Topics (Disinformation)

AUTHOR
Anna Staender, Edda Humprecht

KEYWORDS
topics, disinformation, sources, misinformation, conspiracy theories, social media

BRIEF DESCRIPTION
The topic variable is used in research on disinformation to analyze thematic differences in the content of false news, rumors, conspiracies, etc. Those topics are frequently based on national news agendas, i.e. producers of disinformation address current national or world events (e.g. elections, immigration, etc.) (Humprecht, 2019).

FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION
Topics are a central yet under-researched aspect of research on online disinformation (Freelon & Wells, 2020). The research interest is to find out which topics are taken up and spread by disinformation producers. The focus of this research is both on specific key topics for which sub-themes are identified (e.g. elections, climate change, Covid-19) and, more generally, on the question of which misleading content is disseminated (mostly on social media). Methodologically, the identification of topics is often a first step followed by further analysis of the content (Ferrara, 2017). Thus, the analysis of topics is linked to the detection of disinformation, which represents a methodological challenge. Topics can be identified inductively or deductively. Inductive analyses often use a data corpus, for example social media data, and try to identify topics using techniques such as topic modelling (e.g. Boberg et al., 2020). Deductive analyses frequently use topic lists to classify contents. Topics lists are initially created based on the literature on the respective topic or with the help of databases, e.g. by fact-checkers.

REFERENCES/COMBINATION WITH OTHER METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION
Studies on topics of disinformation use both manual and automated content analysis or combinations of both to investigate the occurrence of different topics in texts (Boberg et al., 2020; Bradshaw, Howard, Kollanyi, & Neudert, 2020). Inductive and deductive approaches have been combined with qualitative text analyses to identify topic categories which are subsequently coded (Humprecht, 2019; Marchal, Kollanyi, Neudert, & Howard, 2019).

EXAMPLE STUDIES:
Ferrara (2017); Humprecht (2019); Marchal et al. (2019)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
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</table>
| Ferrara (2017)  | Content type: Tweets  
Sampling period: April 27, 2017 to May 7, 201  
Sample size: 16.65 million tweets  
Hashtags:  
#Macron, #Presidentielle2017, #fn, #JeVote, #LePen, #France, #2017LeDebat, #MacronLeaks, #Marine2017, #debat2017, #2017LeDébat, #MacronGate, #MarineLePen, #Whirlpool, #EnMarche, #JeVoteMacron, #MacronPresident, #JamaisMacron, #FrenchElection | –           |
| Humprecht (2019)| Content type: fact checks  
Outlet/ country: 2 fact checkers per country (AT, DE, UK, US)  
Sampling period: June 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017  
Sample size: N=651  
Unit of analysis: story/ fact-check  
No. of topics coded: main topic per fact-check  
Level of analysis: fact checks and fact-checker | conspiracy theory, education, election campaign, environment, government/public administration (at the time when the story was published), health, immigration/integration, justice/crime, labor/employment, macroeconomics/economic regulation, media/journalism, science/technology, war/terror, others | Krippendorff’s alpha = 0.71 |
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<tr>
<td>Marchal et al. (2019)</td>
<td>Content type: tweets related to the European elections 2019 Sampling: hashtags in English, Catalan, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish Sampling criteria: (1) contained at least one of the relevant hashtags; (2) contained the hashtag in the URL shared, or the title of its webpage; (3) were a retweet of a message that contained a relevant hashtag or mention in the original message; (4) were a quoted tweet referring to a tweet with a relevant hashtag or mention Sampling period: 5 April and 20 April, 2019 Sample size: 584,062 tweets from 187,743 unique users</td>
<td>Religion Islam (Muslim, Islam, Hijab, Halal, Muslima, Minaret) Religion Christianity (Christianity, Church, Priest) Immigration (Asylum Seeker, Refugee, Migrants, Child Migrant, Dual Citizenship, Social Integration) Terrorism (ISIS, Djihad, Terrorism, Terrorist Attack) Political Figures/Parties (Vladimir Putin, Enrico Mezzetti, Emmanuel Macron, ANPI, Arnold van Doorn, Islamic Party for Unity, Nordic Resistance Movement) Celebrities (Lara Trump, Alba Parietti) Crime (Vandalism, Rape, Sexual Assault, Fraud, Murder, Honour Killing) Notre-Dame Fire (Notre-Dame Fire, Reconstruction) Political Ideology (Anti-Fascism, Fascism, Nationalism) Social Issues (Abortion, Bullying, Birth Rate)</td>
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REFERENCES

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