

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Social Network Platforms for Discursive Legitimation: Unveiling Neoliberalism Behind the Discourse on Public Universities

Daniel S. Lacerda^{1*} and Rita de Cássia T. Santos²

¹Management, Strategy and Entrepreneurship Department, Montpellier Business School, Montpellier, France

²Programa de Pós-Graduação em Administração, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre – RS, Brasil

Abstract

Social media is increasingly viewed as a game changer in political struggles worldwide. Yet, even as its global reach and impact are now evident, its mechanisms of legitimation of organisations and public policies are still unexplored. This article discusses 'communicative situations' (Van Dijk, 2015) extracted from social network platforms concerning the dispute for the (de)legitimation of public universities in Brazil during the campaign and administration of a far-right government. Applying critical discourse analysis, we show the implications of the communication architecture of these platforms for the processes of discursive legitimation. Interactions driven by social identification change the text to be consumed by subsequent users, shifting the debate from technical to identity-based argumentative *topos*. Our contribution is two-fold: (1) we explore the struggle for legitimacy in the open channels of social media, where the institutional environment cannot suppress deviant opinions and highlight the politics of legitimation; and (2) we demonstrate how actors can legitimise the disinvestment in higher education, before managerial decisions reach universities, through discourses that would not be immediately associated with neoliberalism such as moral conservatism.

Keywords: *Legitimation; discourse; social media; higher education; Brazil; far right*

Handling Editor: Devi Vijay; Received: 18 September 2021; Accepted: 16 September 2022; Published 15 December 2023

During the 2018 Brazilian presidential campaign, one of the proposals of the elected president, Jair Bolsonaro, was the implementation of fees in public universities, which sparked the first of many debates that would be waged on social media about higher education. However, what attracted our attention was that the topic of these debates on social media, more specifically on social network platforms, only rarely concerned the actual funding. Even though the expansion of neoliberalism has been associated with a worldwide decrease in public funding of higher education (Humphrey & Gendron, 2015), the texts we analysed were concerned with moral evaluations about the behaviour and identity of the disputing actors, suggesting that they were controlled by a hidden agenda. In this article, we investigate this struggle and show the role that social network platforms have in discursively legitimating neoliberalism in higher education.

Although the commodification of higher education advances with the expansion of neoliberalism (Miller, 2010; Nurunnabi, 2018; Willmott, 1995), many scholars also portray the defence of universities as autonomous spaces that should promote public values and social justice beyond market-oriented performance (Chatelain-Ponroy et al., 2018; Clegg et al., 2011; Contu, 2018). We argue here that these struggles against neoliberal policies of commodification of higher education do not start or finish within the university; they happen in public (often virtual) arenas where the legitimacy of universities is disputed. Therefore, although the neoliberal governance of the 'performative university' (Jones et al., 2020) is driven by rationally defined targets and systems of control, their very existence needs first to be legitimised. In particular, we see the legitimation process as discursive, in which stakeholders struggle to control the knowledge and indicators that make organisations accepted or

*Corresponding author: Daniel S. Lacerda Email: d.lacerda@montpellier-bs.com

contested through language meanings (Glozer et al., 2019; Vaara, 2014).

Since a seminal article by De Cock (1998) in this journal showed the impact of discourse on organisational change, the arena of disputes has changed considerably towards virtual spaces. Social network platforms increase the importance of examining the interactions during the production of discourses, which results in nonlinear texts (Bouvier & Machin, 2018). In contrast with institutional perspectives that see change as converging to stability with the suppression of deviant opinions (Bitektine & Haack, 2015), the open and less censored channels of communication on social media create an arena with the potential for highlighting dissent and unveiling the interests at stake (Khosravinik, 2017). Thus, power becomes a central aspect that justifies the need for critical discourse analysis of the interactions.

In this paper, we ask how social media enables discursive legitimation. More specifically, we analyse the disputes involving Brazilian public universities on social network platforms in the context of neoliberal reforms and ask what the moral evaluation of universities can teach us about discursive legitimation. We contribute to the literature on discursive legitimation (Glozer et al., 2019; Vaara, 2014; Vaara & Tienari, 2008) by demonstrating the role played by the architecture of communication on social media for discursive legitimation. In the specific conditions of social network platforms for communication, the stability of the institutional environment does not converge to a single basis of legitimation, and politics become central. Our critical discourse analysis focusses on the interactional level, putting discursive practices in their social context of consumption. For that, we adapted the socio-cognitive approach developed by Van Dijk (1998, 2014, 2015) to social media texts, providing a methodological contribution as well. Finally, our analysis of discourses on public universities also contributes to the literature on higher education by showing how the defence of neoliberal policies for universities can be intertwined with moral and identitarian political agendas. The information architecture that defines the conditions of discourse reproduction in these platforms is embedded in a mechanism of ideological concealment that changes the interlocutors' argumentative *topos*—that is, the guarantees that anchor the transition of an argument to its conclusion.

The following section presents the idea of performative universities that has colonised higher education in the past decades and the importance of discussing processes of legitimation to resist it. Next, we contextualise the relevance of social network platforms and their implications for discursive legitimation. This is followed by the presentation of the socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse analysis, which focusses on how discourses are produced and consumed by individuals according to their ideology. In the methodology section, we explain how data was collected from the Internet and

analysed using Van Dijk's framework. The results section presents the analysis of the selected posts and subsequent comments and reactions, according to the proposed framework. Then, we discuss the implications of these findings both for the literature on higher education and legitimation processes. The final section presents future recommendations and limitations of the study.

The struggles for the legitimacy of universities in a market society

Universities were born with a quasi-sacred mission of creating and protecting the truth, and for a long time, they have been dedicated to the mission of educating citizens more than training economically relevant professionals (Patriotta & Starkey, 2008). However, the development of capitalism is the development of markets; and the process of commodification, which enables a product or service to be traded, has also impacted higher education and the idea of what a university is (Willmott, 1995). The increasing influence of markets and market-oriented indicators on the university model naturalised the idea of a 'performative university' (Ball, 2003; Jones et al., 2020), which deploys the governance of neoliberal education in fabricated forms of measurement and control. As a result of this change worldwide, many authors argue that universities have become highly oppressive educational environments, and customer experience has subverted teaching models (McCann et al., 2020).

In many countries, this shift associated with the neoliberal stage of capitalism was led by new public management, which transformed the governance of the education sector by promoting the decline in state funding and increasing the dependence on the market, with impacts on both scholars and students. For example, in Poland, new research funding schemes imposed on the higher education sector have discouraged mass enrolment and penalised scholars dedicated to teaching (Jelonek & Mazur, 2020). In France, state reforms that advanced the results-oriented culture have undermined the public values universities had been traditionally committed to (Chatelain-Ponroy et al., 2018). In India, the marketisation of higher education helped in shaping student subjectivity according to the market governmentality and led to disenchantment among students (Varman et al., 2011).

These mechanisms of 'Targets and Terror' (McCann et al., 2020) deployed in universities touched by neoliberalism seemed to convey such an inescapable system that became considerably naturalised and unchallenged for many years. Miller (2010), for example, argued that the question is not even whether universities are the producers of commodities—since markets would have established that already—but what commodities are being traded: the certification of learning, the competencies learned by students, or the experience

of being/consuming in the university. Regardless of the product, students are increasingly seen as customers of a new industry, which is configured by 'discursive schemes that constitute the university lifeworld, colonizing it with commercial values' (Parker, 2002, p. 615).

However, the aforementioned transformation is also complex and selective. Universities (and business schools) continue to be a locus of dispute and internal struggles underpinned by ideological differences (Grima, 2011); pervaded by intersected and interfering competing rationalities such as those on excellence and gender (Wieners & Weber, 2020); preserving spaces for critique and consciousness-raising on issues such as inequality (Zulfiqar & Prasad, 2021); and even offering innovative forms of resistance to autocratic change that help in forging the identity of the academic community (Bowes-Catton et al., 2020). Likewise, even though universities are constantly haunted by the pressures of commodification, they still harbour disciplines that escape the market logic (Patriotta & Starkey, 2008), and fields that challenge the status quo (Clegg et al., 2011). This dual nature is also generative of social struggles around the role and funding of universities, which we highlight here as underpinned by struggles for their legitimation and delegitimation in society.

