

# Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

## *Os Caminhos das Mobilizações On-line Antirracismo no Brasil em 2020*

■ NINA SANTOS<sup>a</sup>

Instituto Nacional de Ciência e Tecnologia em Democracia Digital. Salvador – BA, Brazil

LUCAS REIS<sup>b</sup>

Zygon AdTech. Salvador – BA, Brazil

Instituto Nacional de Ciência e Tecnologia em Democracia Digital. Salvador – BA, Brazil

### ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand the visibility dynamics around the 2020 online anti-racism mobilization on Twitter and online news media in Brazil. We work with two corpora. The first is a Twitter dataset ( $n = 5,811,499$ ) with mentions to *blacklivesmatter* and *vidasnegrasimportam* from May 12<sup>th</sup> to July 19<sup>th</sup>. The second one comprehends 1,650 news stories published in national Brazilian news websites about the same two topics. By analyzing the communication dynamics and temporality on both media, we seek to understand how the issue was treated by journalistic coverage and by users' mobilization. Our results indicate that Twitter incorporates violence episodes to anti-racism movements before news media do. The latter, in turn, offer a more stable coverage over time.

**Keywords:** News media, Twitter, black lives matter, vidas negras importam, racism

### RESUMO

O artigo visa compreender as dinâmicas de visibilidade da mobilização on-line antirracismo em 2020 no Twitter e na mídia on-line brasileira. Trabalhamos com dois corpora. O primeiro é um conjunto de tweets ( $n = 5.811.499$ ) com menções a *blacklivesmatter* e *vidasnegrasimportam* de 12 de maio a 19 de julho. O segundo compreende 1.650 textos de sites de notícias brasileiros sobre os mesmos temas. Ao analisar a dinâmica e temporalidade de ambas as mídias, buscamos compreender como o tema foi tratado pela cobertura jornalística e pela mobilização dos usuários. Nossos resultados apontam que o Twitter associa de forma mais rápida episódios de violência aos movimentos antirracismo, enquanto a mídia oferece uma cobertura mais estável ao longo do tempo.

**Palavras-chave:** Mídia, Twitter, black lives matter, vidas negras importam, racismo

<sup>a</sup> Nina Santos is a post-doctoral fellow at the Brazilian National Institute of Science & Technology for Digital Democracy and an associate researcher at the Centre d'Analyse et de Recherche Interdisciplinaires sur les Médias (Université Paris II). Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1944-8599>. E-mail: [nina.santos@inctdd.org](mailto:nina.santos@inctdd.org)

<sup>b</sup> CEO at Zygon AdTech, researcher at the Brazilian National Institute of Science & Technology for Digital Democracy and YLAI fellow. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3323-2102>. E-mail: [lucas@zygon.digital](mailto:lucas@zygon.digital)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v16i1p235-256>

V.16 - Nº 1 Jan./abr. 2022 São Paulo - Brasil SANTOS | REIS p. 235-256

MATRIZES



## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

**A**NTI-RACISM MOVEMENTS GAINED new momentum in Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic. A series of episodes of violence against Black people, both in Brazil and abroad, revived the debate as well as mobilizations for social and racial justice. As we will see below, these movements gained strength from the end of May, after the murder of George Floyd, an African American killed by a policeman on May 25<sup>th</sup> in the American city of Minneapolis. But even before that, Brazil had already seen its own cases of police violence against Black people on news and social media.

Brazil has the largest afro-descendent population in the world and the violence against them is a routine issue. From 2008 to 2018, the murder of Black people increased by 11.5% while, for other populations, it decreased by 13% (Atlas da Violência, 2020). Besides that, it is important to highlight that, between May and July, Brazil was one of the main countries affected by COVID-19 and implemented a widespread policy of social isolation. During this period, people were encouraged to be at home and go out just for necessary activities. The context of the pandemic resulted in a triple increase of violence against this already marginalized population. First, there was an increase in deadly police actions resulting in more deaths; second, data indicate that COVID-19 in Brazil killed four times more Black people with low education levels than white people with high education levels; third, the Black population is the one most exposed to both precarious conditions of housing and of jobs. In that context, understanding the dynamics of anti-racism movements becomes even more crucial, and the digital environments gain centrality as spaces for visibility, conversation, and mobilization.

Considering that, this paper aims to understand the communication dynamics about the 2020 online anti-racism movements in Brazil. Online content on the topic was mostly organized using the hashtag #blacklivesmatter – which was created in 2013 and achieved several visibility peaks since then – and its version in Portuguese, #vidasnegrasimportam. Those two labels will guide the composition of our corpus. Our analysis is centered in two communication environments: Twitter as a central stage for political activism (Arceneaux & Weiss, 2010; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Rogers, 2014), and online news outlets as important legacy media in the construction of public debate.

The first section of the article establishes the context and history of online anti-racism movements, while in the second one, we discuss the roles and possibilities of Twitter mobilization and online news coverage on a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), drawing the research question and hypotheses that will be explored in this article. We then present our methods

and discuss our results before drawing some conclusions and suggestions for future research.

### **ANTI-RACISM ONLINE MOBILIZATION**

The #Blacklivesmatter hashtag was created in July 2013 (Freelon et al., 2016) in a period called, by Karatzogianni and Schandorf (2012), as the fourth phase of online activism. At that point, online political mobilizations were no longer a novelty and were turning mainstream. That phase would include the Arab Spring protests (2011), as well as those in Greece (2011), Spain (2011), Nigeria (2012), Brazil (2013), and Turkey (2013), and was characterized by the adoption of private and mainstream communication platforms. At that moment, the political use of social media was frequently viewed as a possibility for the inclusion of new voices and for resistance against authoritarian governments. Seven years later, #Blacklivesmatter is still active and the view on online activism changed radically, especially after the Cambridge Analytica scandal which raised concerns about the context of the Trump election in the US and the Brexit referendum in the UK. In Brazil, this new period of political activism is strongly marked by the 2018 presidential campaign which resulted in the election of Jair Bolsonaro.

