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**Citation:** Levy, H. and Mercea, D. ORCID: 0000-0003-3762-2404 (2021). Exploring narrative linearity between Twitter and the news: Echoes of the Arab Spring in Brazil. *Discourse and Society: an international journal for the study of discourse and communication in their social, political and cultural contexts*, doi: 10.1177/09579265211023223

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**Link to published version:** <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265211023223>

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## **Exploring narrative linearity between Twitter and the news: Echoes of the Arab Spring in Brazil**

### *Abstract*

This article explores the use of narrative theory as an analytical framework to investigate the extent to which popular hashtags and the news can develop into intersecting stories. It juxtaposes the case of hashtag-based reports seen during the Arab Spring to understand the coverage of notorious political episodes in Brazil. Namely, the 2016 impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the 2018 election of Jair Bolsonaro. Here, narrative linearity emerges as a tool to observe the borrowing of Twitter hashtags in several journalistic pieces. It is contended that the linearity of authorship, narration, and representation of time appears as a satisfactory pathway to trace the development of hashtags into popular news stories. Results suggested that hashtags can significantly follow narratives and agendas in journalism while differing from their original social media context.

Keywords: Journalism, Arab Spring, Narrative Linearity, Brazil, Social Media

On its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Arab Spring has set many precedents for the role of social media platforms in journalistic practice. The 2011 event played an important part in reshaping the way journalistic organisations cover protests. Ten years later, newsrooms seem more aware of interactive audiences (D’heer & Verdegem, 2015; Hänska, 2016). The rising prominence of Twitter in these transformations has been the object of many studies since then (e.g., Bastos *et al.*, 2013). For instance, Twitter appears as a handy tool for information sourcing, especially while disruptive events are unfolding (Hermida, 2016; Bossio, 2017). The upshot

of the collaborative process between social media and journalists can amount to the production of “public knowledge” (Creech, 2015). Based on the surge of concomitant narratives on social media and the newsrooms since then, this paper proposes an interdisciplinary analytical framework to observe how linear are the narratives that both environments have portrayed.

The problematic part with Twitter’s growing significance for journalism comes down to how its content becomes news. Some of the issues include the dependence on the platform’s design and “logic” (Enli & Simonsen, 2018) and the normalization of its network as a sourcing database among journalists (Barnard, 2016). Expectations of reciprocity between what journalists write and what audiences want to see published also exist (Lewis *et al.*, 2014). The reliance on popular hashtags is another essential indicator of this process. As signalling pieces of text, hashtags could guide news curation (Bruns *et al.*, 2014). The hashtags *#25jan* and *#egypt* helped maintain an organized information flow during the Arab Spring (Lotan *et al.*, 2011), and the 2011 London riots had *#ukriots*, *#tottenham*.

This article takes inspiration from the Arab Spring uprising to theorize the linearity between popular hashtags and journalistic narratives. Those events have come up on social media and in mainstream journalism as narratives of revolt against authoritarianism and longstanding dictatorships (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015; Hänska, 2016). As an under-researched concept, narrative linearity could shed light on innovative criteria for mapping social media's influence on journalistic practice. Specifically, we concentrate on how hashtags continue to reflect their original context following their reproduction in the news. Next, we retrace some of the echoes of the Arab Spring in journalism’s convergence with social media and its impact on the production and reproduction of narratives.

### *The Arab Spring, hashtags, and narratives*

Following Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation, on 17 December 2010, a search on Twitter for *#sidibouziid* (the name of his hometown) would return a set of images and reports about the activist's death (Howard *et al.*, 2011). In the count of 13,262 posts published with this hashtag, one finds images of his body in flames, information about protests and content framing the incident as part of the Arab Spring (Lim, 2013). The news reporting on the *#sidibouziid* case turned Tunisia's emerging wave of activism into a transformative political event (Harlow & Johnson, 2011; Kassim, 2012). In other reports of this period, hashtags became a strategic asset for spreading the Arab Spring's narrative of an uprising in many languages (Poell & Darmoni, 2012).

Hashtags have likewise facilitated the practice of live reporting for spectators following the news from elsewhere (Aday *et al.*, 2013). Its trans-mediatised nature has contributed to further convergence between journalists' practices and those of activists, mainly when trying to map or predict new disruptive events (Hänkska-Ahy & Shapour, 2013; Yang, 2016).

Hashtags can be heuristic for predicting further unrest, being valued by journalists as such (Hodson, 2013). The social media narrative conveyed with the hashtag related to Bouazizi's death eventually rendered his self-immolation pivotal in the anti-authoritarian protest (Blaise, 2017). It also helped to popularise the narratives of other "mediated martyrs" among Western audiences. (Halverson & Ruston, 2013).

Since we rely on hashtags to study narratives, we have avoided drawing parallels between social media networks and mainstream journalism as both realms operate under different communication regimes. Other studies (e.g., Doğu, 2015) have surveyed how content can

manifest on different platforms with alternate emphases. At the same time, further investigations have embraced narrative theory as a way of tracking storytelling across platforms (Ochs & Capps, 2009; Page, 2018). We take the last line of enquiry to test *linearity* or *non-linearity* as concepts that can allow us to understand how narratives can be transferred or not from social media into journalism. Crucially, we apply these concepts to Twitter, which has become a critical tool for news reporting during moments of civil unrest.