Legitimacy has been classically defined in the field of public administration as the compatibility between results and the value patterns of the associated systems (Stillman, 1974). It has become fundamental also for the strategic and institutional assessment of whether the actions of organisations are considered 'desirable, proper, or appropriate' (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). However, more recently, other approaches have also demonstrated the discursive construction and maintenance of legitimacy, which are less dependent on evaluated outputs (Glozer et al., 2019; Vaara, 2014; Vaara et al., 2006).

As these authors show, actors discursively construct their authority by exploiting positions in the field that have given them legitimacy to exercise it. This is particularly important under conditions of institutional change when social norms, values and judgements are disputed (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). However, both in public and corporate administration, the legitimation process through which legitimacy is established has become particularly fluid in the virtual arenas of social media (Glozer et al., 2019; Vaara, 2014). Discursive analysis can be particularly useful in understanding these dynamics, especially when drawing on critical perspectives illuminating the power relations and the politics of legitimation.

Social network platforms and the mobilisation of (de)legitimation discourses

The growing rates of digitalisation—currently, 4.62 billion people are active social media users worldwide (Kemp, 2022)—have increased the expectation of the role of social

media in steering public debates. In effect, various studies have demonstrated their impact across the world. For example, social media and digital platforms were instrumental for political canvassing during the Arab Spring, Green Movement of Iran and political unrest in Iceland, enabling civil engagement to protest and coordinate action (Ozden & Tanko, 2019). Social media also powered the disrupting paradigm of 'post-truth' politics in the United States of America (USA), enabling Trump's use of alternative facts to sustain political dominance (Knight & Tsoukas, 2019). It also had a similar role in the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom (UK) by immediately leveraging events that shifted the attention to scapegoats before their communication by media outlets (Schmidt, 2017). Therefore, their capabilities of quickly reaching a large public in uncensored channels of communication have made social network platforms a powerful instrument of legitimation that can shift public opinion.

In Brazil, despite the fact that 23% of the adult population is still not connected to the Internet, the country has the world's third-highest average of daily time spent online (Kemp, 2022), which partly explains why social network platforms have become so important. Since the 2018 elections, the debates that emerge and are held on social media have occupied a central role in the country's political direction (Da Silva & Kerbauy, 2019). This is not surprising to the extent that scholars have established that social media analyses remain efficient predictors of public opinion even when users do not represent the general population (Ceron et al., 2014). Methods of extracting and analysing information on Twitter have also been demonstrated as efficient predictors of electoral results in various countries (Jaidka et al., 2019).

Given the established importance of these platforms, understanding how discourse navigates on them can explain much about its mechanisms of legitimation. The definition of discourse depends on the theoretical approach, but it usually refers to a text in context, that is, any utterance whose production is controlled and selected to support a certain social order (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). Discourse is thus an instrument used to define and shape social relations, and every discourse contains ideologies that support social practices that are usually presented as neutral. Therefore, discourse analysis aims to unveil the assumptions concealed in a text. To this end, strategies of analysis are employed to examine how statements are constructed, revealing the implicit ideological assumptions of the producer of the message (Van Dijk, 2014).

In most approaches, this analysis focusses on the stage of discourse production, for example, how a newspaper text produces meanings beyond the text itself. However, in the case of social media, it is also essential to examine how other participants construe and consume the discourse, as they are often co-producers. Although investigations of discursive legitimation in management are still scarce (Vaara et al., 2006;

Vaara & Tienari, 2011), the analysis of social media settings reveals the great potential created by their dialogical nature. For example, Glozer et al. (2019) discussed the role of social media for discursive legitimation in an organisation-led social media setting and proposed three main functions for it: establishing discursive authority; validating normative, moral and rational evidence; and controlling consensus by harmonising dissent. In our case, we will expand on how the particular information architecture on social media realises similar mechanisms beyond the reach of organisational control.

Framework: From the production to the consumption of discourse

On social media, the more a post receives comments or 'likes', the greater its visibility, which moulds the structure available for discursive interaction (Khosravini, 2017). In addition, as operationalised by algorithms, the text is not limited to the initial post; it is augmented by comments inserted in pre-fixed interaction templates, such as reactions, shares, and the sequencing of comments. The clear division between producers and consumers of text is thus broken, and the dynamics of the communication event no longer occur on a one-to-one basis but from many to many (Bouvier & Machin, 2018).

We adapted Van Dijk's (1998, 2011, 2015) analytical framework to the analysis of social media texts. His *socio-cognitive theory* allows us to approach discourse structures in the interface between socially shared representations and personal practices, that is, between social structures and individual agency. This approach reveals the social structures of power and control via the relationships between discourse and cognition, that is, the capacity to process information and transform it into knowledge (Van Dijk, 1998). One of the main assumptions is that *ideology* shapes the construction of *mental models* (also known as personal situation models), which in

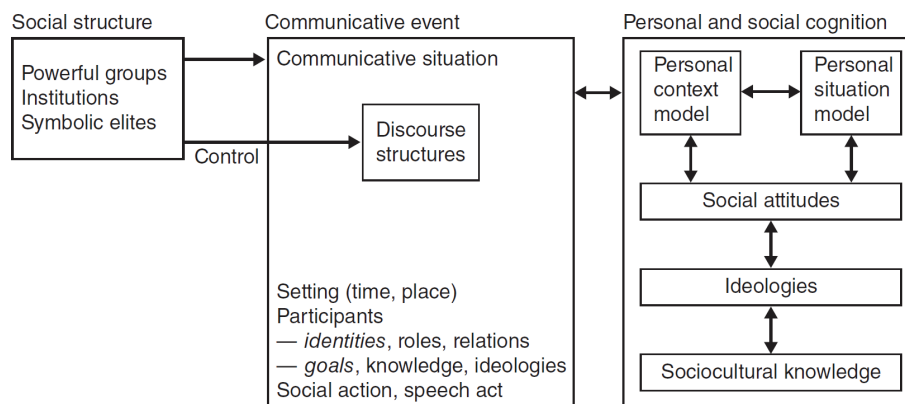
turn mediate how discourse is understood or interpreted (Van Dijk, 2015). Although Van Dijk does not use the example of social media, we can apply his approach following the same categories, as shown in Figure 1. For example, the content posted on social network platforms—as in other genres—would not be reduced to the communication per se, but to a given *communicative event* triggered by the topic of the post and how its content is inscribed in the interactive structure (reactions, shares, comments). This situation is capable of reproducing or reinforcing the ideas of institutions, groups, and symbolic elites on the mental models of those who consume/reproduce/produce posts.

As illustrated in Figure 1, powerful groups and institutions control the discourse structures that are consumed in communicative events, but the consumption of this discourse will depend on the mental model. This model refers to personal and social cognition, which are nonetheless also controlled indirectly by the same discourse structures. If such discursive control over the mental models of recipients is in the best interests of the speakers or writers and against the best interests of the recipients, we have an instance of discursive power abuse, usually called manipulation (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 472). Therefore, the social reproduction of ideologies reflects a structure of concrete social practices of the different social groups with which individuals identify, even though this influence does not occur directly and is mediated by variables of contextual and evaluative beliefs (Van Dijk, 1998).

Method

Empirical context: Higher education in Brazil

As stated in the constitution, Brazilian public universities hold the status of autarchies, subjected to public administration principles and federal audit but endowed with pedagogical-scientific,



Source: Van Dijk, 2015, p. 474.

