

Article

## Technopopulism and Politainment on Brazil: Bolsonaro Government's Weekly YouTube Broadcasts

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### Abstract

Digital platforms have become powerful weapons in the hands of many politicians. In search for disintermediation of information, Jair Messias Bolsonaro found in social networks a new space to interact with his voters. With a communication strategy primarily online, the former president of Brazil had social profiles on all platforms and has transformed these channels into official government sources, in a campaign whose goal was to discredit the traditional media and occupy the place of speech of these social actors. This article analyzed Bolsonaro's weekly live streams, made available on his YouTube channel in order to study the technopopulism undertaken by Bolsonaro. Through a quantitative and qualitative content analysis, 121 videos (with a total duration of 83 hours and 58 minutes) were examined, from March 7, 2019, when the president of Brazil began doing the weekly YouTube broadcasts, until May 11, 2022, when this research was planned. The results indicate that the themes addressed in the live streams have influenced the disinformation process in Brazil and especially the hate attacks against important Brazilian democratic institutions. The speeches of resentment against the press, the Supreme Court, and the opposition parties are constant in Bolsonaro's weekly programs. Finally, this article concluded that Bolsonaro's communicative strategy on YouTube is an example of technopopulism based on the manipulation of public opinion with the dissemination of propaganda favorable to the government, and veiled attacks on all kinds of enemies of the current system in place as a true example of right-wing populist government.

### Keywords

Bolsonaro; Brazil; disinformation; politainment; post-truth; technopopulism; YouTube

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction: State of the Art and the Construction of Technopopulism in the Current Brazilian Context

Challenging traditional models of information flow (Anastácio, 2017), the interactivity of digital platforms has initiated a debate about quality and credibility in the digital age, which has resulted in a social process of eliminating intermediaries and has led to the disintermediation of information, journalistic disintermediation, and disintermediation of communicative processes (Katz, 1988; Lafrance, 1997; Zallo, 2016), whose effect of the "network society" resonates in the spheres of

communication, economy, culture, and, of course, politics (Sousa, 2004). While journalists lose their monopoly on the fourth estate, governors take advantage of the available modes of disintermediation to communicate directly with voters (Bruns & Highfield, 2015), in a clear commodification process of public political life (Larrondo et al., 2016; Manning et al., 2017), which turns them into influencers (Street, 2012; Wheeler, 2013).

Thus, online communication and the interactivity of digital platforms have brought to the globalized world a critical infrastructure from a political, economic, and organizational point of view, in which the echoes of

public and private conversation coexist (Salaverria et al., 2019). With the new ways of telling the facts and the expressive speed employed in these transmissions, a myriad of processes of disinformation, disintermediation of journalism, and manipulation of public opinion, never seen before, have been produced (Arce-García et al., 2019). Attentive to the trends of the post-truth era, many politicians, such as Jair Messias Bolsonaro in the presidency of Brazil, have begun, through social networks, to seek autonomy in their speeches and mainly, to mark their appearances in unusual spaces in political communication (Pérez et al., 2018). We are facing the so-called "new populism," also known as technopopulism, digital populism, or cyberpopulism, which has the same characteristics of traditional populism, except that the leader no longer takes into account the institutions of social intermediation and uses digital media to be in direct contact with society and voters.

Besides that, in this new context of cyberpopulism, the need to demoralize the service provided by the media and journalists and to occupy the other's place of speech was increasingly shown as a clear and evident trend in the social profiles of public and influential characters in the world such as President Bolsonaro and the then President of the US Donald Trump (Di Nubila, 2021). The communicative strategy of these new populisms is based on the following premises: the rejection of the rules of democracy, production and dissemination of hate and disinformation, an anti-corruption and anti-elite discourse, and the presence of conspiracy theories (Sánchez Frías, 2022). With the adoption by these politicians of a modus operandi based primarily on online, direct, objective, and intimate communication with voters (Benkler et al., 2018), it was noted that the bombardment of information on digital platforms created an environment of competition with conventional media (Almeida, 2019).