### *Social media narratives, linearity and non-linearity*

Linearity appears as one of the many available approaches for studying social media narratives. This discourse-based strategy allows us to privilege the narrativity of tweets concerning the same stories that surface in mainstream journalism. Labov & Waletzky (1997) saw narratives as textual elements following a linear “temporal order” in which clauses organize as a classic plot: an action, evaluation, and resolution. In turn, Ochs & Capps (2009) examined narratives as a form of multidimensional storytelling. In this frame of reference, the construction of a narrative blends organic forms of text seen on social media with the standardized content of the news. For our purpose, the categorical approach that evaluates the quality of the text as a narration, or its narrativity, is the strategy that best suits a discourse-oriented method (Alleyne, 2014: 80). Ultimately, we probe narrative linearity as the study of organizational features of social media posts. We contend that such linear textual elements are pivotal for describing unfolding events (Hoffman, 2011:102; Ochs & Capps, 2009).

Our goal is to verify how these elements can feed or not into news pieces, while testing this approach to analyse the convergence between social media and journalism. For example, narrative linearity can help discern how hashtags emerging from conflicts and social unrest can go on to influence journalistic content. Developing narrative linearity as an analytical

method means systematically to observe how social media posts flow downstream into press stories. One example may be the proclamation of a “Facebook Revolution” by social media users, which fits journalists’ version of rather complex events (Bady, 2012).

There are multiple levels of interactivity and text organisation online, many of which can lead to the formation of the same viewpoint or interpretation of facts (Page, 2017:528). The search for narrative linearity on social media can shed light on such entwinement. *Reportedly*, a Twitter profile active until 2016 illustrated it very well. It was a project led by the ex-NPR journalist Andy Carvins, who had recruited a team based in different locations worldwide. They retweeted posts from multiple users but always ensured that a story told by different narrators in different timeframes or languages remained linear. Users retweeted varying facts and opinions, but their stream retained the same basic structure (start, discussion, end) in each story.

Simultaneously, social media posts can form a set of non-linear narratives by obscuring a single fact or muddying a faithful narration of an event. According to Ochs & Capps (2009), *non-linearity* corresponds to vague and unpredictable forms of narrativity. Non-linearity may reflect a “cultural aesthetic, an artful strategy, or the spontaneous, back-and-forth reasoning of personal narrative as a sense-making practice.” In 2019, the virality of *#amazonfires* or *#prayforamazonia* put international news into a state of alert. Based on social media reports and reactions, the world’s most-accessed outlets criticized Brazil’s crisis management (Andrade, 2019). This episode escalated into a diplomatic spat with France (Oliveira, 2019). One saw Brazilian embassies vandalized (The Brussel Times, 2019). Wildfire incidents had appeared in large swaths of the Amazonian forest. However, many of the images and references associated with these hashtags were incorrect, either because other Amazonian

countries were also involved or because these posts linked to photos of other episodes that happened elsewhere (O Globo, 2019). While still predicated on facts, the event's reporting generated the news in a non-linear way, at least as far as its accuracy was concerned.

Successful experiences such as *Reportedly* are a favourable embodiment of narrative linearity on Twitter. It emulated responsible journalistic narration. The profile's selection of informative sources benefitted journalists' and readers' expectations vis-à-vis standards for ethical and accurate journalistic reportage. Yet, to understand the trajectory of popular hashtags such as #25jan in the headlines, it is necessary to investigate mention patterns that characterize their distribution in tandem with an analysis of the part that activists and journalists play in their reproduction (Poell & Van Dijk, 2015).

This article proposes the study of narrative linearity as an alternative discourse-based method for tracing the imprint of social media texts on journalism that questions the continuum from social media storytelling to journalism (e.g., Papacharissi, 2015). Putatively, a non-linear narration can help spread multiple versions of a story on social media, compromising the reliability of news reporting (Saldaña *et al.*, 2017). Secondly, it advances aspects of journalistic sourcing from social media based on whether the verification process becomes increasingly reliant on random "experiential verification", i.e. seeing what users have said about a topic, rather than investing in hearing from multiple, separate eyewitnesses (Lăzăroiu, 2014). Thirdly, it analyses content engendered by the translation of hashtags into news pieces (Bennett, 2011; Barnard, 2016; Bell, 2019). The study of such questions can reveal the state of reliability in contemporary journalism, although we do not dwell on this concept at length. As we highlight below, Brazil's case is remarkably relevant as the country's hegemonic broadsheets struggle to keep up with social media.



### *Social media narratives in Brazil's journalism*

There is a growing interface between social media, journalism, and politics in Brazil. On 6 September 2019, news reports cited hashtags suggesting a dress' code for marching against President Bolsonaro during the Independence Day parade in Brasília (Passarelli, 2019). The 2013 demonstrations, which brought out thousands of people onto the country's streets, were matter-of-factly reporting on hashtags that communicated distinct attitudes toward the mobilization (Santini *et al.*, 2017). One hashtag *#ogiganteacordou* (literally, *the giant woke up*) hailed the country's uprising as another, *#vemprarua*, or *come to the street*, gave voice to some of the imperatives to protest. Both appear in articles, opinion pieces, and reportages in the country's leading dailies (Bosco, 2018).