Figure 1. Schema of discursive reproduction.

administrative and financial autonomy (Minto, 2018). However, because the government funds them, such organisations face a similar legitimacy dilemma to other government and public administration organisations, which calls for clear social impact as a response to limited public funds. Since 2015, the decreasing federal investment in research and public universities has triggered the defence of higher education by social movements informing the public about the positive social impact of research and higher education.

One of the main messages communicated by their advocates is the quality of education in Brazilian public institutions. Whereas primary and secondary private schools often offer better-quality services than public institutions, it is the opposite in higher education, where 27 out of the 30 best universities in the country, in most rankings, are public ones. As a result, Brazilian public universities generally benefit from a much better reputation than the private sector (Bielschowsky, 2019), which is dominated by profit-seeking corporate groups. Yet, only about one in six university students attend public, fee-free courses. Because of the highly competitive entrance, for decades public universities have fought against the stigma of being elitist institutions that admit only those with access to better schooling. Despite recent improvements in expanding higher education access to the lower socio-economic classes with successful affirmative policies of inclusion, the model remains controversial in the country, and many take advantage of this to argue that it should be abandoned altogether, giving space to the private market.

In Brazil, the dispute between public funding of higher education and the private market of universities is historical. In 1933, private institutions accounted for 44% of higher education enrolments, and a rapid increase from 1964 to 1984 brought this share to 64.3% (Durham, 2003). Between 1990 and 2003, enrolments in the private sector grew by 187% against 87% in the public sector; and between 2004 and 2017, the former grew by 109% and the latter by 74% (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais [INEP], 2022). As a result of this historical bigger expansion of the private sector, access to public higher education remains restricted nowadays. Although more than 80% of students in primary and secondary education are enrolled in public institutions, for higher education, it is only 15.4% of the 3.6 million students (INEP, 2022). The limited access to completely free education still poses a big barrier for higher education in the country. In 2020, only 23% of Brazilian adults aged 25–34 years held a tertiary education degree, which is almost half of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) average.

In addition to higher education, universities return to society the impact of their research and direct public services, for example, through free clinics or technical consulting. However, their funding is mainly challenged in relation to the free

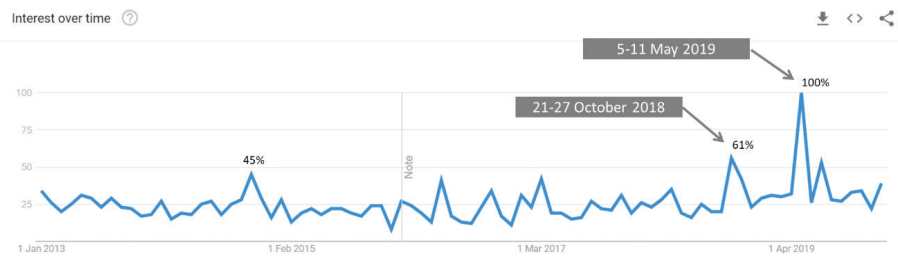
education they offer. Since the enactment of the right to free public education at all levels, promulgated by the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, debates have been repeatedly held in Congress proposing the implementation of tuition fees (Minto, 2018). These debates returned strongly to the political agenda in 2018, as the interest in public universities dominated the public arena during the presidential elections in Brazil (Da Silva & Kerbauy, 2019). This interest was spiked by a proposal to implement tuition fees in public universities, which exacerbated discursive disputes about the meaning of public higher education, especially in federal universities.

Neoliberal reforms had already hit Brazilian higher education in the previous three decades. The much faster expansion of private education with direct funding by the state, laws enabling private companies to benefit from public infrastructure in research partnerships, and increasing dependence of universities on private donations were signs of academic capitalism increasingly operating in the country (Costa & Goulart, 2018). However, the period between 2003 and 2019 was also marked by a vast expansion of free public higher education both in number of institutions (+47%) and students (+72%), in addition to the many affirmative policies that increased the access for low-income and black students (Carmo et al., 2014). This period of democratisation of access reinforced the symbolic association of public universities with progressive and democratic movements, an image they created out of their historical role of resistance against autocratic regimes, including the non-democratic period between 1964 and 1984. As a result, far-right movements elected universities as enemies to be fought. Emboldened by previously existing conservative movements, and with the support of emerging social network platforms, the far right targeted public universities in their political messages, often misinforming the population about these institutions by using derogatory left-wing stereotypes. We explain next how we collected and analysed data concerning this dispute for legitimacy.

Data collection and analysis

In the first stage of the study, we wanted to identify the moments when the topic of public universities was most in evidence in the public debate. Given the lack of available tools to make analytical queries on the dataset of social network platforms, in the first stage of the study, we used the Google Trends¹ tool to search for the term 'public universities' in the period between 2013 (when the far right emerged) and 2019. The peak of the search trend on Google was in May 2019, and the second-highest peak occurred in) October 2018 (see Figure 2). We selected these two moments to

¹ Using graphs, the tool Google Trends allows us to analyse the frequency with which a certain term is searched on the Internet. The tool reports on the relationship between online traffic and a social event. URL: <https://trends.google.com.br/trends/?geo=BR> [accessed on October 21, 2020]



Source: Google Trends, 2020.

Figure 2. Popularity of the term 'public universities' in relation to the peak (100%), from 01 January 2013 to 01 January 2020.

analyse the interactions on two social network platforms: Twitter and Facebook. Twitter has a flexible search tool, allowing the parameters of research to be defined and the most important [highest engagement] posts identified, but that is not the case with Facebook. Therefore, first, we decided to perform a search for news stories using Google Search in the two periods described above. Considering that social media and traditional media mutually influence each other in defining the agenda of conversation (Schmidt, 2017), we wanted to identify relevant stories that had been later posted on social media. We created a corpus of 144 stories for the 2018 week and 118 stories for the 2019 week, which helped us understand the context of the debates happening on social media.

The period between October 21 and 27, 2018, during the presidential election campaign, was when the dispute over the higher education model appeared strongly on social media, which was also the first time in the history of Brazilian elections that higher education occupied a central place in the campaigns (Da Silva & Kerbauy, 2019). When annotating the corpus for the results of that week, we identified that the central focus of the discussions was tuition fees in public universities, a topic related to the government proposal of the then-presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro. We then selected the posts on Facebook regarding the proposal to charge tuition fees that had the biggest repercussion (measured by the number of shares as a proxy for engagement). The three news headlines with the highest engagement (i.e., interactions) were identified and analysed in detail (see Table 1). The first thread (post from the daily *Estadão*) was used in this article to present the results.

During the second period, between May 5 and 11, 2019, in the fifth month of Jair Bolsonaro's administration, there was a strong repercussion caused by the statements given the previous week by the Minister of Education announcing a 30% budget cut to higher education. The stories presented the disputes around the reasons, constraints, and possibility of fulfilment of the proposal. The fact was further inflamed by persecutory statements, particularly when he threatened to cut funding particularly from universities that were too politically active, provoking student demonstrations across the country, later described by social movements as the 'Education

Tsunami'. For this second timeframe, we conducted an advanced Twitter search for the term 'universities'. The three tweets that mentioned public universities and had the highest engagement were identified and their threads (a tweet followed by comments or answers) underwent an in-depth analysis. The thread triggered by President Bolsonaro was used in this article to discuss the results.

The communicative situations identified above were analysed according to the socio-cognitive approach (Van Dijk, 2014, 2015) to reveal the mobilised ideologies in the attempted control of mental models for each communicative event, which is triggered by the first post of each thread (triggering claim) and continues with the following interactions (reactions and comments structured in discursive interactions). Inductive coding was performed for the selected posts and comments to establish the mobilised ideologies in each case. The first author coded the content from Twitter; and the second coded the content from Facebook, and the results were then cross-checked for similarities. The texts were analysed by exploring the semantic structure of the announcement of the post (images, title, lede), the discourses of the texts of the triggering post, and the subsequent interaction established in the thread between the platform users.