The use of fake news in political campaigns is nothing new, but, in some cases, it has become clear that technology, such as data segmentation and bots, were being used to spread false information in order to persuade undecided voters. This type of political strategy gained momentum in 2016, during the election of Donald Trump in the US, carried out with the help of the strategy firm Cambridge Analytica. This company has also been active in more than 100 election campaigns on five continents, including the presidential election campaign in Kenya in 2013, Nigeria (2015), the Czech Republic (2018), and Malaysia (2013). Donald Trump made a point of criticizing the mainstream media and used social media and "alternative" media to spread his speech. He invariably accused journalists of misinforming the population. Trump's tweets also focused on his political opponents. Aware of the discontent with the Obama administration, the businessman spread several fake news stories about Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party. From stories such as that Barack Obama was allegedly born outside the US to arms sales to the Islamic state and cases of

pederasty. Trump has spared no effort to smear his opponent. As for the God code, Donald Trump did not directly use religious speech, but said that his opponents were anti-Catholic, as an attack (Danelli, 2020).

Focusing on the case of Bolsonaro in the phase prior to his arrival to the presidency of the Republic of Brazil, Mello (2020) highlights how the traditional media offered a critical image of this military man who was described as polarizing, populist, and with an extreme-directed ideology. Thus, the large Brazilian media groups became one of the biggest obstacles to the audacious electoral objectives of Bolsonaro, a permanent conflict, which always had the purpose of shielding the politician against criticism, undermining the confidence of the interlocutors in the communication process (Mello, 2020; Santana & Archegas, 2022).

With this troubled and long-standing relationship, the constant attacks between the parties became even more visible during Bolsonaro's candidacy for the presidency of the country, which led the politician's team to adopt a communication strategy focused primarily on digital, thus availing itself of the advice of Steve Bannon, the strategist who took Donald Trump to the White House in the US (Benkler et al., 2018). With Bolsonaro's tactical shift (he was the only candidate who did not rely on traditional political marketing techniques during the 2018 presidential election), it was realized that the bombardment of information in closed networks such as WhatsApp created a competing environment with the mainstream media, placed partially under suspicion by the politician himself and his allies.

Social media platforms have become powerful weapons for Bolsonaro who has come to embody the figure of a technopopulist leader. Technopopulism is understood as the system that articulates the manipulation of public opinion and of the digital mass of frustrated and isolated individuals through algorithms and big data, fomenting anger and extremism (Da Empoli, 2019). Rather than creating consensus around an ideology, technopopulists operate by creating chaos and dissensus to foment hate and manipulate digital engagement. The term *technopopulism* appeared in the 1990s and referred to the emergence of anti-system political parties in a context of expansion and technological development.

If in the analog version, populism depended heavily on the leader's personal charisma, especially his oratory ability (Cesarino, 2007); in the digital version, this central figure puts and distributes his own populist mechanism so that his followers spontaneously reproduce it. This fractalization has come to be potentiated in an unprecedented way by the digital character of social media, in particular its ability to, on the one hand, produce equivalence between originally disconnected individuals, and, on the other, produce difference and polarization through digital bubbles (Gerbaudo, 2018). Authors like Rosa (2021) point out that the new marketers of technopopulism have learned how to use digital

language to mobilize the gigantic (depoliticized and disjointed) energy of contemporary mobs in favor of their political and ideological agendas, not by creating adherence, but by fostering dissent. And that is exactly how, with this movement, Bolsonaro and his supporters have risen to the category of prosumers, consumer users, and content creators (Tapscott, 2010).