Not only Black Lives Matter activism survived this whole period, comprising very different views on the political use of technology, but it also unfolded far beyond a Twitter hashtag (Freelon et al., 2016). The movement also gained international repercussion, including in Brazil where racism is a major issue (Almeida, 2019).

Although created in 2013, the Black Lives Matter hashtag started to gain major attention only in August 2014. A study from the Center for Media & Social Impact, based on the total corpus of tweets with the hashtag brought directly from Twitter, shows that while it only appeared in 48 public tweets in June 2013 and in 398 tweets in July 2014, in August of that year that number had skyrocketed to 52,288 (Freelon et al., 2016). That change is directly associated with the Ferguson protests in the US.

From 2014 to 2020, the persistence of #BlackLivesMatter is unprecedented, compared to other hashtags used for social causes (Figure 1). Another study, this time from the Pew Research Center, attests that the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag has had a relatively consistent presence on Twitter from 2013 until 2018 with peaks related to major events (Anderson et al., 2018).

The research shows that



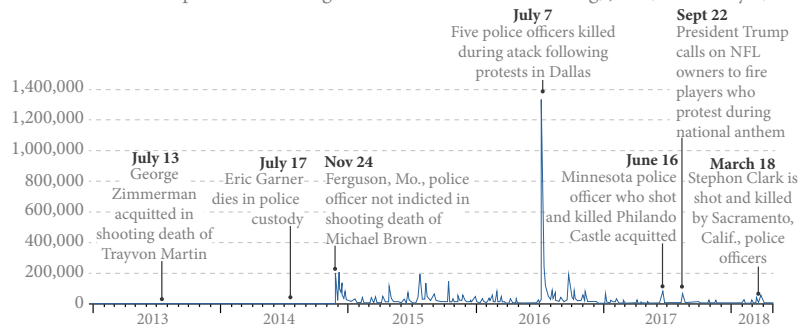
## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

one of the most notable of these spikes occurred over a period of roughly 10 days in the summer of 2016. On July 5 of that year, Alton Sterling was fatally shot by police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The following day, Philando Castile was shot and killed by a police officer in the suburbs of Saint Paul, Minnesota. On July 7, a gunman killed five police officers and wounded several others in Dallas, Texas, and on July 17 another shooter attacked law enforcement in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, killing three officers and wounding three others. Over the 10 days spanning July 7-17, 2016, the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was mentioned an average of nearly 500,000 tweets daily. (Anderson et al., 2018, p. 13)

**Figure 1**  
*#BlackLivesMatter timeline from 2013 to 2018*

### Use of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on Twitter periodically spikes in response to major news events

Number of Twitter posts mentioning the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, Jan.1, 2013-May 1, 2018



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available tweets using Crimson Hexagon. "Activism in the Social Media Age"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Note. Reproduced from *Activism in the Social Media Age*, by M. Anderson, S. Toor, L. Rainie e A. Smith, 2018, p. 14. Copyright 2018 Pew Research Center.

Studies also indicate that most messages with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter are posted in solidarity with the movement (Ince et al., 2017) and that eventual counter-movements – such as #AllLivesMatter – are smaller in comparison to the original one (Freelon et al., 2016; Haffner, 2019). However, we must not consider it a homogeneous movement. Haffner (2019), for example, developed a place-based analysis that shows that adhesion to the movement varied significantly according to the racial composition of localities. We also need to consider that these findings about #BlackLivesMatter should be seen in the context of several investigations that show a relation between racial attacks and hate speech and online media (Roshani, 2020; Rossini, 2020; Trindade, 2020).

In 2020, the hashtag spiked again after the murder of George Floyd, on May 25<sup>th</sup>, but the repercussion of the movement in Brazil also had its own national causes. On May 19<sup>th</sup>, the thirteen-year-old João Pedro was killed by the police in Rio de Janeiro in the middle of a crossfire. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the five-year-old Miguel fell from the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of an apartment building while his mother, who worked as a housemaid, walked the dogs of her employer. She was obliged to take her son to work as a result of the closing of schools and had asked her employer to look after him while she walked the dogs. On July 12<sup>th</sup>, a major television program (*Fantástico*, aired Sunday night) revealed that a woman had been assaulted by the São Paulo police in a very similar way to the aggression imposed against George Floyd. And those were only the cases that gained major national visibility.

In reaction to that, the issue of racism and anti-racism movements gained the public debate through both activists' actions and news coverage. On social networks, in addition to the original #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, the meaning of the expression was also translated to Portuguese as #VidasNegrasImportam. On the news, coverage also became more intense. The role of those two communication environments is the topic we are going to explore on the next section.

## NEWS COVERAGE AND TWITTER MOBILIZATION IN A HYBRID MEDIA SYSTEM

The use of online social network platforms for activism is not a new topic in the communication research field. A broad bibliography covers the relation between online mechanisms and political engagement (Aguiton & Cardon, 2008; Badouard, 2013; Bakardjieva, 2015; Bennet & Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Gomes, 2011; Kavada, 2015; Mabi & Gruson-Daniel, 2018; Valenzuela, 2013), and the topic gains special interest from the scientific field from 2010 onward (Gomes, 2011). However, if the relation between digital media and activism has a broad bibliography, the literature does not necessarily take into account important issues of the contemporary hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013) and frequently presents the so-called one medium bias (Mattoni & Treré, 2014) or adopts a simplistic approach to technology (Della Porta, 2013), resulting in excessively techno-deterministic views of the phenomenon.