We analysed the comments from a *cognitive perspective*, to identify mental models (how users appear to see, interpret, and mentally represent the properties of the social situation in which they are involved); and a *social perspective*, in order to compare the level of adequacy of the elements of discourse of each interlocutor in relation to the actual problems that were evoked. The groups that disputed the meanings of the discourse were identified from the comments with the most reactions. Then, the adopted rhetorical strategies for delegitimizing opponent or dissident discourse were identified and linked to the supporting ideologies of each group. The key role played by the architecture of social platforms in changing the message during the interactions emerged from this analysis.

Findings

In this section, the main findings following the three main steps of analysis will be reported. We will: (1) present the posts selected to illustrate the results of the analysis, (2) discuss how

Table 1. Threads coded using the socio-cognitive approach.

Thread	Engagement	Communicative event
Newspaper <i>Estadão</i> on Facebook: Bolsonaro's team wants to charge tuition fees at federal universities (2018-10-22)	16,299 shares, 17,632 likes, 5,904 comments	<i>Triggering Claims:</i> students come from high-income families and high cost of universities <i>Discursive interactions:</i> <i>ad-hominem</i> fallacies against students framed as party seekers vs. those who do not study in universities should not talk about them <i>Mobilised ideologies:</i> university as a moral threat vs. university as a meritocratic institution
Magazine <i>Exame</i> on Facebook: Bolsonaro's team wants to charge tuition fees at federal universities (2018-10-2)	9,400 shares, 10,000 likes, 3,100 comments	<i>Triggering Claims:</i> students come from high-income families and high cost of universities <i>Discursive interactions:</i> negative description of university students and distancing Bolsonaro from the Workers' Party vs. negative description of the president's supporters <i>Mobilised ideologies:</i> 'antipetismo' (rejection of Workers Party) and populism vs. elitism
Newspaper <i>Gazeta do Povo</i> on Facebook: Bolsonaro's program plans to charge tuition fees at public universities (2018-10-23)	441 shares, 2,000 likes, 662 comments	<i>Triggering Claims:</i> the proposal aims to use the funds raised to finance places for lower-income students <i>Discursive interactions:</i> in Brazil, only the poor pay for college and the media is biased in highlighting the proposal vs. everyone should have access to free and quality education <i>Mobilised ideologies:</i> 'bolsonarism' (populist exaltation of the leader) vs. education as a social right
President Bolsonaro's official account on Twitter claiming that the university budget cuts were a lie (2019-05-10)	5,910 shares, 26,200 likes, 2,100 comments	<i>Triggering Claims:</i> the 30% cut in universities' budgets is a lie created by government enemies. <i>Discursive interactions:</i> students will defeat the government which is lying vs. police will bring order against protesters <i>Mobilised ideologies:</i> neoconservatism vs. social change through popular movement
Citizen 'luri K.' on Twitter criticising the government's actions against education in the previous week (2019-05-09)	5,690 shares, 13,800 likes, 247 comments	<i>Triggering Claims:</i> the government promotes multiple regulatory changes to disinvest in education and are liberalising the right to carry arms <i>Discursive interactions:</i> people in Brazil are blind and cannot see reality vs. leftist militants spread lies <i>Mobilised ideologies:</i> neoconservatism, denialism vs political superiority
Congresswomen Sâmia Bomfim on Twitter criticising mistakes by the Ministry of Education and the budget cut (2019-05-10)	3,148 shares, 13,100 likes, 111 comments	<i>Triggering Claims:</i> the government is incompetent and ill-educated and has no legitimacy to cut education funds <i>Discursive interactions:</i> those who want higher education should pay for it vs. the minister represents the sentiment of the raging middle class <i>Mobilised ideologies:</i> neoliberalism vs. feminism

Source: Own elaboration.

Note: The threads highlighted will be discussed in detail.

the interactions that followed these posts highlighted and selected mental models, and finally (3) demonstrate how these mental representations underlying discourse meanings differentiate groups that struggle by mobilising different ideologies.

Posts triggering the communicative event

Figure 3 highlights the Facebook post of the news story with the highest engagement during the first timeframe

(October 21–27, 2018). The headline and the summary (lede) of the story, translated in the figure caption, reinforce the emphasis given to the central characters. The campaign 'advisors' [the team preparing the government programme] mobilise a technical *topos*, and their argument is highlighted in the post: 'advisors point to the high cost [of federal universities] in comparison with private universities'. The full story explains the counterargument by the association of rectors and the national union, explaining



Source: Estadão (2018).

Note: Translation: 'Bolsonaro's Team wants to charge tuition fees in federal universities: advisors point to the high cost in comparison with private universities and the fact that most students come from high-income families; entities deny relationship and expert sees unconstitutionality'.

Figure 3. Estadão newspaper's post.

that these costs cannot be compared because they refer to different things. However, this is only briefly reflected at the end of the summary in the statement: 'entities deny relationship'. The rhetorical strategy used to frame the two opposing groups is another indication of discursive construal. One side is predicated affirmatively to set the agenda, and the other is defensively negative; while the 'advisors indicate', 'entities deny'.

In the full news article published on the website, the union representative explains that it is a mistake to compare the direct costs of these two types of institutions (public vs. private) because most of the federal university

budget goes to scientific research, which is not conducted in most private universities. Brazilian scientific production takes place almost exclusively (at least 90%) within public universities (Clarivate Analytics, 2018). On the newspaper's website, the National Association of Rectors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education also showed that two out of three federal university students come from the lower social classes. However, the text with which most users interacted was not from the newspaper's website but the news post.

Regarding the second timeframe investigated (May 5–11, 2019), Figure 4 presents the tweet with the highest

engagement on Twitter when the topic of the agenda was the threat of university budget cuts. We analysed the tweet's title and the transcript of the video. The tweet shared by the president in office, Jair Bolsonaro, was titled 'The lie about the 30% university cut'.

In the reproduced video, the mayor of the city of Itajubá, Carlos Molina (Social Democratic Brazilian Party [PSDB]), starts by presenting himself as a federal university professor and then countering government critics. He claims that the budget of federal universities would not be slashed by 30% as announced by the media because this percentage would only apply to the discretionary expenses (non-obligatory), which correspond to 25% of the total, meaning the reduction would instead be 30% of 25%, 7.5%. In later developments, we learned that the budget for the country's federal universities would have been reduced in fact by R\$1.7 billion (approximately €379 million), which represents 24.84% (not 30%) of the non-compulsory expenses (the so-called discretionary expenses) managed by the universities and 3.43% (not 7.5%) of the total budget. In the video, Mr. Molina also said that previous administrations had made similar cuts and amendments to the budget law, even though he did not explain that the planned budgets in

those years were also much higher: R\$15.3 billion in 2015 against R\$6.9 billion in 2019, for example. The video continues with criticism of those who protested against the budget cuts of 2019:

It is not a coincidence that most of those who are flaunting and overestimating the numbers, overestimating the budget reduction, even twisting information and numbers are also against pension reform and the projects I mentioned just now. In truth, they are against the government. They are the resistance. Otherwise, they would have made the same noise they are making now in 2014 and 2015, but they didn't. (Video transcript, 4:24 min)

This text's argumentative construction begins with a technical budget theme, and it shifts towards the partisan motivations of those who criticise the cut, indicating an *ad-hominem* strategy. The argument suggests that what matters is not what the portrayed individuals claim to be the truth, but who they are. Because these individuals are also opposed to other government projects, they are framed as advocates of previous administrations, even though previous administrations are not under discussion. More than the arguments used by those who criticise the budget cuts, the criteria of truth used in this circumstantial variant of the *ad-hominem* fallacy is the



Source: Jair M. Bolsonaro [@jairbolsonaro]. (2019, May 10). *A mentira do corte de 30% nas Universidades* [Tweet]. Twitter. URL: <https://twitter.com/Miraci31/status/1126889019487465472> [accessed on January 12, 2020].

Note: Translation: 'The lie of the 30% university cut'.

Figure 4. President Jair Bolsonaro's tweet.