The propaganda in favor of candidate Bolsonaro occurred spontaneously, through live broadcasts, via internet, made by advisors and participants of the events. With a simple and interactive dynamic, basically working as a kind of repeater station, the voters felt empowered by not only being receivers of news, but also propagators of the campaign's movements. The overall result was an explosion of information, some of it decontextualized and even false (Almeida, 2019). Much of this content fell into the category of fake news, in the broad sense of the term (Tandoc et al., 2018): fake news, conspiracy theories, offensive and slanderous material against certain people or groups, urgent and alarmist warnings, distorted or taken out of context statements—in other words, messages that would hardly circulate with such amplitude, speed, and capillarity in traditional forums of the public sphere such as the professional press, where there is greater publicity and social and legal control.

In addition to the term fake news, disinformation, misinformation, and post-truth have also gained prominence in the vocabulary of communication experts, and show the relevance that information, obtained through social networks, has acquired these days. In addition to the bombardment of information in a virtual environment, the veracity of facts has become constantly questioned and, as a result, it has become increasingly necessary to check whether the information received is actually true and accurate. Although misinformation is defined as "the dissemination of incomplete, inaccurate, or misleading information that aims to deliberately or intentionally lie about something" (Fetzer, 2004, pp. 228–231), for some authors such as Wardle & Derakhshan (2017), it can probably be harmless and treated as ignorance regarding a subject. As in post-modernity, there is no longer any absolute truth; the spreading of false news leads to the trivialization of lies, and consequently to a fertile ground for the construction of post-truth, a phenomenon that privileges subjective and emotional discourse to the detriment of reason and facts (Estrada-Cuzcano et al., 2020), making the communication disseminated through social networks an ideal place for the proliferation of beliefs and ideologies.

With this trend on the rise, the scenario of intolerance to diversity of thought and political polarization (right and left) have been significantly rearranged in the 2018 Brazilian electoral context (Aggio, 2020). The technopopulist mechanism was put into operation. The idea of leadership, which emerges in contexts of widespread dissatisfaction and stands as a paladin of rupture and change, was launched (Cesarino, 2020). Sponsored by the Social Liberal Party and presented to the population

as an anti-system candidate and defender of family values, Bolsonaro contested the second round of the general elections with Fernando Haddad, candidate of the left, representing the Workers' Party and managed to be elected with the support of 55.1% of the valid votes.

"Bolsonarism" was born as a political project of "anti-political" nature that, besides incorporating classic traits of populism, presents some peculiarities in its design of attacking and degrading democratic and republican institutions with the ultimate goal of concentrating political legitimacy in the figure of the leader (Avritzer, 2020). After all, this is how populist politicians see themselves, as the only true representatives of the people's interests (Fitzi et al., 2019; Müller, 2019; Tormey, 2019). Bolsonaro has thus laid the foundations of a government based on a public image on and off social media, which combines verbal aggression with identity agendas, hate attacks, and the dissemination of fake news (Nascimento et al., 2018).

The technopopulism practiced by Bolsonaro during the 2018 election campaign worked so well that, since the first months of his government (January and February 2019), the president has further reinforced his communication strategy based on politainment and the use of social media as his official sources, diversifying his activities on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube (Cesarino, 2020). Seeking a radical change in the intermediation between politicians and the media, the new president promoted his YouTube channel, encouraging his followers to turn off the television and inform themselves only by his weekly lives (shown from March 2019 onwards), in an explicit intention to build an exclusive channel with his electorate (Recuero et al., 2017).

The use of social media as a political weapon has already been studied by different authors (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018, 2019; Lacalle et al., 2023) in a large number of countries. Concrete examples such as Trump's victory in the US (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Journell, 2017), the Brexit in the UK (Kucharski, 2016), and the Mexican elections in 2018 (Magallón, 2019) have already been analyzed and the strategy of disinformation through social media for the purpose of manipulating public opinion in democratic processes has been demonstrated. The case of Bolsonaro has been treated by authors such as Almeida (2019), Cesarino (2020), and Di Nubila (2021). However, there is a lack of works that focus on the case of the Liberal Party leader's technopopulist practice on YouTube. That is why this research intends to investigate the weekly lives posted by Bolsonaro's YouTube account, published on his channel from March 7, 2019, when Bolsonaro, as president of Brazil, began weekly broadcasts, until May 11, 2022, when this study was planned. The objective of this study is to analyze the content and presentation of the messages propagated in the lives as an example of politainment with the aim of confirming and pointing out characteristics of Bolsonaro's "technopopulism."