That is why the idea of a hybrid media system, proposed by Chadwick (2013), seems to be a suitable perspective for our analysis. The author explains that the concept emerges from the premise that it is necessary to try “to integrate



## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

the roles played by older and newer media in political life” (p. 4). That approach would avoid the reductionist analysis centered only on supposedly new or old media. Instead, it focuses on their interactions.

According to Chadwick (2013), when thinking about the ever-evolving relationship between media and politics, the concept of hybrid allows us to integrate three elements that seem crucial: complexity, interdependence, and transition. For the author, the concept makes an interesting bridge between old and new, hybrids being “recognizable for their lineages but also genuinely new” (p. 14). Their newness emerges, then, not from completely new elements, but rather from the recombination of prior existing elements.

Even though the relation between new and old is not always oppositional, it is frequently combined with tensions and disputes, which makes the power component very central. These disputes create an unstable environment and a changing balance between different media logics. “Particulate hybridity is the outcome of power struggles and competition for preeminence during periods of unusual transition, contingency, and negotiability” (Chadwick, 2013, p. 15).

In order to address the issue of anti-racism mobilizations, taking into account the existence of a hybrid media system, we designed our research question around the articulation of old and new media on the online environment:

RQ: What are the dynamics of the information flows about the 2020 anti-racism movements in Brazil on Twitter and online news outlets?

That question allows us to investigate the different ways in which anti-racism movements appear in these media and the eventual points of contact between them. The first issue that interests us is how these movements appear on both media during the two-month period of our corpus.

Working with two different media implicates considering two different media logics (Dahlgren, 2009) that result in different mediation and visibility dynamics (Alves, 2019; Santos, 2019). In news media, the discussion about mediation is centered on the role of journalists and the news media themselves as legitimized gatekeepers that are responsible for choosing what should be brought to a large public (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Segerberg & Bennett, 2011; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Describing the visibility process generated by news media in Brazil, Gomes and Almada (2014) build on the idea of news waves. According to that approach, media would generate a concentration and convergence of coverage around an issue during a certain period of time that would then decrease while another issue emerges (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1995). The wave would be generated by a key event and develop through reactions to it from

the political system and other implicated actors. These key events would be defined as different or peculiar as they implicate in an unfolding of the issue in the news coverage (Gomes & Almada, 2014).

In online social media, the dynamic differs. With the greater number of people that can publish information, new kinds of mediation, not necessarily related to news media, emerge. Ideas of a communication environment based on a mass self-communication dynamic (Castells, 2009), with the existence of personal publics (Schmidt, 2014) exposed to self-mediated contents (Cammaerts & Jiménez-Martínez, 2014) gain prominence in the debate. All of them highlight the central role of individuals in the communication system.

We need to consider that a new sociability emerges also from this online activism. According to Gomes (2011), hyper connection, self-broadcasting and social commenting, and social editing would be its main characteristics. The first one would lead to the end of the separation between *real* and *virtual*. The action of *going online* loses its meaning once the connection to the online world becomes constant and dissociated from computers as physical objects – especially with the increasing importance of mobile use. The digital would no longer be a separated reality. The second one refers to the increase in the possibilities of real-time broadcasting one's actions. Gomes (2011) highlights this is not restricted to a narcissistic perspective, but it is also linked to political activities as a new possibility of citizen empowerment.

The third element of this new sociability pointed out by the author would be the sharing and re-appropriation of content as a form of political action. The author calls this characteristic the “bleachers effect”<sup>1</sup>, meaning that the public that is not at the center of the action may also interfere in it by helping to disseminate related content. This reaction to the content may be done through commenting or editing, which would create a complementing role between those that act by publishing content about their presence on a protest and those whose political action consists in reacting to that content and helping to spread it.

Considering that those different logics would generate diverse visibility dynamics between news media and social media, we suppose that:

H1: There will be no positive correlation between the publication timeline of the anti-racism mobilization on Twitter and its coverage on online news media.

The differences between the communication dynamics around the 2020 anti-racism mobilizations on Twitter and on news media can also be analyzed in terms of its duration. Both events could be seen as having a short duration, according to Braudel's (1969) conceptualization that considers

<sup>1</sup> *The efeito arquibancada*, the original term in Portuguese, refers to the role of supporters of sports teams who, even if not on the game field, may influence the game by their actions of support to those that are the main responsible ones for the action. It seems that, in American culture, it would be something like the armchair quarterback.



## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

those kind of events as being ultra-sensitive and having brief, rapid, nervous oscillation. To him

It is the most exciting, the richest in humanity, the most dangerous too. Let us be wary of this still burning history, felt by their contemporary, described, lived at the rate of their lives, brief like ours. It has the dimension of their anger, their dreams, their illusions. (Braudel, 1969, p. 12)

But the fact is that various authors point to the acceleration of time as a phenomenon of our societies (Abranches, 2020; Lohmeier et al., 2020; Santos, 2000) and online media is certainly a central part of it. In that sense, even though both can be considered short in a historical point of view, the events on social and news media tend to present significant differences in their duration.

As described above, while news media tend to rely on news waves, social media are based on a polyphony of opinions and decisions taken by a multiplicity of actors. In that sense, while news media rely on a professional logic of generating coverage on a certain topic, on social media, the expression of interest tends to be much more decentralized and ephemeral.

Thus, we consider that:

H2: The discussion about the 2020 anti-racism movements in Brazil will be more volatile on Twitter than on news media.

H3: After a peak of visibility, the decreased tendency will be stronger on Twitter than on news media.

But not only the timelines of the movement will develop differently along the period of analysis, the starting point of the mobilization and coverage around the anti-racism movements will be different on Twitter and news media. According to the results found by Gomes and Almada (2014), analyzing the news waves in the major Brazilian television news program: “A key event is not simply an event. It needs to be understood as part of something continuous, of an unfolding, as a phenomenon or a set of consequences” (p. 17).

