1990): the pedagogical modality, neutralization, objectification, seduction, and simulation..

Keywords: Information and Opinion Bubbles, Social Networks, Mediatization, Brazilian Democracy

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora las burbujas de información y opinión de la extrema derecha política brasileña, en una dimensión analítica descriptiva, desde el contexto brasileño del 8 de enero de 2023. La idea central del trabajo es sistematizar los procesos de formación y mantenimiento de burbujas por parte de los agentes políticos de la ultraderecha y sus estrategias de disputa por la posición de mediadores de la realidad en detrimento de los vehículos del periodismo profesional, a partir de las modalidades específicas del campo de los medios (Bourdieu, 1997), señalados por Rodrigues (1990): la modalidad pedagógica, la neutralización, la objetivación, la seducción y la simulación.

Palabras clave: Burbujas de Información y Opinión, Redes Sociales, Mediatización, Democracia Brasileña

1. Introduction

During the Brazilian presidential elections, after the result of the second round of the 2022 presidential elections, right-wing extremists were not convinced of the authenticity of the news presented by the traditional press about the beginning of the government transition process. Even after the pronouncement of the then president, Bolsonaro, on social networks confirming the fact, right-wing militants remained engaged online and offline in

a campaign to contest the result of the election. For them, the electoral process was not yet over. Such conjunctures give clues to a series of cumulative and intertwined social and technological factors that configured the scenario of the invasion of the headquarters of the Three Powers by Bolsonaro's supporters, on January 8, 2023.

Franciscato and Gonçalves (2021) demonstrate how the gap between professional media organizations and this audience was widened in an unprecedented way during the Bolsonaro government and discussed the effects of the former president's actions on the information ecosystem in the country. According to the review presented by the researchers, even in the first months of the health crisis of the new coronavirus in Brazil, in 2020, for example, the levels of aggression against journalists worsened to the point that entities representing the sector, such as the National Federation of Journalists (Fenaj), the Brazilian Press Association (ABI) and the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Abraji), mobilize to curb the growth of violence against professionals. Journalists insisted on doing their job, asking questions, demanding effective answers from the president about the control of the pandemic in the country, but he relied on the denialist discourse about the disease, hid data on the number of victims, threatened journalists in the exercise of their duties, denied the veracity of the information provided by the press in general, recommending to his followers media outlets that correspond to the identities created by his administration. The demand for informational content with the desire to confirm their perceptions of the world has increased exponentially and created the conditions for the emergence of "malicious cyber activities". These compete with journalistic activity in the construction of knowledge about the pandemic, playing with resources from the areas of health and, especially, journalism.

Inspired by this context, this article seeks to explore the strategies of formation of information and opinion bubbles by political agents disputing the position of mediators of reality to the detriment of professional journalism vehicles, based on specific strategic modalities of the media field pointed out by Rodrigues (1990): the pedagogical modality, neutralization, objectification, seduction and simulation. The work begins as bibliographic research that seeks to understand what transformations are underway in the field of journalism and the possibilities of destructuring in the face of deep media coverage and the formation of bubbles of information and opinion on social networks. Its objective is to rethink the field and its traditional bases, as conceived by (Bourdieu, 1997) in the face of the mediatization strategies operated by individuals and collectives of individuals in digital social networks.

In its second phase, it presents a systematic observation of the scenario of information disorder in Brazil, after the 2022 presidential elections, using a database made available by the Brazilian news agency, Aos Fatos in partnership with the organization Muck Rock. The collection has more than 119,000 images, 25,000 audios and 321 videos collected by Radar Aos Fatos, the artificial intelligence of the agency Aos Fatos. The collection contains all the publications found by Radar that contain keywords related to the theme

of democracy. That is, not only content considered potentially misinformation, but everything related to that topic.

2. Autonomy, Digital Networks, and the Emergence of Information Bubbles

According to Castells (2013), the internet and the technologies connected to it are communication systems based on the "culture of autonomy"; "technologies of freedom" that promote a circle of struggles to liberate minds from historically legitimized structures (Castells, 2013, p. 202). This, according to the author, has been shaping a more diverse and diffuse society, generating greater "freedom at the social level" and "individuation" and autonomy at the level of social actors. Gathered around campaigns to delegitimize institutions, including the media, individuals arranged in horizontal and editable communication networks, build initiatives based on personal interests and desires. The strength of these new political movements arises precisely from the exercise of re-editing and reprogramming the digital infrastructure around other interests, above all, in spite of the great "programmers and switchers", "media barons" and the new elite.