Likewise, the 2016 impeachment of Dilma Rousseff led to the spread of the hashtag *#naovaitergolpe* (or *coup d'état*), which was met with the oppositional *#foradilma*, meaning "Dilma, out." These hashtags mixed what the news reports said with what happened in the process of impeachment itself (Brasil, 2017). The 2018 election of Jair Bolsonaro intensified the ideological competition seen during the impeachment. Hashtags such as *#elenão* and *#elesim* (no to him or yes to him) have featured in reportages on various subjects, from the criteria to rent an apartment (Pauluze, 2019) to carnival themes (Carazzai *et al.*, 2019). In all of them, hashtags were directly or indirectly entrenched in the coverage. Since Bolsonaro's inauguration as President until his recent criticism for handling the pandemic, his family and allies have targeted opponents and the press via social media. They promote ridicule and erode ethics in political communication (Monteiro., 2019). In 2019, President Bolsonaro's account *favourited* a tweet that scorned the French First Lady, sparking a diplomatic crisis

with French authorities (O Globo B, 2019). On the other side of the spectrum, Brazil's leading daily has created a section dedicated to social media named "hashtag."

Against this backdrop, Brazilian journalism seems to offer an ideal laboratory for examining editorial choices that have placed hashtags at the centre of content, news, and facts. Budget cuts in newsrooms have left editors facing forced hybridity or loss of competitiveness (Bennett, 2006). These changes pose unprecedented dilemmas regarding the line between factual and obscure journalism; the competition between content, news, and commentary; questions about influence, dependence, social media content or reporting. While not all these issues deserve equal treatment in this article, theorizing linearity in Brazil could pinpoint the journalistic treatment given to social media content as an indicator for the quality of reporting. In the following, we flesh out the research methods.

### *Methods*

The primary step was to scrape a set of tweets containing hashtags that trended during two recent moments of crisis in Brazil. Although Twitter is not the most used social network in Brazil (Pasquali, 2019), the platform's usage by politicians, celebrities, and activists has triggered journalistic coverage on many occasions, as discussed above. We sought to generate a purposive sample of tweets (Barratt *et al.*, 2015) related to two cases of political disruption or disagreement that reached the federal government in Brazil over the last ten years (2009-2019), which were likely to be deemed newsworthy both on social media and by mainstream journalists. For the 2016 impeachment, we considered the period from the approval of impeachment proceedings in Congress until the final vote to impeach. For the 2018 elections, we selected the month of October, which concentrated both voting rounds (Table 1).

We initially retrieved over 5,000 hashtagged tweets related to the two events by using Twitter’s Advanced Search facility. The selection process (Robinson & Mago, 2018) resulted in eliminating stop-words, emojis, duplications, spam, and tweets that were not related to the events at all (including ads, undecipherable text). After selecting the top-performing messages (n=40) and those which safely matched the circumstances at stake, we lined them up alongside narratives retrieved from news stories (n=40) about the same events and dates. When tweets reached the headlines precisely, we further explored links or images added by users. When tweets did not check the journalistic reports' date, we picked up the closest stories to them in time.

*Table 1. Sampled events and respective hashtags on Twitter*

<i>Event/Threshold</i>	<i>Hashtags</i>	<i>Timespan</i>	<i>Tweets retrieved</i>
2016 Impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (The beginning and the end of the proceedings)	#naovaitergolpe #foradilma	02 December 2015 – 31 August 2016	2,784
2018 Election of Jair Bolsonaro (The two rounds of the vote)	#elenao #elesim	01-31 October 2018	3,169

We ranked the most retweeted, replied, and favourited messages, categories that underline our concept of popularity, because of their potential to generate news stories (Duguay, 2016). From this list, the number of forty tweets sufficed to create a scenario in which tweets' content could be read alongside the news pieces while allowing for an in-depth analysis of each of them. We then coded the narratives based on the extent to which they bridged each other, classifying them as linear or non-linear. Other studies that have parsed each tweet's content and wording and investigated the relations established with external sources have also limited the number of tweets analysed to a small sample (e.g., Beck, 2011; Alnemer *et*

*al.*, 2015). Notwithstanding, many limitations arise from using Twitter's historical data. Over a period, one may delete the tweets or changes to application programming interfaces, restricting the retrospective gaze (Driscoll and Walker, 2014). Despite this, these snapshots could already help theorize linearity/non-linearity. It was not our aim to account for the breadth of hashtagged tweets at the moment of their publication.

On the other hand, we performed a scoping search on the country's most-read broadsheets' websites (Sachitiello, 2019) to assess which hashtags were the top-mentioned ones and in which news pieces. We selected the two most-cited hashtags on each of the events from this group, representing the main antagonist sides. Forty headlines and individual full stories appeared side-by-side with the selected tweets.