## 2. Methodology

In order to investigate Bolsonaro's political discourse communication strategy during the weekly lives posted by his YouTube account, as already mentioned in this article, all Bolsonaro's weekly lives were analyzed, from March 7, 2019 (the date on which the president went to his social networks and said he would perform this periodic programming) to May 11, 2022 (the time when this research was plotted). The sample was finally composed of 121 distributed chronologically as follows: 31 from 2019, 38 from 2020, 38 from 2021, and 14 from 2022. The average duration of these videos is 43 minutes ( $M = 42'41''$  and  $SD = 16'49''$ ). For the analysis of Bolsonaro's weekly live videos, an analysis sheet was used, divided into categories, in order to trace qualitative and quantitative characteristics regarding each video made available on Bolsonaro's personal account. The variables included in the analysis were based on the literature review, adapting categories described in previous research (Cordeiro Da Silva, 2020; De Oliveira & De Vargas, 2021; Santos de Moraes & Silva, 2021), according to the analysis of a previous sample of 25 videos. Thus, the aim was to describe certain informative characteristics present in Bolsonaro's lives, through a description and quantification of its thematic components, typology of messages transmitted, the presence of a certain type of guests, the scenarios chosen, and the type of production that occurred. To achieve these ends, the analysis sheet was composed of identification variables (number of unit of analysis [UA], date, link), duration, user interaction (number of likes, views, and comments), subject matter (national politics, international politics, Covid-19, economy, criticism of the opposition and the press), presence of guests, audiovisual format (scenario, production, types of shots, camera movement, use of signs), and type of message (generating fear, reinforcing stereotypes, fostering resentment, people against the elite). The interaction variables (or the interaction features) were quantitative scale variables, while the remaining variables were qualitative nominal variables. A statistical study was performed with the SPSS program, which provided descriptive and inferential results, providing the significance level ( $p$ ).

The search was restricted to links found on the social network in question. Due to the policy adopted by the digital platform to take off the air videos that violate the company's internal rules and also go against Brazilian legal precepts, some links have no audiovisual content, just a warning for rule violation and consequent removal from the air.

The sample was fully coded by two coders and then tested for intercoder reliability by having 50 videos (42% of the total sample) viewed by a third coder. An average agreement coefficient value of over 80% was found, as indicated by Igartua (2006), in order for the data to be reliable. This author points out that the determination of the degree of agreement is particularly appropri-

ate when using categorical variables, that is, those that adopt a nominal level of measurement, as was the case with the variables analyzed.

## 3. Results

In more than half of the videos (65.3%), the setting chosen was the Brazilian leader's office, while the making of the videos stood out for their simplicity, as they were always made with a single camera, a general shot and without camera movement. Regarding the topics covered, an average of five themes were explored in each video, highlighting national and international politics, the economy, attacks on the press, and the Covid-19 pandemic (see data in Table 1).

**Table 1.** Main topics.

Subject	%	N
National	100	118
Opposition	91.5	108
International	81.4	96
Economy	76.3	90
Criticism of the press	73.7	87
Covid-19	50.8	60
Praise for the press	30.5	36

On the other hand, a characteristic of Bolsonaro's lives was the presence of guests, who participated in 84% of the videos. Among them, the most frequent were government ministers (53.4%), the military (28.8%), and economic representatives (20.3%). Far behind, physicians participated with 5.1%. Also, the presence of a sign interpreter was also common (92.4%). Regarding the gender of the guests, it was found that the vast majority were men, being the only ones present in 89% of the lives, while there were only women guests in 4% of the programs and guests of both genders in 6%.