Autonomy, according to the author, stems from the existence of open technologies and sources that have been present on the internet since its creation. For the author, the social movements that emerged on social networks on the internet are "free communities", constituting, technologically and culturally, "hybrid public spaces of political deliberation" in which revolutionary dreams and aspirations for new forms of democracy have been generating a type of differentiated, more reactive collectivity, with configurations and proportions unimaginable in times before the internet.

The observation of the political scene and public debate in recent years points to the centrality of the infrastructures of digital social media platforms for the organization of collectivities around political issues, as described by Castells (2013). The large structures of digital platforms based on data and artificial intelligence focus and amplify disputes, in which institutions have increasingly confronted the "realities" and "knowledge" of the self-proclaimed "networks of change" or counter-hegemonic movements — the outsiders. Agents, previously considered spectators of the media field, have been exercising themselves as actors capable of changing the structure of social fields, particularly those focused on communication. In the field of journalism, specifically, this means disputes directed at the concept of "truth" and "relevance" to raise doubts about the pretensions of journalism and the right of each person to make public his or her own observations and reports of facts.

For Rodrigues (1990), the very genealogy of the media field and its intimate relationship with modernity makes it susceptible to intense activities of provisional circuits on the margins of its "sphere of legitimacy" (Rodrigues, 1990, p. 143). The author points out that these movements come mainly from the political field, for which information has come to play an increasingly important role. According to Braga (2012), with mediatization, the edges of these two spheres of legitimacy have become even more

susceptible to mutual influences. They are particularly involved in continuous processes of "circuits", in which certain agents internal and external to the field have been interacting outside the usual logics of the field, triggering and generating different processes and reasonings.

In other words, the current socio-political context includes intertwined technological and social processes that form a hybrid system of communication (man-machine) that includes power struggles, which cross the media field (Bourdieu, 1997) towards other social fields (Bourdieu, 1989), reconfiguring the nature of communications, social and cultural processes. These transformations and the scenario of successive crises in the news market have meant that journalistic agents have been more affected by organizations interested in raising capital relative to the field. The orderly movement, based on the systematic use of data, artificial intelligence technologies and digital social network infrastructures, has resulted in zones of circulation of cognitively consonant ideas, in which actors can feed back their indignations and hopes and influence each other, without the interference of agents belonging to media institutions.

It is from this perspective that this researcher constructs the idea of information bubbles in social networks and defends the idea of this structure as a product of mediatization (Braga, 2012). Bubbles are not a "fact of the media" (Braga, 2012, p.44) or of the expansion and domination of the technology industry or the culture industry over society, but consequences of a set of mechanisms in sectors of society, including "non-mediatic" sectors, in relation to the dominance of media legitimacy. Bubbles are the result of structurally incomplete processes (Braga, 2012) of circulating flows in the areas of dispute for processes, media and products.

3. The Strategic Function of Bubbles

Bubble filters and echo chambers refer, respectively, to the interpretations of Pariser (2011) and Sunstein (2001) about the changes in the virtual public space based on the individualized personalization of media content for consumption, carried out through artificial intelligence technologies. Sunstein (2001), author of the echo chamber metaphor, uses it, above all, to analyze the social impacts of technologies that, according to him, make up a "control architecture", as opposed to the "social architecture", reiterating the "homophilic" behavior of humans – their tendency to establish connections with cognitively consonant people. The features of echo chambers are self-isolation, anonymity, and personalization. As a result, according to Sunstein (2017), echo chambers are producing more trust for political actors, but behaviors of increasingly extremist groups, with tendencies to polarization. Sunstein (2017) considers that echo chambers create, socially and technologically, "parallel universes" that threaten democracy and produce conditions of vulnerability for individuals on the network.

With Big Tech's policy of data exploitation, the author says, citizens have become commodities "and are often 'sold' to advertisers" (Sunstein, 2017, p. 28). Political leaders,

willing to spend a few dollars, can have access to these products and analyze them to create campaigns, apps, and bots to fuel negative sentiments within groups.

Pariser (2011) coined the term filter bubbles to describe the mechanisms present in the infrastructure of digital social networks, such as Facebook or Google, Twitter, Instagram, to deliver personalized content and a tailored worldview that fits perfectly with the initial beliefs of the individual/user. They are the means by which algorithms exert agency and communicative automation. They are the result of the "training" of algorithms, based on data such as "likes", comments, shares, time spent on each publication on Facebook, but mainly, the comparison and approximation of user profiles with similar behaviors based on this data with the basic objective of transforming digital media into a less chaotic, even welcoming, place. Surrounded by people and things that the user likes the most. According to Pariser (2011), filter bubbles can distance the individual from information and groups that are not compatible with their initial interests, to provide a "purified" experience, which has become an unprecedented social problem.