The next step was to perform the coding and the analysis (Table 2) based on questions stemming from the literature that defines narrative linearity. We borrowed from Page (2013:12) a series of conceptual tools that help understand linearity applied to the news. Her ideas of linearity applied to social media narratives (Page, 2013, 2018) are also featured in Ochs & Capps (2009:56) discussion about capturing "living narratives", that is, the ability to identify conversational elements as they appear in the stream and not necessarily in a context-full circumstance. As we attempt to take forward aspects present in both discussions, we propose a model that prioritises the observation of the "representation of time", "authorship", and "narration" as categories for coding. The use of these categories allows one to scrutinize several further points intrinsically related to the practice of journalism.

While there are many ways of mapping the above categories through social media data, such as interactivity (e.g., likes or retweets), and tellership, as well as formats of prototypical

narratives (Dayter, 2014), we tended to what Ochs & Shapps (2009:54-56) described as the elements that influence the composition of a narrative. It marks users' embeddedness in such events and their personal experiences in moments of distinct duration but equal relevance to the participants. Political events of enormous importance for a country may appear to each individual on very subjective dates, according to the user's interest and position in it. In the *representation of time*, we considered tweets' linearity if they contended or followed specific events, such as a protest day or a quote from a politician in a particular context. The repetition of an original tweet or quotation determines *authorship*, as the extent to which actors stick to the same rhetorical style is a boundary for *narration*.

Non-linearity could reveal a misalignment in the representation of time or the wrong event cited. The causality indicated on social media might differ from what a journalist would conclude, and the former prevails in this assessment of narration. This practice could thereby throw the reliability of stories into question. The linearity of authorship, i.e. the appropriation of social media content with no factual reference, would undermine its origin. All these factors, whether linear or non-linear, could have profound implications for the journalist's role. It has already fuelled a crisis in the profession (Russial *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, it can underscore the importance of linear narration, adding to research on hashtags' event-defining function (e.g., Hodson, 2013). Ultimately, it can show the influencing factor for journalistic interpretations of the same events.

*Table 2. Coding matrix*

Criterion	Question	Text cues
1) Linearity	1a. Do users or journalists point to the exact causation or the same solution for similar issues or events that occurred at the same time? ( <i>representation of time</i> )	1a. Causality or solutions assignment.

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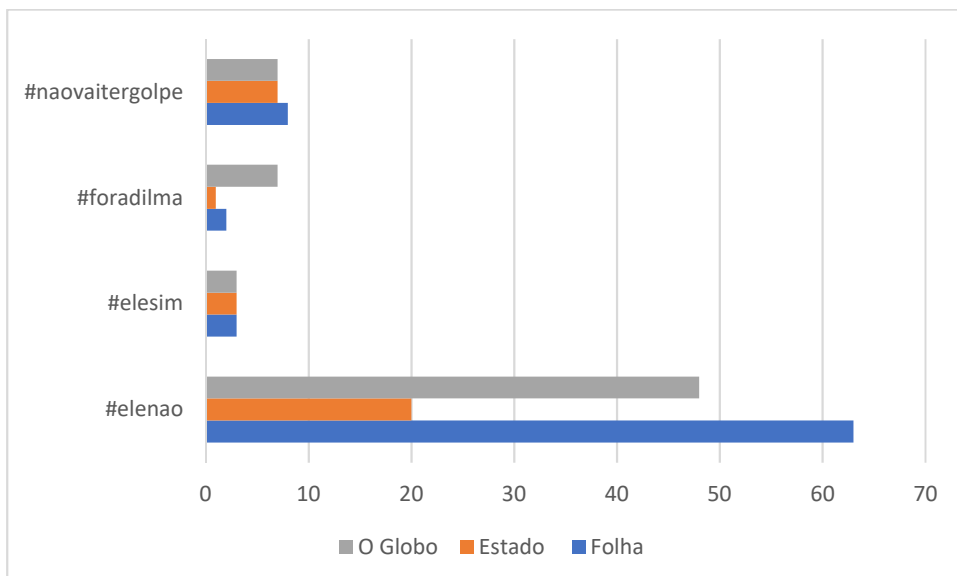
	1b. Are Twitter users or journalists repeating the same content source, either social media or journalist reports? Have they acknowledged their sources? <i>(authorship)</i>	1b. The distribution of storytelling efforts among different social networks and actors.
	1c. Is the narrative produced on one platform co-constructing a story with the other? Are they part of a joint storytelling effort? <i>(narration)</i>	1c. Diversity of sources--Twitter users, journalists, and the replies received (which could add new narratives).
2) Non-linearity	2a. Do Twitter users and journalists use sources or reports of distinct timeframes while reporting on similar issues or episodes <i>(representation of time)</i>	2a. Random references, no mention of causes.
	2b. Have Twitter users employed quotes from news media, or have journalists quoted tweets? Have they acknowledged their sources? <i>(authorship)</i>	2b. Diversity or concentration of narrating voices.
	2c. Instead of shared interpretations, is there a different emphasis in one narrative, on one platform, then on the other? <i>(narration)</i>	2c. Lack of links or responses to each other's story.