That characterization of the key events that will generate coverage on the news media and mobilization on Twitter around the anti-racism movement seems especially important here. Due to the different dynamics of the communication environments – news media based on journalistic coverage and Twitter, much more on mobilization processes – we assume that the key event will start first on Twitter and then on the news coverage. That is because, although the violence cases against Black people are treated as news by the



news outlet, they are not immediately associated with a long phenomenon and tend to be treated as episodic. In that sense, the coverage of the first police violence cases may not be associated with the anti-racism movement, thus not appearing in our data. On the other hand, taking into account that Twitter is a communication environment much more propitious to mobilization, that association would appear sooner. Black Twitter, for example, characterized as a movement of resistance and political organization between Black communities – both in the US and in Brazil – may be seen as a counter public in the digital arena (Hill, 2018). Thus, we assume that:

H4: The association between police violence cases and the anti-racism movement appears first on Twitter and is then incorporated by the news media.

Also due to the characterization of Twitter use as a mobilization space; we expect that hyperlinks to external content will not be directly affected by the quantity of news media reports about the movement. Previous research about the hashtag mobilization pro and against President Bolsonaro during the pandemic showed that the percentage of these links is relatively low, and that news media represent a small part of them (Santos, 2021). Also, in previous studies about the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, the presence of news media links was questioned. Freelon et al. (2016) found that “protesters and their supporters were generally able to circulate their own narratives on Twitter without relying on mainstream news outlets” (p. 5). Our fifth hypothesis goes toward that notion, assuming that:

H5: There will be no positive correlation between the number of news articles published and use of links on tweets.

## METHODS

To develop this study, we considered the period between May 12<sup>th</sup> and July 19<sup>th</sup>, covering a period of 10 weeks. As written above, George Floyd was killed on May 25<sup>th</sup>, so our datasets comprehend two weeks before the major spike of attention to the issue. That timeframe also allowed us to cover the slavery abolition anniversary in Brazil (May 13<sup>th</sup>).

Within that timeframe we built two corpora. To collect Twitter data, we used an adjusted version of the Python library Twint and set it to collect mentions in Portuguese of the hashtags #Blacklivesmatter and #Vidasnegrasimportam. We gathered all original tweets (did not consider retweets) and its 37 metainformation. Our whole Twitter collection, after deduplication, reached 5,811,499 tweets. As this dataset was very large, we hosted it in a MongoDB account and used PyMongo (another Python library) to run analysis queries.



## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

We chose to work with hashtags as they are natively digital objects which serve multiple functions and are specially used to organize and engage on activist actions (Omena et al., 2020). We may not disregard that hashtagging is not necessarily the consequence of human action and is often related to bot activities, but for the purpose of this article, that possibility of appropriation corroborates our understanding of hashtag engagement as collectively formed actions mediated by technical interfaces (Omena et al., 2020). They are, thus, subject to affordances and constraints of the communication environment they are embedded in.

The size of our Twitter corpus is quite significant compared to previous research. Ince et al. (2017) estimated that there were 660 thousand tweets with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter during an 11-month period in 2014, while Freelon et al. (2016) identified 4,312,599 mentions to the term in the period of one year between June 2014 and May 2015. Anderson et al. (2018) make a longer analysis, from July 2013 to May 2018, identifying 30 million mentions throughout the period, an average of 17 thousand per day. It is necessary to consider that all these studies are based on a corpus in English, the movement's original language, where the mentions are supposed to be higher.

Our second corpus was composed by online news media articles. To collect data from news media, we used Media Cloud (<https://mediacloud.org/>), an open platform to extract data from online journalistic outlets. We collected articles that cited “Black Lives Matter” or “Vidas Negras Importam” during the same period of the Twitter collection. By doing that, we got 1,650 different articles.

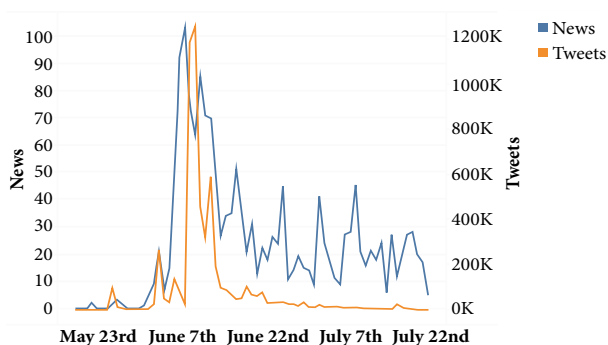
After a pre-analysis using PyMongo, a Twitter workable dataset version was generated as a json file. Mediacloud data were on CSV files. Both were analyzed using the Tableau software to identify patterns, verify trends, and calculate some metrics. At the end, final calculations were done in Excel files. Most of the analysis we do here are descriptive or exploratory statistical, the best method to answer our Research Question.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To investigate the dynamics and inter-influences between information flows about the 2020 anti-racism movements in Brazil on Twitter and online news outlets, we started by testing our first hypothesis. It suggests that communication dynamics on Twitter and news outlets are different in so many aspects that there will not be a correlation between publication timelines in both communication environments.

To test that, we first calculated the Pearson’s correlation for all our period of analysis. The result was 0.54, suggesting a positive correlation between the publication trends on Twitter and online news media outlets. As we can see in Figure 2, both timelines present the same pattern: low volume at the beginning of the timeline, with a huge peak just after, followed by a long decrease until the end of the studied period. So, testing the timeline as a whole, our hypothesis was falsified.