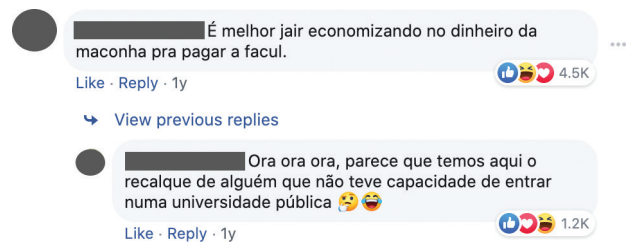
interlocutor's personal circumstances. However, to some degree, the video also appeals to the abusive variant of this fallacy, that is, a direct attack on the opponent's character. This variant serves as a hook for the post's interactions, which completely abandon the technical part of the argument, as will be demonstrated in the next section.

The discursive consumption and reproduction: Selecting mental models

After presenting two posts that trigger communicative events, we move towards the central part of this analysis: the interactional analysis of comments and reactions. On social networking platforms, the instant reaction features enable users to interact with a publication, which can be seen as a particular discourse structure present in the texts. Through reaction icons, the content of a post is immediately consumed, but not necessarily the full article to which it refers. This is the case of the Facebook post illustrated in Figure 3, with approximately 18,000 reactions and 6,000 comments. Reactions are a brief and superficial mode of discursive interaction of consumption/reproduction that allows for an equally superficial, but not absent, insertion of individuals in the communicative event. Reactions to the post (such as 'like', 'love', and 'laugh') enhance the visibility given by algorithms while also pointing to the concealment of discursive content and agency (who speaks, to whom, and how).

On social media, only 0.013% of those who view a news post click on it to see the story; and less than half of those who share a story on their newsfeed read the full text (Gabiello et al., 2016). In a scenario where the vast majority of users usually do not access the full story or do not watch a shared video, individuals are restricted to the image/title/lede structures or the shared video title. The triggering claim is thus an important element to control the discourse of the communicative situation, but it is not the only one. The debate between interlocutors of opposing political tendencies occurs in a fragmented way through comments or answers whose prominence depends on their frequency of interaction. Such engendering is linked to the communicative event's situational 'closing' parameter (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 219), which determines the limits of the conversation and what message will be the centre of the discussion. This is illustrated in the example of Figure 5.

The participant in Figure 5 used the pun 'Jair' (the president's first name), instead of 'já ir' (which means 'start', in Portuguese), suggesting that university students should 'start saving the pot money to pay for college'. It invokes the stereotype of public university students as troublemakers and deviant. In addition to a synecdoche that suggests that all public university students smoke marijuana, the suggestion reinforces an abusive variance of the *ad-hominem* fallacy, which allows a direct attack on those



Source: *É melhor jair economizando no dinheiro da maconha pra pagar a facul.* (2018). [Facebook post comments]. Facebook. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/estado/posts/2850236591658051> [accessed on October 8, 2019].

Note: Translations: 'You better start saving the pot money to pay for college'; 'Well, well, well, it looks like we've got a repressed person who wasn't able to pass their public university exams'.

Figure 5. Comment that caused the most reactions to the post in Figure 3.

students. The discourse crafted by the interactions changed the message in the initial text of the post by shifting its argumentative *topos* by mobilising the ideology of universities as a moral threat. This comment had approximately 4,500 reactions, automatically expanding its reach, as comments with more interactions are often displayed automatically below the text, changing the text to be consumed by subsequent users.

Still from the same message, the replica to the comment that generated the most reactions is also the first to appear. The response invoked the ideology of public universities as meritocratic institutions, suggesting that the previous participant criticised it because he was not competent to enter one, and implying his opinion should thus be disregarded. This argument refers to the competitive entrance exams applied by public universities. At the top of the most liked, these comments show that the focus of the debate became identity-based, shifting away from the original topic of the discussion. The participants do not assess university students' efficiency or social class but dispute the ideological beliefs that public university students are marijuana users vs. those who cannot pass the entrance exams are not competent.

Therefore, although public universities score on average 50% higher than private universities in national assessments and cost the state the same investment per student than private institutions charge as fees (Bielschowsky, 2019), the discourse meanings in the highlighted comment and response had nothing to do with cost efficiency or the fundamental right to education. This selection by the platform algorithm uses the number of interactions as a key variable to increase the message's visibility, determining its relevance in the communicative process in terms of power, reach, and distinction, which are key elements for discourse consumption (Van Dijk, 2015). What counts as continuity in discourse production varies according

to the settings of each platform (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), but is primarily determined by the level of user interaction—whether they are real users or bots intentionally created to boost a comment (Forelle et al., 2015). Therefore, even if dissenting voices exist, they become invisible, resulting in a practical mechanism of discursive finalisation (Glozer et al., 2019) that is structurally operated without the intervention of any particular actor:

The new produced text has direct implications in the subsequent interactions. According to Van Dijk (1998), when individuals wish to communicate, they resort to a mental model from which they select the information to be used, according to the beliefs that guide their actions in a given social situation. As a result, users' comments on social media may differ from the intentions of the post's author:

recipients only need 'half a word' to reconstruct an intended mental model with help of the inferences based on situationally and socioculturally shared generic knowledge [...]. This also explains the obvious consequence that recipient models may be different from intended speaker models. (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 125)

Therefore, the mental models used to interpret the message are shaped by socially shared knowledge and ideologies, and affect the recipient's understanding of the meaning attributed by the speaker. Furthermore, since comments and reactions to the post essentially change the text to be consumed by the next recipient, the more interactions that occur, the more the consumed message will be semantically disconnected from the topic of the triggering event (i.e., teaching fees) framed by the original speaker. This process of discourse control will be better detailed in the next section.

Discourse control through the interactions with comments and reactions

We observed above how the debate about tuition fees in federal universities was selectively shifted by a set of beliefs and ideas of individuals and what they inferred about the daily life of these universities (such as students' marijuana consumption). This is not just an individual construal; it results from a broader ideology with naturalised (pre)conceptions. As we explained, based on the socio-cognitive approach (Figure 1), the discourse-society relation is mediated by mental models. However, while in traditional genres of text, 'specific discourse structures may influence the contents and the structures of mental models in ways preferred by the speakers' (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 472), in social network platforms, this control happens during the interaction, increasing the importance of the online struggle for how mental models will be selectively affected. Therefore, we will now expand on how the communicative resources present in the social network platforms, such as tags, reactions, shares, hyperlinks, comments, or images give an

outlet to the expression of meanings that in some ways were already present in the mental models but became strategically enhanced to produce a new text that legitimates neoliberal interests.

We analysed the 232 replies that followed the comment in Figure 5. Firstly, some fought back against the alleged generalised use of marijuana, narrating their own experiences as university students or directly questioning the author by asking, 'What about those who don't buy marijuana, only rice and beans?' Furthermore, most of the negative comments targeted federal public universities with labels like 'true brothels, left-wing militant groups'. Thus, the discourse structures of those who defended tuition fees reinforced the ideological position that represented these public institutions as a moral threat to society. In effect, one of the ways to rhetorically discredit an opponent is to stereotypically predicate them as socially misadjusted (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009), with descriptions such as 'misfit', 'irresponsible', or 'irrational'. In our case, this strategy was a way of escaping from technical and political-economic arguments about access to education.

Several advocates of public universities also replied by criticising the implications of charging tuition fees with statements such as 'I don't know what world you live in ...'; 'the reality is that many students depend on scholarships and the subsidized university restaurant ...'; 'those who come from the countryside have just a bit of money to pay rent'. They refer to the fact that poor students can only study in public universities because they are tuition-free and offer continuity programmes to support low-income students financially. These users brought new elements to the debate, touching on needs that are not solved by charging tuition fees. However, the reply to this first comment that reached the highest engagement, as shown in the figure, only antagonised the previous author who criticised public university students by saying that he was someone who 'was not capable of being admitted into one'. The subsequent interactions reduced the actors/groups to two opposing fronts characterised by their identity and anchored them increasingly further away from the technical *topos* of the discussion. Only one reply pointed out that the possible reduction of public resources passed on to public universities would lead to a drop in the quality of higher education, but it obtained no reaction from other users. This is also a relevant factor, as this mechanism of (in)visibility, by not interacting or ignoring certain comments, is a way to exercise 'closing power' (Van Dijk, 2015) over the communicative event on social media.