This mix of automated querying and manual analysis of Twitter data follows other studies that have looked into how Twitter content absorbs or shuns narratives present in public discourse (Chew & Eisenbach, 2010). We initially retrieved all tweets in Portuguese. One of the authors, a fluent Portuguese speaker, rendered them into English to provide an insight into the context to non-Portuguese speakers and ensure accuracy. A trained second coder repeated the process, from which a Cohen's kappa score of 0.61 resulted. The score represents a fair agreement between coders, given the subjectivity involved in the process, the aim to validate the methodology over the content (Alleyne, 2014:51) and the exploratory aim of this article. Next, we discuss the results.

## Results and discussion

Initial results revealed the extent to which Brazilian journalism borrowed the design of daily news from hashtags. We sought to retrieve some quantitative information from the sample to show the context users painted with their tweets and the critical event dates. The *#elenão* hashtag, which stood for “not him” during the election of Jair Bolsonaro, was the most popular hashtag to appear on journalistic websites with 131 direct mentions in the three most prominent dailies. *#naovaitergolpe*, the anti-impeachment hashtag, comes second in this ranking. By contrast, *#elesim* and *#foradilma* achieved fewer mentions from all the sampled material (Figure 1). This ranking helped to situate the narratives that relate to very decisive moments.

Figure 1. Number of hashtag citations by Brazilian newspapers (02 December 2015 – 31 August 2016 and 01-31 October 2018)



Indeed, examining the most popular tweets suggests a close relationship between the Twitter story and its prominence in the mainstream news media. For instance, from among the

hashtagged messages mentioning the 2016 impeachment (*#naovaitergolpe* or *#foradilma*), most were associated with the coverage of street protests in big cities, such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The messages carrying these hashtags received the highest number of replies, retweets, and favourites. Users typically published them between 13 March 2016 and 17 April 2016. The first date corresponds to the vote's calling and the second to the first impeachment vote in Parliament. After this peak, the parliamentarians authorized the proceedings by 342 votes in favour and 147 against it (Darlington, 2016). During the 2018 election, tweets with the hashtags *#elenão* or *#elesim* peaked during a Roger Waters' concert in October 2018, weeks before the run-off vote. Both the *#elenão* and *#elesim* hashtags appeared as the singer protested the right-wing candidate. The number of occurrences of both hashtags reveals high levels of activity. The *#elenão* hashtag was more popular than the pro-Bolsonaro *#elesim* (see Table 3). After laying out this context, we specify the categories of linearity and non-linearity identified.

### *The representation of time*

The analysis suggested that most coverage from mainstream journalism had carried over narratives from events that stemmed from pro-impeachment hashtags, as suggested elsewhere (van Dijk, 2017). Here, protests, demonstrations, and comments translated into news stories, opinion pieces, and commentary in the months before the decisive vote deposed Dilma Rousseff. After 17 April 2016, once the impeachment process seemed to veer towards the vote in Congress, journalistic reports started to cite pro-impeachment hashtags more often. On 01 April, one of the country's leading pollsters revealed that 61% of Brazilians supported Rousseff's and her Vice-President's impeachment (BBC Brasil, 2016). On Twitter, the main narrative pushed with the hashtag *#naovaitergolpe* insisted on rebelling against the impeachment because of lack of evidence against Rousseff. The *#foradilma* hashtag



encapsulated what seemed to be Brazilian society's growing accommodation of the impeachment. 13 March 2016 saw a big protest favouring Rousseff's impeachment. Among the most popular tweets using the hashtag, most were from right-wing politicians' accounts:

“More than 5 million Brazilians took to the streets to convey their message. It is up to Congress to respect and fulfil the sovereign will of the people. #foradilma” - 13 March 2016 by @tumaoficial

A few days later, another wave of tweets from the other side of the political spectrum invited the public to a round of pro-Rousseff protests. One prominent comedian, himself a Rousseff impersonator, tweeted about the upcoming demonstrations:

“Tomorrow, an act for democracy in the whole of Brazil #juntospelademocracia #nãovaitergolpe” 17 March 2016 by @dilmabolada

Meanwhile, in the press, the use of these hashtags was met with restraint. The journalistic narrative acknowledged both narratives, the protests and demonstrations, and the Impeachment supporters. Journalists described the viral hashtags to illustrate expressions of discontent. As far as the *representation of time* was concerned, impeachment narratives on Twitter and the press were non-linear, diverging on causation. Occasionally, hashtags came up as passages quoted by mainstream politicians, but their meaning and motivation remained far from the context in which

“The pandemonium was so huge, with boos and curses at Waters' [concert], that the musician stood onstage saying nothing for almost five minutes #Elesim” Tweeted by @paulacamara\_ on the 10 October 2018.