**Figure 2**  
*Twitter and online news media timelines*

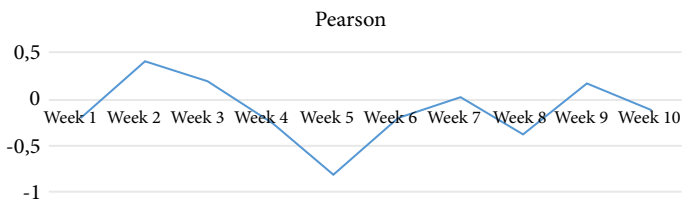


Note. Made by the authors.

But that did not seem enough, taking into account that we could visually see that the dynamics were significantly different in some of the analyzed periods. So, we decided to calculate the correlation within each week of the studied period, and there we can see (Figure 3) a very different landscape.

On the one hand, Weeks 2 and 3 show the highest correlation and concentrate most of the content published. This period is strongly influenced by George Floyd’s murder and the street protests in reaction to it. So, there was an external event that drove content production both on news media and Twitter.

**Figure 3 –**  
*Correlation between Twitter and online news media timelines per week*



Note. Made by the authors.



On the other hand, week 5 presents a strong negative correlation, followed by week 8, with a significative negative one. So, looking at shorter time windows, where the endogenous dynamic of each media can be better perceived, we can see that, although the general trend is positively correlated, there are significant internal differences during the studied period. In other words, in a longer timeframe, both timelines tend to follow external events with different rhythms but with a similar trend: lower volumes before a key event, a fast increase leading to an enormous peak just after the key event, and a slow decrease after that. But if we break a large period into smaller ones, differences in rhythm get more relevant. Significant positive correlations appear in only two of the analyzed weeks. So, we can say that our first hypothesis was partially falsified.

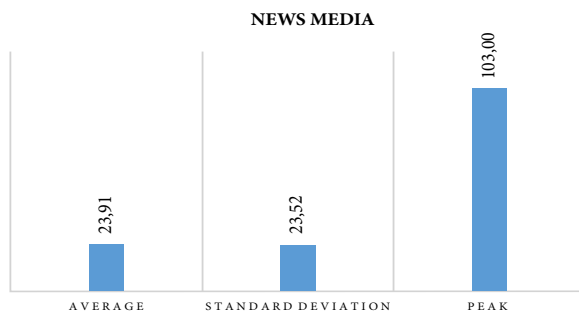
To further explore this issue, we approached our second and third hypotheses, which explore the temporality of the coverage on news media and the mobilization on Twitter. First, we expected a larger volatility on Twitter than on news media sites (H2). To test this hypothesis, we calculated the standard deviation, average and median, and the proportion between standard deviation and average. The larger this proportion, the larger the volatility in our sample. On the same way, the larger the difference between average and median, the more disperse are the numbers in our corpus.

Figures 4 and 5 show that while for news media the difference between average and median was relatively small (26%), 24 against 19, for Twitter the difference was huge: 546%, with a median of 13,396 and an average of 84,224. That shows how daily volumes vary much more intensely on Twitter as compared to news sites.

Besides that, on Twitter, the standard deviation represented 263% of the average and 1,658% of the median. On news media, the same analysis showed a result of 98% and 123%, respectively. At last, the peak of publications on Twitter represented 15 times the average of publications (and 94 times the median), while on online news outlets, the peak was four times the average and represented five times the median. So, our H2 was confirmed: The dynamic of anti-racism movements on Twitter was more volatile than on online news media.

**Figure 4**

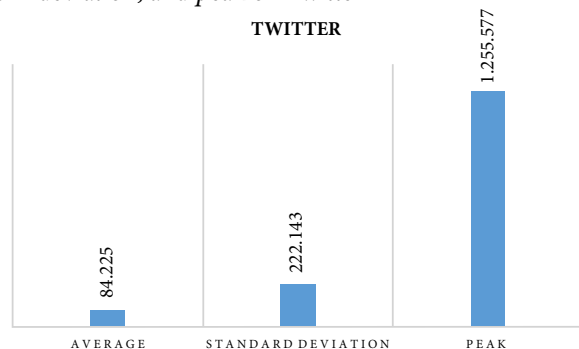
*Average, standard deviation, and peak on online news media*



*Note.* Made by the authors.

**Figure 5**

*Average, standard deviation, and peak on Twitter*



*Note.* Made by the authors.

In terms of temporality, we also devoted specific attention to the moment after the peak. In that sense, we investigated the intensity of the decrease in publications expecting that there would be a stronger decrease in volume on Twitter than on news media (H3).

In order to analyze that, we considered only week 5 to week 10 of our corpus, since the peak took place on week 4 on both Twitter and online news media outlets. We then compared the decreased intensity in both communication environments.

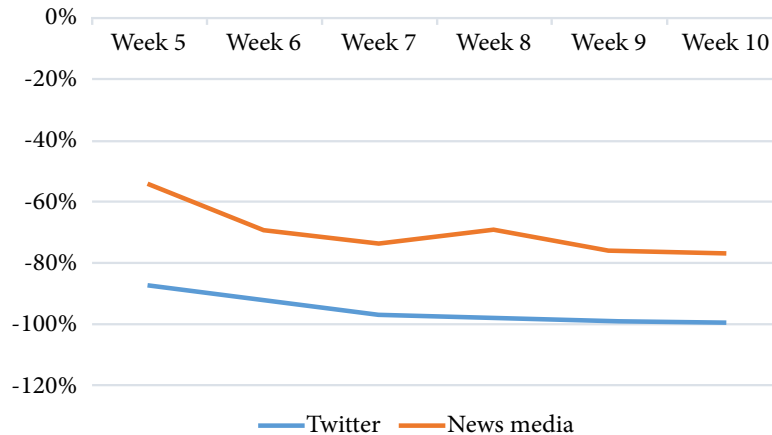
As we can see below (Figures 6 and 7), our hypothesis is confirmed. After week 4, the decreased intensity was higher on Twitter. Tweet volume on week 5 was 87% smaller than on peak, while, on news media, this figure was smoother (54%). In all weeks after the peak, Twitter presented a reduction in volume, while news media showed an increase. Besides that, we can also see that the decreased tendency is stronger on Twitter than on news media.



## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

**Figure 6**

*Decrease rates per week on Twitter and online news media*

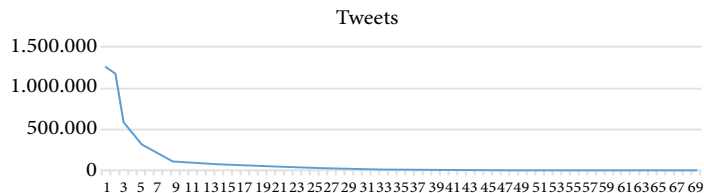


*Note.* Made by the authors.

However, we must highlight that those findings do not mean that the anti-racism movement vanished from Twitter. The volume of tweets on week 10 was almost 10 times higher than on week 1, what shows a resilience of the issue on this social media platform. The distribution of Twitter publications strictly follow the so-called Pareto rule (Pareto, 1971), commonly found in organic digital phenomena (Reis, 2018). The two weeks (20% of the analyzed period) with the highest volume concentrate 80% of the tweets.

**Figure 7**

*Decrease rate on Twitter per day*



*Note.* Made by the authors.

News media shows another pattern, where the coverage extends over time in a more nuanced way. That can be related to the journalistic work itself, which tends to seek and cause repercussions around the topics on its agenda, a phenomenon that can be approached through the logic of news waves (Gomes & Almada, 2014).

Our fourth hypothesis test will also take into account that difference of logics between Twitter and news media. While the first is a more suitable place for activism, the second functions according to the journalistic industry. In that sense, we supposed that the association between police violence cases against Black people and the anti-racism movement would appear first on Twitter (H4). That means the first police violence cases would be rapidly associated to the Black Lives Matter and *Vidas Negras Importam* movements on Twitter, while, on news media, that relation would take some time to be incorporated.

As we can see on Figure 8, there was a peak of mentions on May 19<sup>th</sup> on Twitter. This volume was provoked by the repercussion of the murder of João Pedro, a Brazilian Black boy who was killed by a police bullet in Rio de Janeiro and whose body disappeared for 17 hours. On Twitter, this case created a wave of tweets related to the anti-racism movements, while the same did not occur on the coverage of online news media outlets.

That does not mean news media did not cover the case. We found 32 media articles that mentioned the case, but they did not associate it to the anti-racism movements. In the case of the media outlets, the key event that will trigger a news wave about the movements is the murder of George Floyd, almost 10 days later. So, as we can see, tweets were faster in associating police violence with anti-racism movements and we attribute that to a more activist role of users on Twitter.

Thus, although a general view of the phenomenon suggests that the dynamics on both communication environments are highly correlated, a closer look shows significant differences between them. The association between police violence against Black people and the anti-racism movement is made more rapidly on Twitter than on news media. As we mentioned, the first police violence case of the studied period (João Pedro's murder, on May 18<sup>th</sup>) was covered by the media, but not related to the movement, what happened immediately on Twitter.

In other words, despite being considered a fact worthy of coverage, the assassination of João Pedro itself was not capable of triggering a wave of news about the anti-racism movements, a wave that will start to form on journalistic sites after the assassination of George Floyd. This can be interpreted following the logic of news waves, proposed by Gomes and Almada (2014), according to which the news would be based on successive themes that are explored until their exhaustion, seeking to generate repercussions on one of them with different social actors. These waves “would be triggered by key events, which are defined as different or peculiar events, as they imply an unfolding of a certain theme in the news” (p. 17). When analyzing coverage in *Jornal Nacional*, the



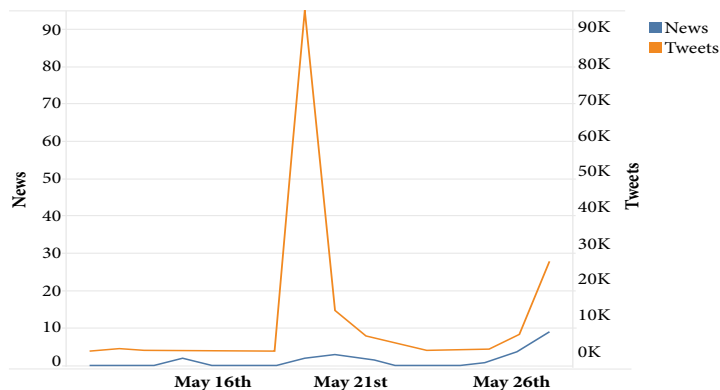
## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

authors conclude, however, that “the key event is not simply a mere event. It needs to be understood as part of something continuous, of an unfolding, as a phenomenon or a set of consequences” (p. 17).

If, on the one hand, the dynamics of news waves may seem not to incorporate the activist logic as quickly as Twitter, on the other hand, it also generates a coverage of the topic that is more time-paced. The two weeks with the highest volume of published articles represented only 45% of the total period (on Twitter, they represented almost 80%). Again, this is related to the journalistic work itself that tends to seek and cause repercussions around the topics on the agenda on the news sites. On Twitter, a significant part of the publications is not made by professionals committed to keeping the topic in vogue. Thus, the volume of mentions falls rapidly, even if it does not disappear completely, since the volume on the tenth week was 10 times higher than on the first one.

**Figure 8**

*João Pedro's assassination effect on Twitter and online news media*



*Note.* Made by the authors.