Similar dynamics occurred in the case of Twitter in 2019, in which the president tweeted referring to the budget cuts as a 'lie'. Juliano Medeiros' (the president of an opposition party, PSOL—Partido Socialismo e Liberdade) answer had the highest engagement and, therefore, greatest visibility (Figure 6). It did not mention the technical aspects of the discourse, even though technical arguments are also always political.

Juliano Medeiros  @julianopsol50 · 10 de mai de 2019

Mentiroso é você! Os estudantes vão lotar as ruas na semana que vem. E se seus lacaios de plantão partirem pra repressão, saiba que teremos mais gente na rua em seguida. Isso aqui vai virar um Chile, com os estudantes liderando a derrocada de seu governo de extrema-direita.

800 176 2,8 mil

Em resposta a @julianopsol50 e @jairbolsonaro

Ôh o gás!



18,1 mil visualizações 0:54 / 1:19

1:37 PM · 10 de mai de 2019 · Twitter for Android

143 Retweets 1 mil Curtidas

Source: Juliano Medeiros [@julianopsol50]. (2019, May 10). *Mentiroso é você!* [Tweet]. Twitter. URL: <https://twitter.com/Miraci31/status/1126889019487465472> [accessed on January 12, 2020].

Note: Translation: 'You are the liar'; 'your robot-followers on duty'; 'your far-right administration'. 'Here comes the gas!', the same phrase shouted by those who sell kitchen gas cylinders on the streets of Brazil. Thus, the metonymic use of 'gas' was a pun aimed at legitimising the violent act presented in the video to silence others. The strategy is effective as interlocutors engage with the humorous sense of the message and ignore the violence it conveys. At this point of the discussion, there are no more concerns with budget issues or the role of education. It is simply a dispute between two identity groups who share more antagonistic positions on the partisanship spectrum than the ideological spectrum. Other users who

Instead, his reply focussed on the president's character and his administration ('you are the liar'; 'your robot-followers on duty'; 'your far-right administration') and called the opposition to the scheduled demonstrations, placing himself within this group ('students will fill the streets'; 'we'll have even more people'; 'with students leading'). The synecdoche applied to Chile ('this will turn into a Chile') refers to what occurred in the neighbouring country, where the population had taken to the streets for weeks that same year, paralysing the government and forcing the implementation of progressive policies.

Responding to this interaction, government supporters reacted mostly to the allegorical reply of a user who shared a

video in which students are dispersed by a police officer using pepper spray. The video is preceded by the comment 'Here comes the gas!', the same phrase shouted by those who sell kitchen gas cylinders on the streets of Brazil. Thus, the metonymic use of 'gas' was a pun aimed at legitimising the violent act presented in the video to silence others. The strategy is effective as interlocutors engage with the humorous sense of the message and ignore the violence it conveys. At this point of the discussion, there are no more concerns with budget issues or the role of education. It is simply a dispute between two identity groups who share more antagonistic positions on the partisanship spectrum than the ideological spectrum. Other users who

subsequently open the thread would be presented with a communicative event whose context favours a similar engagement.

As we can see, these discursive interactions are directly driven by the protocols and available resources of the communicative event (e.g., the algorithms of social platforms). Unaware of a process that seems transparent to them, individuals try to exercise active control over their daily interactions and conversations, and at the same time, they are also somewhat passive targets of public texts and discourses of other actors that exert influence over their beliefs and actions. Ultimately, the instrument of legitimation of actions undertaken by members of the same group is the ideology they share: 'In sum, ideologies form the basic principles of group-internal legitimation. They do so by specifying the ideological categories of membership' (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 257). However, these ideologies (e.g., moral conservatism about drugs) are semantically disconnected from what they ultimately legitimise: the (neoliberal) practice of charging fees to previously free education.

Discussion

(De)legitimising an inclusive university for everyone

In the first two government budgets that the Bolsonaro administration produced, the federal budget allocated to higher education was slashed by R\$1.1 billion each year. Although we cannot establish causality between the struggles analysed here and the subsequent political decisions, we can argue that the same neoliberal discourse pervades them. The powerful groups and symbolic elites who control the discourse structures of a communicative event (Van Dijk, 2015) are interested in the privatisation of education, and the delegitimation of public funding of universities and its redistributive function is instrumental for that process. In Brazil, the political movements that aim to exempt the state from its duty of ensuring public and free education have been associated both with the capitalist structural crisis (Minto, 2018) and the expected evolution of neoliberal governance (Costa & Goulart, 2018), which demonstrate their links with global circuits of neoliberalism.

In effect, in other countries, reforms in higher education systems have also increased the importance of student fees and other non-public sources for funding universities. We know from the management literature, for example, how that has increased students' expectation to learning market valued skills to access well-paid positions (Clegg et al., 2011); generated an instrumental race for institutional legitimacy and prestige by universities to attract more funding (Humphrey & Gendron, 2015); reduced sensitivity to university publicness replacing it for performance-based values (Chatelain-Ponroy et al., 2018); and contributed to the commodification of learning and reduction of access to segments of the population

(Bowes-Catton et al., 2020). Increasing dependence on private funding is part of a larger scheme of neoliberal governmentality in higher education, which creates 'a close entanglement between rationalities of governance of individuals and governance of markets' (Varman et al., 2011, p. 31). In this article, we focussed on the legitimation of this neoliberal discourse when applied to universities in Brazil.

Attempts of neoliberal reforms have targeted Brazilian higher education for a long time (Costa & Goulart, 2018), especially benefiting private institutions. Formal education in private universities and business schools may play an important role in perpetuating socio-economic inequality through the naturalisation of mechanisms of class privilege—as is also the case in other countries (Zulfikar & Prasad, 2021)—in contrast to the political claims of diversity embedded in public universities (Carmo et al., 2014). In the Brazilian context, the public governance of universities allows them to have considerable autonomy from the market and attain higher accessibility and teaching quality in relation to private institutions (Bielschowsky, 2019; Minto, 2018). The delegitimation of public universities on social media undermines, precisely, their autonomy, and approaching neoliberalism discursively enabled us to understand the local inflections of the neoliberal ideology and comprehend its mechanisms of operation.

The texts analysed here show a discursive attempt to change the very core of public funding. We showed here how false claims regarding technical debates (e.g., that only the elite would attend public universities) are intertwined with rhetorical and prejudicial framings (e.g., public universities as places of 'potheads'). The identity *topos* used in the second argument is much more engaging and definitive than the rational argument about students' economic profiles that could be refuted, and the debate managed to shift the agenda from the technical to the moral domain.

This mechanism that takes place in social network platforms demonstrates that the system of formulation that gives coherence to neoliberal discourse can also draw on other discourses that would not be immediately associated with neoliberalism. The implication is that the defence of neoliberal policies for universities is intertwined with—and sometimes exclusively appears through—a moral and identitarian political agenda. The cases here illustrate how the far right has systematically used moral discourses to defend neoliberal policies. This discursive strategy is extremely problematic because it suppresses the technical evaluation of the socio-economic impacts of public policies under consideration. We will now discuss our contributions to the debates on this discursive legitimation.