“I find it funny that Bolsominions [Bolsonaro fans] say, “oh, but they booed Roger Waters once he showed the #elenão [projection]. Waters confronted Thatcher, Reagan, and Brezhnev in the 1980s. Do you think he is afraid of *minions*?” @mizanzuk on 28 October 2018

On the other side, the news portal of *O Globo* published a similar chronicle of the incident, but providing a vague depiction of what happened:

“Roger Waters pays homage to Marielle Franco in a Rio concert. Moments after he displayed the hashtag #elenão on the big screen, before singing the last two songs, Waters received boos and applause from the audience” *O Globo*, 25 October 2018

These examples illustrate the non-linearity that comes from two kinds of narratives, emphasising polarisation on social media and the other that attempts to represent both sides of the press's political spectrum. These tweets cast disparate lights in representing time, as #elenão props up not only the movement against Bolsonaro, as the hashtag has initially suggested, but ultimately, the encapsulation of the extreme polarisation in Brazilian politics. The first tweet constructs Waters’ performance as an example of resistance against Bolsonaro. The user @paulacamara\_, otherwise, borrows a quote from *Folha de S. Paulo* to frame his concert as a humiliation of boos. Dissonant from both narratives, the concert's press story is one of a tense but peaceful demonstration (Menezes, 2018).

*Table 3. Coding results for ‘representation of time’*

Categories	Representation of time
Linearity	22
Non-linearity	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>

In sum, the fact that *Folha de S. Paulo*’s content, as of other broadsheets during that period, intended to accommodate both sides of the political divide results in non-linearity between both platforms. One sees the same content, the same facts, and events facilitating distinct narratives. First, the divergence happens because the press tended to act as the shock absorber between active partisan fronts to report the concert's attendance. Second, the non-linear use of facts (to claim the singer’s show was a success or otherwise) corresponds to a scenario where

the primary pursuit is not one for clarity over the issue. Instead, the quest is of confirming Waters’ high popularity and ultimately accommodate a set of expectations for peace. Like in the Arab Spring, reports followed a “reinforcement of social stratifications” (Bossio & Bebawi, 2017), in which a dominant middle class echo their dissatisfaction while political realities remained unchanged. Next, we discuss authorship and linearity.

### *Authorship*

Authorship on social media can control the narrative or tell it first (Page, 2018:200).

Accordingly, it is possible to understand linearity as a phenomenon that reproduces narratives across media platforms and reproduces some Twitter users’ narratives over others leading to an affiliation sentiment (Zappavigna, 2011). For example, some journalistic websites chose to quote messages from politicians or celebrities on Twitter, rather than from ordinary users from the same platform, which testified to a form linearity among both stances of power. Thus, one upshot was that some narratives were more extensively followed through than others, as we shall discuss.

*Table 4 – Coding results for authorship*

<u>Categories</u>	<u>Authorship</u>
Linearity	23
Non-linearity	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>

One learns from Roger Waters’ case that some of the most frequently press-cited Twitter handles calling for *#elenão* were those belonging to academics, niche right-wing news websites, or politicians from both left and right. *#Elesim*, on the other hand, mostly comes from meme accounts and anonymous profiles, as well as the accounts of evangelical pastors,

bloggers, and ordinary citizens with no apparent connection to social movements or any organized party affiliation.

For example, the users *@rbarbosa6* and *@paulacamara\_*, do not self-identify as political activists on their profiles despite their extensive list of anti-left, targeted posts with the *#elesim* hashtag. The gospel singer André Valadão was the author of another series of pro-Bolsonaro tweets. A prominent figure in the Minas Gerais state, Valadão's presence is less spoken of in mainstream journalism, but his messages summed up multiple causes defended by the *#elenão* users. One of his most-commented tweets reads:

“They [The left] speak of love. Love? Do they speak of equality, equality? [Do they] speak of freedom, freedom? [They are] since 2002 in power and speak as if they were about to seize power. #ptout, #haddadout, #elesim, #bolsonaro” by *@andrevaladao* on 28 October 2018

The example above illustrates how posts from prominent users (not necessarily only celebrities of the mainstream media) have created open-ended messages or personal reflections that would engender a greater weight for non-linear narratives, if they portrayed exclusively stories seen in mainstream news outlets. Linear accounts communicated users' thoughts in such causes rather than provide users with journalists' narratives. In effect, such actors' versions of the facts have been more closely related to conspiracy theories or the spread of fact-free posts.

The narrative those users produced, nevertheless, indirectly made it into the news. For instance, reports that overestimated the size of their “movement” and these groups' influence in the country's politics come through as beyond doubt. If they could not get journalists' buy-in entirely, at least these narratives would have successfully projected their power and

presence on news outlets' pages. Non-linear narratives also consist of political actors, journalists, and news outlets confirming their fear of this group of prominent users. They do it so either by justifying their failure to contest them or by assuming they would not enchant the public due to the opponent's (right-wing) popularity, as these reports tell:

“The spiking rejection to Haddad [Bolsonaro's opponent] suggests that #elenão has contributed [to it]. After spending the weekend celebrating the social media success of the demonstrations against Jair Bolsonaro, members of the #elenão movement are introduced to the Brazilian reality” - Folha de S. Paulo, 02 October 2018

“Lies influence the ballot box. Since last Saturday, many groups of Bolsonaro supporters come in [on the internet] with montages against the #elenão movement”. O Globo, 04 October 2018

“The people ask for passage. The demonstrators of the Sunday 21 October 2018 responded to the exclusive #elenão movement, which has mobilized fewer people than the day before” Estado de S. Paulo, 22 October 2018