Only 1% of the videos had no guests. On two occasions that he had female guests (UA 25, UA 66), it was to talk about the Indigenous people, in relation to their economic development and that they were effectively treated with hydroxychloroquine. On another occasion, he received as a guest a woman, affiliated to his party, and running for mayor of Recife. She is the sister of a naval officer, and therefore in favor of civil-military schools. Finally, on November 9, 2020 (UA 64), he invited a girl who stated that she would get vaccinated against Covid-19 only if the relevant bodies such as Anvisa approve the use of the vaccine. The guest commented that she did not like the word "misogyny." Bolsonaro concluded that the audience of his live videos had to be heterosexuals like her to have a future.

The four occasions in which women were invited were videos in which the national economy was discussed ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 11,100$ ), resentment was used ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 6,396$ ), and the message of the people

against the elite did not appear ( $p < 0.01, \chi^2(1) = 14,048$ ) as well as no discussion of racism was visualized in the scope of the investigation.

No statistical association was detected between most types of messages and the presence or absence of guests in the videos. Thus, the type of topic covered (education, health, economy, army, etc.) and whether the video included messages of fear, stereotypes, or criticism of the press were independent of whether the video had a guest or not. On the other hand, an association was detected between two types of messages and the presence or absence of guests. In the first case, a tendential association was detected between the presence of guests and the dissemination of messages of resentment ( $p < 0.1, \chi^2(1) = 3,443$ ). Thus, issues were dealt with resentfully to a greater extent when there were guests than when there were not. Specifically, 85.9% of the videos with guests conveyed messages of resentment, while only 68.4% of the videos without guests did so.

Secondly, a statistically significant association was detected between the presence of guests and the message of "the people against the elite" ( $p < 0.01, \chi^2(1) = 7,737$ ). This message was broadcast in 26.3% of the videos without guests, compared to 6.1% of the videos with guests.

Breaking down these results by the possible types of guests, statistical association was detected in several cases. Thus, the presence of physicians was associated with health care messages ( $p < 0.01, \chi^2(1) = 7,569$ ). In 83.3% of the times that physicians were invited, health-care topics were discussed, while only in one case was a physician invited to discuss other issues. This was UA 10, a video published on May 10, 2019, in which education, economy, and army issues were discussed. Similarly, the presence of military personnel was associated with some treatment of issues of racism, which although statistically significant ( $p < 0.05, \chi^2(1) = 5,026$ ), referred to only two cases in which the invitation to a military member entailed addressing this issue, compared to 32 cases in which military personnel were invited and not addressed.

The use of resentment was also associated with a greater presence of the military in the videos ( $p < 0.05, \chi^2(1) = 4,156$ ). Thus, resentment was spoken in 94.1% of the occasions in which members of the military participated in the videos, "only" appearing in 78.6% of the videos in which military members were not present. In contrast, the participation of economic specialists was associated with less recourse to resentment, which appeared in 86.2% of the videos in which economists were not present, compared to 70.8% of those in which they did ( $p < 0.1, \chi^2(1) = 3,195$ ). In addition, military guests were also more frequent in international topics, as this topic was discussed in 91.3% of the videos with military personnel, compared to 77.4% of videos without military personnel, resulting in a trend-type association ( $p < 0.1, \chi^2(1) = 3,037$ ).

The military also appeared more often in messages that did not include fear (64.7%) than when they

did (35.3%), again a statistically significant association ( $p < 0.1, \chi^2(1) = 2,834$ ). In contrast, economic guests were more common when fear was used (66.7%) than when it was not (33.3%), a statistically significant association ( $p < 0.05, \chi^2(1) = 4,458$ ). Inviting economic specialists was associated at the trend level ( $p < 0.1, \chi^2(1) = 3,687$ ) with a lower probability of criticizing the press, since when specialists in this area were invited, criticism of the press occurred in 58% of the cases, compared to 77.7% when there were no economic guests.