The struggle for discursive legitimacy on social media

As discussed above, the burden of neoliberalism in higher education has well-documented implications for universities,

and their effect also generates organised resistance within them (Ball, 2003; Bowes-Catton et al., 2020; Grima, 2011). However, much of this struggle happens before managerial decisions reach the universities. In that sense, this paper draws on the idea that social media is an important arena of dispute for legitimacy that can drive political decision-making as it 'provides a new way for internal organizational conflicts to emerge beyond an organization's boundaries that can be very consequential' (Knight & Tsoukas, 2019, p. 192). The scale of their importance has also been recently established by the literature, for example, 'what can be deduced from the USA 2016 elections is that social media, digital platforms and the internet have become game changers in political canvassing' (Ozden & Tanko, 2019, p. 190). What we have missed so far is knowing more about their dynamics of legitimation.

Through a socio-cognitive approach (Van Dijk, 2015), we proposed to interpret how debates on social media connect communicative events with social structure through the manipulation of mental models. The architecture of information on social network platforms favours the production of a communicative situation designed to generate identification with a group identity. Hence, the discourse of the opponent can be delegitimised regardless of the semantics of the original topic, for example, via *ad-hominem* fallacies, based on the affect that is mobilised via a structure of discursive practices linked to different social groups with which the individual identifies dynamically. Legitimation is 'one of the main social functions of ideologies' (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 255), but the ideological bases that underpin the disputes are often concealed, and critical discourse analysis helps to reconnect them with the uttered claims.

Previous literature had shown the importance of discursive analysis for interpreting processes of legitimation and legitimacy struggles (Vaara, 2014; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Vaara et al., 2006). However, this literature has only recently been mobilised in the particularity of the social media context (Glozer et al., 2019). Our findings confirm, for example, how the 'closing power' (Van Dijk, 2015) that the algorithm uses to hide certain utterances for the benefit of others resembles the function of 'discursive finalization' (Glozer et al., 2019) that singularises authorised voices. We have also made further contributions to this field, by analysing the open arenas of social network platforms and revealing the politics of legitimation at the macro level. The management field approaches the conditions of institutional change as temporary, in which the conflict of legitimacy judgements would be resolved with the reestablishment of the factors that prevent deviant judgement expression (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). However, deviant opinions cannot be completely suppressed in social media. They thus need to be hidden or discredited, making the politics of legitimation emerge.

Previous literature in management and beyond had also shown other examples of how disruptive social media has been within and across organisations, with legitimacy implications even when legitimacy is not mobilised as a concept. This dynamic was seen for instance during Brexit and the 2016 USA election, where a new political discourse emerged to 'play on the unconscious and the emotions in ways that serve to reframe the debate' (Schmidt, 2017, p. 260). Likewise, the mobilisation of populist discourses for political gains in the past decade has often relied on the same channels worldwide (Barros & Wanderley, 2020; Knight & Tsoukas, 2019; Kreis, 2017). In effect, the openness of social media platforms had already been previously associated with uncensored communication channels inviting difference and dissent in the legitimation process (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Glozer et al., 2019). Building on that literature, our contribution has demonstrated the ideological mechanisms of discourse control that enable (de)legitimation. We have showed that the informational architecture available in the structure of interactions on social media is the main reason for the shift of the so-called argumentative *topos* in our case from national policy (technical) to moral behaviour (identity).

Concluding remarks

The present article analysed the dispute for legitimacy of public universities and their funding in Brazil, based on the changes that the growing use of social media has caused in how people produce and consume (de)legitimising discourses of public higher education. We demonstrated how the architecture of information on social media changes how discourse is (re)produced and consumed and enables the mental model to be manipulated in the communicative event. The focus on moral *topos* that highlight identity conflicts and hinder the open debate on the importance of universities posed enormous challenges for the debates of educational models that are alternatives to the neoliberal *status quo*. In this context, such political and economic proposals are legitimised with moral and behavioural justifications.

As we have discussed in this paper, in recent years, successive cuts in the funding of universities have been discursively legitimised worldwide, oblivious to all the evidence of the failure of the Washington Consensus on the expansion of private higher education, particularly in developing countries (Nurunnabi, 2018). Our analysis helps in understanding how these processes of legitimation take place beyond the technical evidence, and this is why our analysis of discursive legitimation has theoretical and practical implications. Following the vast literature on the effects of neoliberal reforms for the commodification of higher education, we have also been reminded of the importance of critically (re)imagining (Patriotta & Starkey, 2008) and changing (Contu, 2018) the university.

Unveiling neoliberalism behind the moral evaluation of public universities helps to refocus the debates to the implication of public policies in higher education.

Finally, although we used data from Facebook and Twitter in our analysis, the mechanism is similar for other social network platforms, such as Instagram or LinkedIn. Interaction among individuals on social media means that communicative events mobilise more than the consumption and reproduction of the discourse initially conveyed in a post. Social media algorithms can select and leverage existing interactions, which are crucial to manipulating the mental model defining how the final message will be absorbed. This has become a powerful tool to influence political decision-making and seek to establish legitimacy. However, understanding these mechanisms of operation of social media allows users to keep disputing it, and new communicative situations can be created by dissenting voices of active users.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the senior editor, Devi Vijay, and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments, which helped strengthen the arguments of the paper. The views presented here do not necessarily reflect the position of the authors' respective institutions, and the publisher.

Conflict of interest and funding

Daniel S. Lacerda is a member of LabEx Entrepreneurship, funded by the French government (LabEx Entreprendre, ANR-10-Labex-11-01).

References

- Ball, S. J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215–228. doi: 10.1080/0268093022000043065
- Barros, A., & Wanderley, S. (2020). Brazilian businessmen movements: Right-wing populism and the (dis)connection between policy and politics. *Organization*, 27(3), 394–404. doi: 10.1177/1350508419883378
- Bielschowsky, C. E. (2019). Avaliando o desempenho e custos da graduação das Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior. *EaD em Foco*, 9(1), 1–23. doi: 10.18264/eadf.v9i1.828
- Bitektine, A., & Haack, P. (2015). The “macro” and the “micro” of legitimacy: Toward a multilevel theory of the legitimacy process. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1), 49–75. doi: 10.5465/amr.2013.0318
- Bouvier, G., & Machin, D. (2018). Critical discourse analysis and the challenges and opportunities of social media. *Review of Communication*, 18(3), 178–192. doi: 10.1080/15358593.2018.1479881
- Bowes-Catton, H., Brewis, J., Clarke, C., Drake, D. H., Gilmour, A., & Penn, A. (2020). Talkin' 'bout a revolution? From quiescence to resistance in the contemporary university. *Management Learning*, 51(4), 378–397. doi: 10.1177/1350507620925633
- Carmo, E. F., Chagas, J. A. S., Figueiredo Filho, D. B., & Rocha, E. C. (2014). Políticas públicas de democratização do acesso ao ensino superior e estrutura básica de formação no ensino médio regular. *Revista brasileira de estudos pedagógicos*, 95(240), 304–327. doi: 10.1590/S2176-66812014000200004
- Ceron, A., Curini, L., Iacus, S. M., & Porro, G. (2014). Every tweet counts? How sentiment analysis of social media can improve our knowledge of citizens' political preferences with an application to Italy and France. *New Media & Society*, 16(2), 340–358. doi: 10.1177/1461444813480466
- Chatelain-Ponroy, S., Mignot-Gérard, S., Musselin, C., & Sponem, S. (2018). Is commitment to performance-based management compatible with commitment to university “publicness”? Academics' values in French universities. *Organization Studies*, 39(10), 1377–1401. doi: 10.1177/0170840617717099
- Clegg, S., Dany, F., & Grey, C. (2011). Critical management studies and managerial education: New contexts? New agenda? *M@n@gement*, 14(5), 271–279.
- Contu, A. (2018). “... The point is to change it” – Yes, but in what direction and how? Intellectual activism as a way of “walking the talk” of critical work in business schools. *Organization*, 25(2), 282–293. doi: 10.1177/1350508417740589
- Costa, C. F., & Goulart, S. (2018). The academic capitalism and neo-liberal reforms in Brazilian higher education. *Cadernos EBAPE.BR*, 16(3), 396–409. doi: 10.1590/1679-395165788
- Da Silva, D. R., & Kerbauy, M. T. M. (2019). Eleições 2018 e a forte influência das redes sociais. In C. Costa & P. Blanco (Eds.), *Liberdade de Expressão Questões da atualidade* (pp. 125–143). Universidade de São Paulo. doi: 10.11606/9788572052597
- De Cock, C. (1998). Organisational change and discourse: Hegemony, resistance and reconstitution. *M@n@gement*, 1(1), 1–22.
- Durham, E. R. (2003). *O ensino superior no Brasil: público e privado. Trabalho apresentado ao Núcleo de Pesquisas sobre Ensino Superior da Universidade de São Paulo*. Retrieved from <https://sites.usp.br/nupps/wp-content/uploads/sites/762/2020/12/dt0303.pdf>
- Estadão. (2018). *Equipe de Bolsonaro quer cobrança de mensalidade em universidades federais* [Facebook post]. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/estado/posts/2850236591658051>
- Forelle, M. C., Howard, P. N., Monroy-Hernandez, A., & Savage, S. (2015). Political bots and the manipulation of public opinion in venezuela. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi: 10.2139/ssrn.2635800
- <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2635800>Gabielkov, M., Ramachandran, A., Chaintreau, A., & Legout, A. (2016). Social clicks: What and who gets read on Twitter? In S. Alouf & A. Jean-Marie (Chair). *Proceedings of the International Conference on Measurement and Modeling of Computer Science—SIGMETRICS '16* (pp. 179–192). Antibes Juan-les-Pins (France). doi: 10.1145/2896377.2901462
- Glozer, S., Caruana, R., & Hibbert, S. A. (2019). The never-ending story: Discursive legitimation in social media dialogue. *Organization Studies*, 40(5), 625–650. doi: 10.1177/0170840617751006
- Grima, F. (2011). Between authenticity and conformism: Ideological tension as a lever for change in Business School. *M@n@gement*, 14(5), 311–350.
- Humphrey, C., & Gendron, Y. (2015). What is going on? The sustainability of accounting academia. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 26, 47–66. doi: 10.1016/j.cpa.2014.09.008
- Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais (INEP). (2022). *Censo da Educação Superior 2020*. Retrieved from https://download.inep.gov.br/educacao_superior/censo_superior/documentos/2020/tabelas_de_divulgacao_censo_da_educacao_superior_2020.pdf
- Jaidka, K., Ahmed, S., Skoric, M., & Hilbert, M. (2019). Predicting elections from social media: A three-country, three-method comparative study. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 29(3), 252–273. doi: 10.1080/01292986.2018.1453849