On Twitter, accounts boasting a high number of followers, such as Guilherme Boulos, a left-wing politician and candidate, dialogued with the ones sponsoring a view of right-wing domination in the country's politics in such non-linear way with other partisan actors. These leftist users tweeted messages that associated the vote for Bolsonaro with the escalating violence, but did not create the same linear effect that the latter did:

“Shooter kills 11 people in the United States. This [act] is the security solution that Bolsonaro has to offer #elenão” by @guilhermeboulos 22 October 2018

“UFPR student was brutally assaulted in front of the university by cheerleaders shouting, “Here is Bolsonaro!”. A “justification”? He was wearing an MST cap. Glass bottles broken by attackers injured the student #elenão” @psol50

“Police chief of downtown SP, Temistocles Telmo posts with homophobia and fake pro-Bolsonaro news; on Sunday, PMs commanded by him ignored assaults by #EleYes groups in protest” @pontejornalismo

While the use of the #elenão hashtag in news stories echoed their social media authors, stories from media-prominent users continued, instead, to linearly reflect ideas such as the

fear of Bolsonaro supporters, the rise of fascism, the certain fall of the leftist candidate.

Illustratively, this report from the newspaper Estado de S. Paulo attaches the tweets of

Guilherme Boulos to their central message, which says:

“On Sunday, the 07<sup>th</sup>, the candidate to the Presidency, Guilherme Boulos, had declared his support to Haddad in a message on Twitter: ‘We conducted a campaign with dignity and seeded the soil for the future. Now we will be on the streets to defeat fascism and elect the one who represents the democracy in the second round: Fernando Haddad. #elenão’, the message says.  
Estado de S. Paulo – 08 October 2018

Quoting tweets in their entirety allows for linear authorship, but similar rhetorical styles surely point to the narratives closer to the right-wing view of Brazilian politics. For example, even when such journalistic reports represent only part of citations from these messages, they mirror quotes of these right-wing actors, as they are also identified in the headlines and the body of the journalist’s text. Leftist hashtags such as *#naovaitergolpe* featured less in journalistic reportage, especially those put out by prominent figures. AlSayyad & Guvenc (2013) argued about the popularity of insurgent voices during the Arab Spring and the extent to which new media gave them new organizational logics but not necessarily political renovation. Here, social media posts and news reports featuring *#elenão* also shed similar light regarding journalists’ previous alignments and the inability to constitute an oppositional rhetoric. The preference for some Twitter user-authors over others has snowballed into creating more linearity for the use of *#elenão*, but this featured Bolsonaro-friendly posts. It eventually becomes a symbiotic resistance, and the narrative critical of the left spread in and out social media. Below we continue this discussion by exploring the possibility of a linear narration.

*Narration*

Proportionally, this category makes up the most linear reports seen in this study. While not all popular hashtags channelled anger, mockery or memes, the narration in journalistic reports depicted hashtags such as *#elenão* or *#foradilma* to communicate disruption and personal disgust in the face of the respective political developments. In the news, these hashtags grounded the coverage of protests and turmoil. Below we discuss some factors that contributed to linearity and non-linearity, respectively.

*Table 5. Coding results for ‘narration’*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Narration</b>
Linearity	24
Non-linearity	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>

As in the previous section, the post by a celebrity or retweeting by an artist would garner more visibility for events connected to the right-wing causes (Bolsonaro’s election and Dilma’s impeachment). It was notable in the analysis that those same events were co-narrated by users and journalists as both sides frame it as a disruption. The more prominent one user seemed to be, the more their content appeared in the headlines. This example from the Estado de S. Paulo newspaper illustrates differences in the press’ approach. One non-prominent user complains about the lack of media attention to a demonstration, noting that in as far as the Estado de S. Paulo newspaper reported on the protests, it failed to acknowledge the presence of artists, which would grant the story more notoriety:

“Congratulations, Estado. You will receive an award for image manipulation *#vempromico #Nãovaitergolpe*” 14 December 2015 by *@gringabrazilien*

“Amid the protests, artists engage with political criticism. The hoarse voice of the streets said it very loudly: *#nãovaitergolpe*. The account [of actor] ZeDia (*@zehdeabreu*) has retweeted it. In opposition to him, the singer and songwriter *Lobão* has also published frequently...”. – Estado de S. Paulo, 14 December 2015.

Secondly, tweets extracted from the weeks before the first round of the 2018 election showed both antagonist groups narrating the imminent vote using *#elenão*. For instance, the narration of Waters' concert/protest against Bolsonaro saw a considerable spreading of theses associating public funds with corruption on the left. This counter-tweeting aimed at disrupting the narrative of the event as a successful, calm protest. Therefore, they had to suggest a plot with left-wing supporters. The tweets came on the date of a poll that had the Bolsonaro vote covering 49% of the electorate. The surge in tweeting illustrated the use of conspiracy theories of electoral meddling to prop up the right-wing candidate's narrative. *#Elenão* allowed right-wing users to denounce the "essentially leftist, foreign meddling" plot against their candidate.