The "people against the elite" argument was used to a greater extent when neither ministers ( $p < 0.1, \chi^2(1) = 3,325$ ) nor military personnel ( $p < 0.05, \chi^2(1) = 4,910$ ) were invited, so that this idea appeared in only 4.8% of the videos in which ministers took part and never when military personnel appeared, while it was present in 14.5% of the videos in which ministers did not appear and 13.1% in which military personnel were not invited.

As for the types of messages that were disseminated, the presence of components qualified in previous research as populist messages was detected. Thus, 83% of the messages had a resentment component, that is, in which the rival was treated as an enemy, subversive or even terrorist. In addition, 73% of the videos tried to discredit the media and journalists, while fear-mongering was used in almost half of the units analyzed (47.5%). Information classified as "fake news" was disseminated in 29.7% of the videos, and the argument "people against the elite" appeared in 9.3% of the videos (see data in Table 2). Messages that included resentment were coded as UA 88, a video from July 24, 2021, in which Bolsonaro refers to Lula da Silva as a "thief" and to the press as "shameless liars who want to suck from the government teat, to make money with advertising funds." Within this category, the video of October 16, 2020 (UA 62) in which Bolsonaro claims that the Worker's Party used to help other countries with money from the National Bank for Economic and Social Development was also categorized: "We are fighting against the corruption of former governments. In my government there is no corruption."

**Table 2.** Typology of messages.

Message	%	N
Resentment	83.1	98
Press	72.9	86
Fear	47.5	56
Fake news	29.7	35
People against the elite	9.3	11

It was detected that certain topics were related to the use of a certain type of messages. Thus, a statistically significant association ( $p < 0.001, \chi^2(1) = 22,289$ ) was found between the use of fear and the topics of healthcare, Covid-19 ( $p < 0.001, \chi^2(1) = 41,766$ ), and racism. Such

that 78.9% of the videos on healthcare and 76.7% of the videos on Covid-19 used fear, whereas fear was only used in 32.5% of the videos that did not discuss healthcare and 17.2% of those that did not discuss Covid-19. Similarly, the only two videos that dealt with racism included the fear component.

Half of the videos in which the opposition was criticized used fear, while when it was not criticized, fear was only alluded to in 20% of cases, an association that turned out to be only trendy ( $p < 0.1$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 3,303$ ). Fear was also used in 53% of the videos in which the press was criticized, compared to 32.3% of those in which it was not criticized, a statistically significant association ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 3,896$ ). Examples of the use of fear include the video of September 16, 2021 (UA 95) in which it is stated that the World Health Organization has recommended not to vaccinate young people aged 12 to 17 years from Covid-19, or that of April 1 of the same year that related how the number of poor people were increasing due to confinement. The October 14, 2021 (UA 98) video recalls how Bolsonaro warned from the beginning of the pandemic that the economy would be affected by the blockade and that this would cause the population to go hungry and out of work. It was also common for the Brazilian president to blame mainly the press for generating fear against him, for example, by accusing him of not having bought syringes or lacking intubation kits (UA 78, March 25, 2021). Thus, in UA 70 (December 7, 2021) he literally states that "the media creates fear in the population with all this disinformation."

Recourse to resentment was more likely in videos dealing with the topics of the army ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 7,669$ ), education ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 3,838$ ), international ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 15,610$ ), opposition ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 30,857$ ), press criticism ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 10,261$ ), economy ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 8,479$ ), and, less recurrent in the videos, on health ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 5,732$ ). Thus, resentment was included in 95.5% of the videos on the army, 92.5% on education, 89.6% on international issues, 88.9% of those criticizing the political opposition, 89.7% of those criticizing the press, 86.1% on economy, compared to 75.7% of those that did not allude to the army, 78.5% of videos that did not deal with education, 54.5% on international issues, 20.0% on the opposition, 64.5% that did not criticize the press, 50% that did not report on the economy. On the other hand, the videos that reported on health included resentment "only" 71.1% of the time, compared to 88.8% of the videos that did not talk about health.