We also need to highlight a possibility of a difference in media coverage between national and international cases of racism. Our study does not include qualitative analysis and thus, we could not deepen this issue, but historical power relations may suggest that US events tend to gain intense coverage in Brazilian media. Not only events from dominant countries gain attention in national media but they also serve as important actors in framing what are considered to be social problems. On the other hand, prior articulations on Twitter related to Black communities – such as Black Twitter – may have accelerated the incorporation of the issue on that communication environment.

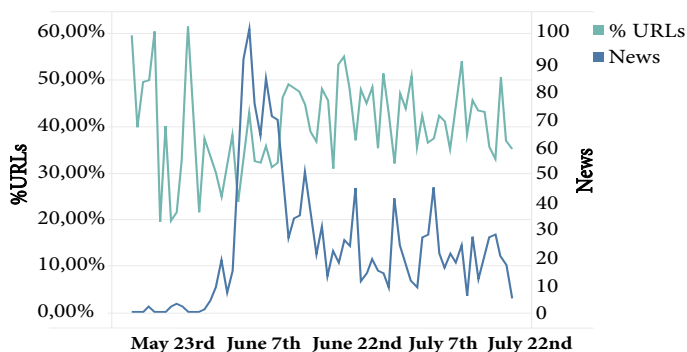


Our last hypotheses focuses on possible inter-influences between news media dynamics and the Twitter one. So, we tested to see if the number of news articles was positively correlated with the number of links present on tweets. Based on previous research (Freelon et al., 2016), our assumption was that there would not be a positive correlation.

The result of the Pearson's correlation showed a slightly negative correlation between the two variables of -0.14. Figure 9 illustrates our findings: the increase or decrease in the publication of online news media articles does not affect the use of links on Twitter. This result is confirmed even when we look at a weekly timeframe. Only in one out of the 10 weeks of our dataset there was a positive correlation, while in five weeks there is no correlation, and in four there is a negative correlation. That may suggest that content produced by media outlets were not highly used on the Twitter conversation. To advance that relation between not only communication dynamics but also content circulation, further research is need.

**Figure 9**

*Correlation between the number of online news media articles and the number of links on tweets*



*Note.* Made by the authors.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this paper, we tried to contribute to the understanding of the communication dynamics behind the online anti-racism movements in Brazil, approaching the posting dynamics on Twitter and the coverage on online news media. In order to investigate that, we compared both communication environments general trends, their temporalities, the way they link violence episodes to the movement, and possible inter-influences.




## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

Analyzing the communication dynamics around digital activism requires complex approaches. In our case study, while the role of Twitter activism is more agile and efficient in associating events with a movement, giving them a historical and not an episodic perspective, the media play an important role in giving more stability on the coverage about the subject, contributing to a greater longevity of the debate in the public sphere. Those findings contribute to refining interpretations on the social consequences of online debates.

As Chadwick (2013) states, to think about the political impacts of communication environments, we have to consider not only relations between social actors, but also relations between social actors and technologies. What this study shows is that different communication environments embed different media logics (Dahlgren, 2009). Those logics impact, in real time, the path social mobilizations may go through. Although our effort here was to differentiate the dynamics of news media and Twitter, we may also highlight the interference that characterizes hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2013). That means that the identified dynamics happen considering the interaction between these media in the social arena. The removal of any one of these media should affect the whole behavior of the system. Therefore, a digital activism capable of producing alternatives and effective social changes cannot be dissociated from an integrated and systemic view of the digital communication environment.

Also, the idea of media waves as a process of concentration and convergence of coverage around an issue during a certain period of time (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1995) seems to be very typical of news media, but not of a social medium such as Twitter. In this last one, the overlapping of issues that gain attention simultaneously is higher, as there are much more voices in the conversation. Moreover, the temporality of the communication process is much faster, making the peak of interest much shorter. Without professional journalists seeking repercussions and new reactions to a topic, we could say that the idea of news waves would be replaced by a more acute dynamic, something such as visibility hiccups.

We would also like to highlight the limitations of this study, especially due to the lack of content analysis of the corpus. Surely, a more qualitative approach will be very enriching in understanding the possible inter-influences between the two communication platforms and will also enable a deeper comprehension of how different meanings and appropriations of the topic circulate .

### REFERENCES

Abranches, S. (2020). *O tempo dos governantes incidentais*. Companhia das Letras.

- Aguiton, C., & Cardon, D. (2008). Web participatif et innovation collective. *Hermès*, (50), 77-82. <http://doi.org/10.4267/2042/24155>
- Almeida, S. (2019). *Racismo estrutural*. Pólen Livros.
- Alves, M. (2019). *Desarranjo da visibilidade, desordem informacional e polarização no Brasil entre 2013 e 2018* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade Federal Fluminense]. UFF Institutional Repository. <https://bit.ly/3ByDFkl>
- Anderson, M., Toor, S., Rainie, L., & Smith, A. (2018). *Activism in the social media age*. Pew Research Center. <https://pewrsr.ch/3JC6ZJL>
- Arceneaux, N., & Weiss, A. S. (2010). Seems stupid until you try it: Press coverage of Twitter, 2006-9. *New Media & Society*, 12(8), 1262-1279. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809360773>
- Atlas da Violência (2020). IPEA. <https://bit.ly/3tnBbSt>
- Badouard, R. (2013). Les mobilisations de clavier. *Reseaux*, (181), 87-117. <https://doi.org/10.3917/res.181.0087>
- Bakardjieva, M. (2015). Do clouds have politics? Collective actors in social media land. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(8), 983-990. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1043320>
- Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 739-768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661>
- Braudel, F. (1969). *Écrits sur l'histoire*. Flammarion.
- Brosius, H., & Kepplinger, H. M. (1995). Killer and victim issues: Issue competition in the agenda-setting process of German television. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 7(3), 211-231. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/7.3.211>
- Cammaerts, B., & Jiménez-Martínez, C. (2014). The mediation of the Brazilian V-for-vinegar protests: From vilification to legitimization and back? *Liinc em Revista*, 10(1), 44-68. <https://doi.org/10.18617/liinc.v10i1.697>
- Castells, M. (2009). *Communication and power*. Oxford University Press.
- Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford University Press.
- Dahlgren, P. (2009). *Media and political engagement: Citizens, communication and democracy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Della Porta, D. (2013). Bridging research on democracy, social movements and communication. In B. Cammaerts, A. Mattoni & P. McCurdy (Eds.) *Mediation and protest movements* (pp. 21-37). Intellect, The University of Chicago Press.



## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

- Freelon, D., McIlwain, C. D., & Clark, M. D. (2016). *Beyond the hashtags: #Ferguson, #blacklivesmatter, and the online struggle for offline justice*. Center for Media & Social Impact.
- Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the streets*. Pluto Press.
- Gomes, W. (2011). Participação política online: Questões e hipóteses de trabalho. In R. C. M. Maia, W. Gomes & F. P. J. A. Marques (Orgs.), *Internet e participação política no Brasil* (pp. 19-45). Sulina.
- Gomes, W., & Almada, M. P. (2014, May 27-30). *Ondas de notícias políticas: As dinâmicas da atenção pública no noticiário político de TV* [Paper presentation]. XXIII Encontro Anual da Compós, Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. <https://bit.ly/3BtrSx>
- Haffner, M. (2019). A place-based analysis of #BlackLivesMatter and counter-protest content on Twitter. *GeoJournal*, 84, 1257-1280. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-018-9919-7>
- Hill, M. L. (2018). “Thank you, Black Twitter”: State violence, digital counter-publics, and pedagogies of resistance. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 286-302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917747124>
- Ince, J., Rojas, F., & Davis, C. A. (2017). The social media response to Black Lives Matter: How Twitter users interact with Black Lives Matter through hashtag use. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(11), 1814-1830. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1334931>
- Karatzogianni, A., & Schandorf, M. (2012). Surfing the revolutionary wave 2010-12: A social theory of agency, resistance, and orders of dissent in contemporary social movements. In A. Ornella (Ed.), *Making humans: Religious, technological and aesthetic perspectives* (pp. 43-73). Inter-Disciplinary Press.
- Kavada, A. (2015). Creating the collective: Social media, the Occupy Movement and its constitution as a collective actor. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(8), 872-886. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1043318>
- Lohmeier, C., Kaun, A., & Pentzold, C. (2020). Making time in digital societies: Considering the interplay of media, data, and temporalities – An introduction to the special issue. *New Media & Society*, 22(9), 1521-1527. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820913555>
- Mabi, C., & Gruson-Daniel, C. (2018). Formes et mouvements politiques à l'ère numérique. *Reset*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.4000/reset.1078>
- Mattoni, A., & Treré, E. (2014). Media practices, mediation processes and mediatization in the study of social movements. *Communication Theory*, 24(3), 252-271. <https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12038>

- Meraz, S., & Papacharissi, Z. (2013). Networked gatekeeping and networked framing on #egypt. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(2), 138-66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161212474472>
- Omena, J. J., Rabello, E. T., & Mintz, A. G. (2020). Digital methods for hashtag engagement research. *Social Media + Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120940697>
- Pareto, V. (1971). *Manual of political economy*. Scholars Book Shelf.
- Reis, L. (2018). *Big social data analytics e climas de opinião: Estudo de caso sobre o processo de impeachment da presidente Dilma Rousseff* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Universidade Federal da Bahia.
- Rogers, R. (2014). Foreword: Debanalising Twitter: The transformation of an object of study. In K. Weller, A. Bruns, J. Burgess, M. Mahrt & C. Puschmann (Eds.), *Twitter and society* (pp. IX-XXVI). Peter Lang.
- Roshani, N. (2020). Discurso de ódio e ativismo digital antirracismo de jovens afrodescendentes no Brasil e Colômbia. In T. Silva (Ed.), *Comunidades, algoritmos e ativismos digitais: Olhares afrodiaspóricos* (pp. 42-62). LiteraRua.
- Rossini, P. (2020). Beyond toxicity in the online public sphere: Understanding incivility in online political talk. In W. H Dutton (Ed.), *A research agenda for digital politics* (pp. 160-170). Edward Elgar.
- Santos, N. (2019). *The reconfiguration of the communication environment: Twitter in the 2013 Brazilian protests* [Doctoral dissertation, Université Panthéon-Assas]. Université Panthéon-Assas Archive. <https://bit.ly/3I7tBRZ>
- Santos, N. (2021). Fontes de informação nas redes pró e contra o discurso de Bolsonaro sobre o Coronavírus. *E-Compós*, 24. <https://doi.org/10.30962/ec.2210>
- Santos, M. (2000). *Por uma outra globalização*. Record.
- Schmidt, J. (2014). Twitter and the rise of personal publics. In K. Weller, A. Bruns, J. Burgess, M. Mahrt & C. Puschmann (Eds.), *Twitter and Society* (pp. 3-14). Peter Lang.
- Segeberg, A., & Bennett, W. L. (2011). Social media and the organization of collective action: Using Twitter to explore the ecologies of two climate change protests. *The Communication Review*, 14(3), 197-215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2011.597250>
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message: Theories of media content* (2nd ed.). Longman.
- Trindade, L. V. P. (2020). Mídias sociais e a naturalização de discursos racistas no Brasil. In T. Silva (Ed.), *Comunidades, algoritmos e ativismos digitais: Olhares afrodiaspóricos* (pp. 25-41). LiteraRua.



## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

Valenzuela, S. (2013). Unpacking the use of social media for protest behavior: The roles of information, opinion expression, and activism. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(7), 920-942. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213479375>

---

Article received on February 9<sup>th</sup> and approved on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021.