The work of Sunstein (2001) and Pariser (2011), by addressing the growing difficulties for the exchange of ideas between ideologically distinct groups in virtual social networks and for establishing social commitments, marks an important point for the discussion about the future of democratic decision-making based on these structural conditions.

Although metaphorically employed, the definitions of filter-bubbles and chambers draw attention to social strategies that appropriate and accompany the default of technologies. In other words, they draw attention to the fact that communication autonomy and horizontality — pillars of the great structure of social networks — can be used by new leaders in the battle for the construction of meaning in people's minds, operated in the act of communicating and sharing meaning through the exchange of information.

In Brazil, communication and social strategies based on the use of information in far-right political bubbles have been drawing attention and being the object of research for their impact on the democratic quality of programming on digital social networks and on relations with the growing wave of individualistic discourses, polarization and the weakening of democracy. The anti-democratic attacks of January 8 are an example of the direct, practical and dangerous result of the impact of bubbles on Brazilian democracy.

3. The communicational and social modalities of the media field

Despite Bourdieu's (1997) episodic passage on the field of journalism, in "On Television", through the relational method, defended by the sociologist himself, the studies that supported the construction of the theory of social fields, allow us to rigorously reconstruct the world of journalism, based on properties common to all fields and to compare this constructed reality with the reality of others. "The entire epistemological tradition recognizes the analogy" (Bourdieu, 1999, p.67). Thus, the hypothesis that there are structural and functional homologies between all fields, in Bourdieu's system, allows us

to understand the notions of the field of journalism based on metaphors guided by rhetorical intentions.

According to Bourdieu (1989), fields are theoretical zones constituted by a particular type of objective and independent structures, produced and produced by systems of lasting dispositions: *habitus*. They are "relatively autonomous" social universes, with independent structures, which have their own *habitus* and values that must be distributed and disputed. The countryside is, therefore, a place of symbolic production; a place of struggle, where forces move with effect to preserve or transform the structure of the camp. In other words, a zone of struggles for the "hierarchy of the principle of hierarchization" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 12).

According to Bourdieu (1989), *habitus* is the purpose of disputes. It is the component of the field in charge of separating the "us" from the "them", forming and collecting the "prices" (material and symbolic) in the field, establishing the cognitive rules that will progressively drive the social, "voluntarily or involuntarily" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 89). It is the element that sustains itself, summoning the past and throwing it into the present.

To exercise their deliberative capacity within a given field, that is, to influence the *habitus*, agents need to access and mobilize social capital, which refers to the material or immaterial resources available within the fields (Bourdieu, 1989). They build action strategies, guided by their purposes and continue to seek the accumulation of resources that generate returns within the structure in which they are inserted. This means, according to Lin, Fu, and Hsung (2001), articulating their methods according to the diversity of cultures, ideologies, technologies, level of industrialization, education, and other natural resources to gain social, cultural, political, and economic position. As fields are independent spaces, social capital and the disputes within them are relational, following internal and structure-specific negotiations and logics, although their effects may have repercussions, as well as their values required by adjacent fields.

Among the techniques pointed out by Lin et al. (2001) to study social capital in a given field, three possibilities stand out: 1) documenting the investments and distribution of resources by individuals in the social structure throughout history; (2) focus on ways to access available resources and reflect the strategic positions of people on the ground; 3) Take note of the mobilization of resources, their uses, and the benefits appropriated by individuals as a form of return for their movement in the camps. Thus, from the study of social capital, it is possible to evaluate the resources available in the field, the degree of accessibility, and how it connects with the improvement in the individual's ability to imprint the desired action in the field. In any case, Lin et al. (2001) advise that studies can demonstrate interactive connections and effects between individuals' structures and actions.

As key concepts, *habitus* and social capital contain and demonstrate the causal links and dynamics between action and structure, and by describing which resources are mobilized, by

which actors, and for what purpose, it helps to demonstrate how the individual connects to structure and to other individuals. From them, it is possible to trace disputes for access to resources and symbolic capital and individual and collective identities within the fields studied.

The interest expressed here is to investigate, from the third approach, pointed out by Lin et al. (2001), how individuals can, from the large infrastructure based on data and artificial intelligence, move in alternative fields and how this helps them to take advantage of regulations that can provide them with greater security to carry out their enterprises. Or, still, how cognitively consonant individuals can deposit resources for the realization of a joint agenda, forming their own universes of meaning and norms, threatening the destructuring of the field of journalism.