For its part, the argument "the people against the elite" was positively associated with health ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 13,677$ ), Covid-19 ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 7,790$ ), press criticism ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 4,322$ ), and economy ( $p < 0.1$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 3,774$ ) issues and negatively with international issues ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 5,749$ ). Hence, "the people against the elite" appeared in 23.7% of the videos on healthcare, Covid-19 on (16.7%), criticism of the press (12.6%), and the economy (12.2%) and only in 2.5% of

the videos that did not deal with healthcare, Covid-19 (1.75%), and the economy (0.0%).

On the other hand, it was less frequent when international issues were discussed (6.3%), than when it did not deal with international topics (22.7%). In addition, a statistically significant association was found between criticism of the press and the political opposition ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 15,459$ ). Thus, 77.8% of the times in which the opposition was criticized, the press was also criticized.

Finally, it was found that fake news was statistically associated with racism ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 4,825$ ) and criticism of the press ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 14,083$ ). Fake news was used in 39.1% of the videos in which the press was criticized and 100% of those in which racism was discussed, while it was used in only 3.2% of the videos that did not criticize the media.

In terms of user interaction, Bolsonaro's videos received an average of 173,763 views, 32,790 likes, and 3,092 comments. Covid-19 and healthcare were the topics that provoked the highest number of total interactions, followed by abortion, education, and criticism of the press. On the other hand, the army, the economy, praise for the press, and international issues were the topics that received the fewest interactions (see data in Table 3).

The video that received the most views (529,999) was uploaded on May 3, 2019, and it dealt with the arrest of an advisor to his son, Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, as the main topic. The second most viewed video (June 25, 2019, 521,744 views) featured the president of the Brazilian Agency for International Tourism Promotion playing the Ave Maria with the accordion and criticized regional governors for imposing confinement and praised legislation to end the "monopoly" of the TV station Rede Globo to broadcast soccer matches. In the third most viewed video, Bolsonaro shows himself to be against the so-called "gay kit," allegedly approved by the Workers' Party. Under the denomination of "gay kit," different materials were alluded to in Brazil that would be distributed in schools, from pamphlets of the Ministry of Health to prevent AIDS among prostitutes, to alleged children's books, movies, or porn magazines.

A negative correlation was detected between the frequency with which a topic was addressed and the number of interactions received ( $r = -0.307$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), which indicated that the issues most frequently addressed by Bolsonaro were those that provoked the fewest total interactions among the users of his YouTube channel. Thus, unusual topics such as health, abortion, education, or racism obtained a high number of interactions, while other more frequent issues such as international issues, praise for the press, the economy, or the army were among those that received the fewest interactions.

Finally, the interactions that provoked the participation of guests were analyzed. Firstly, it was found that videos without guests received more interactions (231,057) than those with guests (205,536). Secondly, it was found that videos in which only men were invited

**Table 3.** Interactions of the topics analyzed.

Subject	N	Views	Likes	Comments	Interactions
Covid-19	60	215,449	40,951	3,785	260,185
Sanitation	38	205,612	39,336	3,734	248,682
Abortion	3	187,475	33,413	8,532	229,420
Education	40	190,692	34,309	3,601	228,602
Criticism of the press	87	181,008	34,149	3,300	218,457
Racism	2	181,382	33,254	3,077	217,713
Fuel	41	179,044	35,057	2,927	217,028
Opposition	108	178,006	33,287	3,156	214,449
National	118	173,763	32,790	3,092	209,645
Economy	108	171,918	32,314	3,039	207,271
International issues	96	170,864	32,809	2,987	206,660
Praise for the press	36	169,857	32,665	3,013	205,535
Economy	90	167,159	31,706	2,820	201,685
Army	44	160,896	27,555	3,064	191,515

had more interactions (209,659) than those in which there were guests of both sexes (189,616), and even more than when only women were invited (137,679). Finally, videos with economic experts were found to have the most interactions (238,242), while doctors received the fewest (174,756), with military personnel and ministers in intermediate positions.