- Jelonek, M., & Mazur, S. (2020). Necessary changes, adverse effects? The institutional patterns of adaptation of economics universities to changes prompted by the reform of Poland's science and higher education system. *Management Learning*, 51(4), 472–490. doi: 10.1177/1350507620913896
- Jones, D. R., Visser, M., Stokes, P., Örténblad, A., Deem, R., Rodgers, P., & Tarba, S. Y. (2020). The performative university: "Targets", "terror" and "taking back freedom" in academia. *Management Learning*, 51(4), 363–377. doi: 10.1177/1350507620927554
- Kemp, S. (2022, January 26). *Digital 2022: Global overview report*. Datareportal. Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report>
- KhosraviNik, M. (2017). Social media critical discourse studies (SM-CDS). In J. Flowerdew & J. E. Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical discourse studies* (pp. 582–596). Routledge.
- Knight, E., & Tsoukas, H. (2019). When fiction Trumps truth: What "post-truth" and "alternative facts" mean for management studies. *Organization Studies*, 40(2), 183–197. doi: 10.1177/0170840618814557
- Kreis, R. (2017). The "Tweet politics" of president trump. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(4), 607–618. doi: 10.1075/jlp.17032.kre
- McCann, L., Granter, E., Hyde, P., & Aroles, J. (2020). "Upon the gears and upon the wheels": Terror convergence and total administration in the neoliberal university. *Management Learning*, 51(4), 431–451. doi: 10.1177/1350507620924162
- Miller, B. (2010). Skills for sale: What is being commodified in higher education? *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 34(2), 199–206. doi: 10.1080/03098771003695460
- Minto, L. W. (2018). Gratuidade do ensino superior em estabelecimentos oficiais: precisão e implicações. *Educação & Sociedade*, 39(142), 153–170. doi: 10.1590/ES0101-73302018181580
- Nurunnabi, M. (2018). Accounting for accountability: A critical reflection on the private higher education in Bangladesh. *Administration & Society*, 50(3), 429–470. doi: 10.1177/0095399715587523
- OECD (2021). *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/b35a14e5-en
- Ozden, P. K., & Tanko, A. R. (2019). From Cambridge analytica to "O To Ge" (enough is enough): The dynamics of political canvassing and elections in a social media environment. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, III(XII), 185–193.
- Parker, L. (2002). It's been a pleasure doing business with you: A strategic analysis and critique of university change management. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 13(5–6), 603–619. doi: 10.1006/cpac.2002.0561
- Patriotta, G., & Starkey, K. (2008). From utilitarian morality to moral imagination: Reimagining the business school. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17(4), 319–327. doi: 10.1177/1056492608324449
- Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2009). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 63–94). Sage.
- Schmidt, V. A. (2017). Britain-out and trump-in: A discursive institutionalist analysis of the British referendum on the EU and the US presidential election. *Review of International Political Economy*, 24(2), 248–269. doi: 10.1080/09692290.2017.1304974
- Stillman, G. (1974). The concept of legitimacy. *Polity*, 7(1), 32–56.
- Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 571–610. doi: 10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331
- Vaara, E. (2014). Struggles over legitimacy in the Eurozone crisis: Discursive legitimation strategies and their ideological underpinnings. *Discourse & Society*, 25(4), 500–518. doi: 10.1177/0957926514536962
- Vaara, E., & Tienari, J. (2008). A discursive perspective on legitimation strategies in multinational corporations. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(4), 985–993. Retrieved from <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02276724>
- Vaara, E., & Tienari, J. (2011). On the narrative construction of multinational corporations: An antenarrative analysis of legitimation and resistance in a cross-border merger. *Organization Science*, 22(2), 370–390. doi: 10.1287/orsc.1100.0593
- Vaara, E., Tienari, J., & Laurila, J. (2006). Pulp and paper fiction: On the discursive legitimation of global industrial restructuring. *Organization Studies*, 27(6), 789–813. doi: 10.1177/0170840606061071
- Van Dijk, T. (1998). *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Sage. doi: 10.4135/9781446217856
- Van Dijk, T. (2011). Discourse, knowledge, power and politics. In C. Hart (Ed.), *Critical discourse studies in context and cognition* (pp. 27–64). John Benjamins. doi: 10.1075/dapsac.43.03van
- Van Dijk, T. (2014). Discourse-cognition-society: Current state and prospects of the socio-cognitive approach to discourse. In C. Hart & P. Cap (Eds.), *Contemporary critical discourse studies* (pp. 123–148). Bloomsbury.
- Van Dijk, T. (2015). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 466–485). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Varman, R., Saha, B., & Skälén, P. (2011). Market subjectivity and neoliberal governmentality in higher education. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(11–12), 1163–1185. doi: 10.1080/0267257X.2011.609134
- Wieners, S., & Weber, S. M. (2020). Athena's claim in an academic regime of performativity: Discursive organizing of excellence and gender at the intersection of heterotopia and heteronomia. *Management Learning*, 51(4), 511–530. doi: 10.1177/1350507620915198
- Willmott, H. (1995). Managing the academics: Commodification and control in the development of university education in the U.K. *Human Relations*, 48(9), 993–1027. doi: 10.1177/001872679504800902
- Zulfiqar, G., & Prasad, A. (2021). Challenging social inequality in the Global South: Class, privilege, and consciousness-raising through critical management education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 20(2), 156–181. doi: 10.5465/amle.2019.0294