The field of media, according to Bourdieu (1997), operates as a tangent between the social and a possible and legitimized reality, possessing the power to appoint actors and institutions in the public space. It is no coincidence that the habitus of this field has been the object of disputes and strategies of crossing other fields, such as politics.

Media and journalism actors have the power to legitimize both content that can be recognized as knowledge for a given society and political actors that deserve public attention. They play with habitus and political capital to draw a dividing line between the "professional" and the "profane" and the more they constitute themselves, the more they professionalize, the more the exclusion of the laity operates, proclaiming them illegitimate and irresponsible, so that a new political actor or a new discourse on reality needs to surrender to institutionalized knowledge and practices (already known, already accepted and regulated) by the agents of these fields.

The conflicts between the parties interested in the production of the habitus of the field of journalism, therefore, according to Rodrigues (1990), develop precisely from the attempts of preservation versus surveillance, attempts to attack and capture practices related to fundamental values and rituals, such as transparency, desacralization, legibility and publicity, as well as the capture of technical-medium lineages. The external circuits are operated through a set of strategic modalities typical of the media field: the pedagogical modality, neutralization, objectification, seduction and simulation (Rodrigues, 1990):

- Pedagogical modality: refers to the performance of the role of counselor; suggesting, recommending, educating the audience.
- Neutralization: the exercise of force by juxtaposition as agents in the field of the media or the ability to promote isonomy.
- Objectification: refers to attempts to camouflage oneself as the subject of enunciation, to hide one's own individuality and influence as a person from the countryside. It refers to the idea of truth or impartiality.

- Seduction: the use of emotions that attenuate or enhance conflicts, masking or igniting the violent nature of dispute processes in the media field.
- Simulation: the translation of reality through the construction of imagery figures.

Aiming to understand the social dimension of the actions orchestrated by the right-wing bubbles during the 2022 presidential elections to conquer the position of mediating agent in the field of journalism, this work carried out the systematic observation of the scenario of informational disorder from the products made available by Aos Fatos, in the documentary "GOLPEFLIX", based on these categories indicated by Rodrigues (1990). They will help organize the forms of circulation and presentation of the media products of Brazilian far-right groups during the 2022 presidential elections, which ended on January 8, 2023. The challenge of the research is to delineate the degree of autonomy or independence of agents in relation to the field of journalism, in order to construct their own social worldview, its logics and its capitals of social authority in the contemporary public space.

4. Discussion: Bubbles and the Growth of the Radical Right in Brazil

The Brazilian journalistic outlet, Aos Fatos, made available a collection of more than 1 million texts, images, audios and videos that circulated in Bolsonaro groups in the period. The anonymized media were collected by the disinformation monitor, Radar Aos Fatos, between 2022 and 2023 on social networks (WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter) and far-right websites. Aos Fatos highlighted 687 of these in a digital report entitled "GOLPEFLIX: the digital catalogue of lies that led to January 8, 2023". The content brings the main aspects of the speeches, themes and strategies used by political leaders to convince voters to take to the streets on January 8, 2023.

The systematic observation of the scenario of information disorder in Brazil, after the 2022 presidential elections, proposed here, was based on the content available on the Aos Fatos website. The first step consisted of scanning the content and organizing it by representative categories of the events referred to in each video, audio, text and photo. Each keyword, highlighted in the table below, is related to a set of events, understood as the main objects of the ideas circulating within the right-wing bubble.

Table 1: Contents analyzed

Category	Number of occurrences
Electronic voting machines	140
Call for demonstrations	135
Military Intervention	128

Squid	47
Coup of the Judiciary	49

Source: prepared by the authors

It is important to emphasize that only the events with the highest number of mentions were considered and categorized. Events considered episodic or unrepresentative of the overall context were excluded from the analysis, which explains the disparity in relation to the total number of media available for analysis.

Therefore, the content that reflects: 1) insinuates the existence of fraud in the electronic voting machines; 2) the belief that, based on Article 142 of the 1988 Federal Constitution, the military could legally act in the other branches; 3) that the popular demonstrations would help to reverse the outcome of the elections; 4) that Lula would not be able to take office as president, either due to health or legal conditions (Clean Record Law); 5) that there would be a coup being orchestrated by the Brazilian Judiciary.

Based on the specific strategic modalities of the media field pointed out by Rodrigues (1990) — pedagogical, neutralization, objectification, seduction and simulation — we sought to note the uses of the arguments mentioned above to reinforce homophily in the group under study.

Journalistic organizations have been looking for strategies to recover their social capital, trying to differentiate themselves from other reporting agents in the field. There are indications that point to an effort to intertwine with technologies, through the creation of fact-checking algorithms, as is the case of Fátima, from the website Aos Fatos. Similar efforts have emerged around the world, representing a gain for journalism during the period of the new coronavirus pandemic, however, disbelief in the truth presented by the press and polarization have not been abandoned. In Brazil, this behavior has only intensified.