As a result, it is perhaps of little surprise that the oppositional hashtag *#elenão* trended on Twitter more than *#elesim*. However, in the press, the *#elenão* hashtag remained faithful to its original narrative of disincentivizing the vote for Bolsonaro. Linear reports, nonetheless, exist more in the journalists' reproduction of controversies around *#elenão* than in showing the terms of the widespread opposition to his running for President. The idea of an "ingenious" conspiracy of his supporters by using violence, for example, is shared by co-tellers, as the tweets below help to illustrate:

"Roger Waters reacts to the boos and says he has been censored. Close to the end of the concert, the big screen which displayed the *#elenão* [hashtag] the night before, only displayed the message "no way" – which had already appeared on the touring wall" – O Globo, 11 October 2018

"In such a polarised campaign, the country has had a few cases of aggression (...) the case would have happened when, the night before, shouts screaming *#elenão* and *#elesim* were heard from the individuals who were involved" – Folha de S. Paulo, 11 October 2018.

"The growth of Jair Bolsonaro, despite many adverse circumstances, was built ingeniously by his supporters" – Estado de S. Paulo 03 October 2018



In terms of narration, linkages between social media and the press differed from other episodes in which journalists wrote narratives anchored in the trending topics boosted by hashtags. This effect was observed during the Arab Spring with the #25jan or the #egypt hashtags, as discussed earlier (Lotan *et al.*, 2011). The most popular tweet with the hashtag #*nãovaitergolpe* was an ironic post by the then parliamentarian Jair Bolsonaro. He posted an image of multiple screenshots taken from tweets that attacked him. His narrative was not about the impeachment at all. The left-wing parliamentarian Jean Wyllys tweeted with #*nãovaitergolpe* about the overshadowing of pro-Rousseff demonstrations on public TV channels. He blamed the *golpistas* or those who support the impeachment proceedings. Wyllys likewise showed concern for the non-linearity of media supposedly refusing to broadcast these debates during impeachment proceedings in Parliament:

“The Camara TV network [A parliamentary-based TV channel] opted for the broadcast of Mara Gabrilli [a parliamentarian] combing her hair. This [gesture] means a lot of desperation, folks! #*nãovaitergolpe* #*nãovaiterimpeachment*” by @jeanwyllys\_real

There was thus little narration in the sense of communicating facts or events. Instead, linearity stemmed from actors’ withdrawal from the main event to present their perspectives and such messages subsequently becoming the news. There was no substantive use of facts, quotes, or ideas that resonated on Twitter and in news reportage in those instances. In other words, the study of linearity allows us to see the continuation of a narrative that started with the expression of outrage at Rousseff’s impeachment or Bolsonaro’s election, but in which linearity does not follow through into the media. Either the news served less as a facilitator to understand the impeachment proceedings or, elsewhere, aided, by absence, the reproduction of Bolsonaro’s platform.

Instead, the confluence between *#elenão* and *#elesim*, and the colonization of the former by right-wing users seemed to underpin journalists' co-telling of a single narrative, in which hashtags become part of a normalized political coverage. Following Bady's (2012) analysis of the "spectatorial logic" of the Arab Spring, which came from the normalization of the event in the West, there is a desired level of consistency paved by linear narratives. This confluence towards stabilising one single story is possible by fulfilling extreme polarisation and degradation of politics. That works as a common denominator for many records analysed in this section. We conclude by settling this discussion and briefly discussing this method's suitability for investigating the possibilities of narrative linearity between social media and journalism.

### *Conclusion and limitations*

From the three criteria proposed to explore the concept of narrative linearity, the one that appears to point to a robust form of linearity was the one corresponding to authorship. Both *representation of time* and *narration* help identify linear narratives, but news outlets and journalists seemed to prefer to report on the virality of hashtags and their face-value rather than embracing the time or factual development associated with them. Conversely, authorship revealed less of those who started and led a narrative and more of those who boosted the claims from one side or the other.

The study of narrative non/linearity allows for an extension of the dialogue between social media and journalism flowing from the Arab Spring. The occurrence of linearity primarily stemmed from social media, which successfully fed into journalistic practice. This process shaped narratives that evolved into normalization and stabilised pre-existent political sentiments such as the hatred of the left and the distrust in left-wing politics. Moreover, as

hashtags such as #egypt or #25jan, a systematic borrowing from generic hashtags led to adopters' oversimplified narratives. Considering the linguistic value of the messages only, e.g., their wording and the coinage of terms, it could stand for “ambient affiliation” or propelling hashtags via its acceptance and replication by followers of these stories (Zappavigna, 2011). Linear narratives most likely obeyed descriptions of polarisation and disruption.

One fundamental limitation of this study derives from the use of Twitter historical data retrieved through advanced searches. The sample might have missed deleted or hidden tweets that could have provided other popular tweets for inclusion in the analysis. The question of the degree to which algorithms or robots could have deliberately boosted one hashtag over others is likewise potentially salient (Gerrard, 2018) and unaccounted for in this research. In any case, overcoming these omissions seems unlikely to change this exploration's results, as non/linearity from social to mainstream media remains tied to human agency. Moreover, the messages themselves are amenable to further analysis of how political content on social media increasingly uses imagery and external links to provoke a single form of engagement (Allan & Peters, 2015). These aspects deserve more attention in future investigations.

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