#### 4. Conclusions

The objective of this study was to analyze the content and presentation of the messages propagated in the lives as an example of politainment with the aim of pointing out characteristics of Bolsonaro's "technopopulism."

The research results show that using the platform the president's live videos on YouTube influenced the process of disinformation in Brazil, with hate attacks against democratic institutions. The article indicates that Bolsonaro's communicative strategy is based on manipulation of public opinion and government propaganda.

Bolsonaro's weekly live broadcasts achieved an outstanding interaction of prossumers and developed a populist discourse that included messages of fear, stereotypes, or criticism of the press, among others. A component of resentment was present in 83% of the messages, that is, the rival was treated as an enemy, subversive, or even terrorist; what recalls one of the grammars of populist discourse is the friend/enemy dichotomy, in short, the formation of an "us" opposed to a "them," a logic that is basically built through antagonism (Laclau, 2013). This same dichotomy had been reflected in the recurrent "the people against the elite."

In addition, an attempt was made to discredit the media and journalists in 73% of the videos, while fear-mongering was used in almost half of the units analyzed (47.5%). In turn, information classified as "fake news"

or hoaxes was disseminated in 29.7% of the videos. Fear was also one of the main themes of the live presentations, especially in relation to healthcare and the Covid-19 pandemic and the press.

The growth of technopopulism on a global scale demonstrates that Bolsonaro's digital strategies are aligned with the practices of the global far right when it comes to acting on digital platforms. The content propagated by the president in his weekly YouTube lives was mostly structured based on discursive patterns described by the digital right-wing populism theory. By combining a fierce criticism of press freedom, Bolsonaro acts as a technopopulist, repudiating journalistic institutions as if they were enemies of society, and bringing to himself the responsibility of ensuring and providing the Brazilian population with key values intrinsic to journalism such as independence and providing reliable information.

By disregarding the need for interlocutors, Bolsonaro, in a way, disrespects free access to information, a right that is guaranteed by the Brazilian constitution. Another relevant point highlights the strategy of the populist politician in conditioning his YouTube lives as if it were a communication vehicle, whose function is to carry out the exclusive selection of facts favorable to a particular point of view, especially in benefit of his government, bordering on propagandistic airs, able to exalt extremism as his main source of "ideological violence." And so, we reach the conclusion that Bolsonaro manages to spread with great repercussion and in a direct way what benefits his government, as if he were in a regime without means of communication as validators of the right to information.

As for the last statement, it is worth remembering that the World Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders in 2021, showed that

journalism, the main vaccine against disinformation, was totally or partially blocked in 73% of the 180 countries ranked by the organization, and that Brazil was in the “red zone” of the list. Ranked 111 out of 180 countries analyzed, Brazil is one of the places where the exercise of journalism is seriously compromised, especially by the direct action of President Bolsonaro (Reporters Without Borders, 2021).

The results indicate that the themes addressed in the lives have influenced the disinformation process in Brazil and especially the hate attacks against important Brazilian democratic institutions. The speeches of resentment against the press, the Supreme Court, and the opposition parties are constant in Bolsonaro’s weekly programs. Finally, this article concluded that Bolsonaro’s communicative strategy on YouTube is an example of technopopulism based on the manipulation of public opinion with the dissemination of propaganda favorable to the government, and veiled attacks on all kinds of enemies of the current system in place as a true example of right-wing populist government. This political and media context should lead us to reflect on how technopopulist information strategies and politainment provide fertile ground for the manipulation of public opinion.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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