Right-wing radicals have employed a range of strategies using digital technologies, data, algorithms, and artificial intelligence, primarily to form and maintain information bubbles and circulation of opinion on digital social media, so that they can continue to operate as the main influencers of their audience. In the Brazilian presidential elections, in the face of precautionary measures and pacts signed by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) with sectors of politics and the media to minimize actions that contaminate the information environment at the time of the elections, they distributed exclusive content in *WhatsApp* and *Telegram* groups, placing videos as 'unlisted' on *YouTube* profiles, so that only those who had the direct link to the video could access it. Considering themselves patriots, members of the far-right shared conspiracy theories, invoking the memory of the 1964 military coup involving the Guarantee of Law and Order (GLO) as if they were facts. As

a result, on January 8, 2023, seven days after the ceremony that would mark the return of the Lula government, members of these groups that remained organized virtually and in person, invaded the National Congress, committing acts of vandalism and anti-democracy.



Figure 1. A photo of a demonstration shared in pro-Bolsonaro groups maintained the hope of a "counter-coup" from the right.

The pedagogical modality is also well exemplified in the way the Brazilian far-right dealt with information about electronic voting machines. Since 2018, after winning the second round of the presidential elections, Bolsonaro has preached against them, calling for the return of printed ballots. Soon after the former right-wing president's statements, the ballot boxes, created in 1996 to hold Brazilian elections more safely and quickly, became the target of criticism and concern from the right. This group believes that Bolsonaro would have won in the first round of the 2018 election and not in the second.

With their help, a video went viral on social media with a montage in which a voter presses the number 1 and the electronic ballot box automatically fills in with 3 and shows the photo of presidential candidate Fernando Haddad (PT), without giving him the possibility of voting on the 17th of Jair Bolsonaro (PSL). Despite the evidence presented by the technicians showing the opposite of the content of the video, the deputies elected by the former president's ticket maintained the discourse of fraud at the polls. They demanded measures from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) in relation to the alleged problems with the electronic voting machine. Thus, the president's voters arrived in 2022 with the ballot boxes under suspicion and the TSE negligent.



Figure 2. Video with alleged proof of fraud in electronic voting machines went viral in far-right bubbles after the 2022 presidential elections. The Argentine digital influencer, Fernando Cerimedo, said that part of the electronic voting machines would not have been audited, hence Bolsonaro's defeat.

The category "seduction" is represented by the movement of emotions such as anger and distrust fomented against the TSE and Lula, as well as the hope of a possible counteroffensive, led by the movements in the streets with the support of the army to reverse the result of the elections in favor of the right-wing candidate and the existence of a hidden group. protected from hegemonic forces, more critical, more rational, knowledgeable of the "truth of truths".



Figure 3. Bolsonaroistas bubbles try to decipher supposed subliminal messages in a live stream in which, for the first time, Bolsonaro confirms that there will be a transition from his government to Lula's government. They believed that the former president was, in fact, organizing the intervention together with the Army.

The simulation is present in the figure of the former president himself, Bolsonaro. Invested with the social capital deposited by his followers, nourished by the fantasy of general commander of the Brazilian army and the title of "captain", he articulated with silence in relation to his own defeat, refusing to greet the winning candidate, Lula, or even to reprimand the demonstrators in the streets, serving as encouragement for his followers to remain in their anti-democratic enterprise.

5. Conclusion

The objective of this work was to establish a relationship between the use of data-driven technologies by political agents of the Brazilian political right to influence the national media campus and interfere in the public debate on democracy and the country's deliberative processes. The study showed that there is, behind the phenomenon, an orderly movement, based on the systematic use of data, artificial intelligence technologies and digital social network infrastructures, for the secretive sharing of the worldview of the Brazilian far right, filtering the ideas of external media agents and encouraging violent actions against democratic institutions. In addition to the use of technology, bubbles were formed from the game with communication strategies (pedagogical, neutralization, objectification, seduction and simulation) and, thus, are part of the set of strategies of dispute between journalists and external agents to define the habitus in the field of the media and reality itself. They are structures that are organized around homogeneous symbolic groups, where informative and opinionated content is confused with the actions of individuals who fight for a more or less intentional deinstitutionalization and deregulation. The study also reflects the result of a pedagogical process of disqualification of professional journalists and the Brazilian press among far-right groups, which began long before the election period, a reflection of former President Bolsonaro's own speeches during his government.

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