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Nina Fernandes dos Santos

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## **Social media and democratic challenges: visibility inequalities in the 2013 Brazilian protests**

Nina Santos<sup>1</sup>

Brazil is currently experiencing one of the most complex political moments in its history. Although it is difficult to delimit the development of this situation over time, it is clear that the demonstrations that took place in June 2013 were a turning point in the Brazilian context. Until then, Brazil was living in a considerably stable period. During the governments of Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and the beginning of the government of Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), the economy was developing rapidly, social policies improved as never the lives of the poorest population, the public system of education grew, and the rates of government approval were extremely high. Everything seemed to be fine.

It was in June 2013 that the country discovered, surprisingly enough<sup>2</sup>, a huge dissatisfaction that was hidden in the social fabric. The governments of the Workers' Party<sup>3</sup> had brought about an undeniable improvement in material life and access to services, but had not changed the basis for the production of inequalities. Brazilian cities continued to be areas of exclusion and disparities. With the initial motivation to fight against the rising price of public transport, in a context where Brazil was the seat of major international sporting events, and with a government that seemed to be reaching its limits, the Brazilians used the opportunity to be heard.

The protests that began in late May 2013 have spread across the country and opened a protest cycle (Bringel, 2016). The historical discussion of public transport, which had already been a theme of several protests in Brazil, this time manages to gather around itself an impressive amount of people as well as other causes of discontent. In the following years, the country saw a significant political polarization expressed in the movements for and against the dismissal of President Dilma Rousseff during 2015 and 2016. The paths that connect these two moments are not straight and not at all obvious.

Several elements make up the unprecedented crisis experienced by the country: on one hand, the political world and the traditional organizations of representation are extremely discredited;

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<sup>1</sup> PhD candidate at Université Panthéon-Assas.

<sup>2</sup> The 2013 protests were surprising in size, strength and diversity. This does not mean that this movement is born out of nowhere. Several movements and organizations already highlighted the dissatisfaction of the citizens at that moment. (Bringel & Pleyers, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Leftist political party founded in 1983 to which belong Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff. The party arrives for the first time in the Presidency of Brazil in the elections of 2002, with Lula da Silva.

on the other hand the citizens no longer accept an aged political system full of privileges and find in the streets and on social networks places to express this dissatisfaction.

The understanding of this phenomenon, still in progress, is extremely complex and can be made from several angles of view. Among the incalculable uncertainties of this process, the central role that communication played appears as one of the rare consensus. Although the importance, power and consequences of this role are highly controversial among the various analysts, the fact that the professional media and digital social networks have been one of the key elements of this process is undeniable (Santos, 2018).

Social media was highly used in the protests challenging the traditional communication system that was already in place. Although the democratization of the right to publish information and opinions that social media brings cannot be confused with the democratization of the right to be read, seen and heard, the struggle for visibility that the different discourses will entail will be redefined. If, on one hand, the high use of social media does not mean a necessary change on the power balance of the communication system, on the other the emergence of these media does challenge and offer alternatives to the system that was in place.

Our aim with this article is thus to discuss how the visibility process is configured in this communication environment and how do the actors that compose this environment interact with each other.

### **Visibility as a democratic challenge**

The sphere of public visibility can be understood as "that dimension of social life that is visible, accessible, available to knowledge and public domain" (Gomes, 2008, p.134). This sphere has always been part of community life and is responsible for embracing and organizing collective knowledge common to all or at least to a large part of a particular community.

This sphere is shaped by the publicity processes, which expose the public to the acts and procedures of actors and social institutions. The greater the number of people who know certain information, the higher its level of publicity. The publicity process is opposed to that of privacy (Bentham, 1943).

Considered as an essential part of the community life, the public sphere of visibility will be constituted in different manners over time. If centuries ago the shared knowledge of a

community was mainly based on the direct experience of its citizens, nowadays the media has a main role in sharing information within a community. That means that, even though one did not see or live directly a certain fact, he may be aware of it if that event was elected by the media as something worth sharing with a large public.

Entering in this public sphere of visibility is essential to social movements, since it is thru this that it may attend its objectives to influence society, political decisions and/or public opinion. Gitlin wrote, in 1980, discussing the Students for a Democratic Society movement in 1965 in the USA, that « political movements feel called upon to rely on large-scale communications in order to *matter*, to say who they are and what they intend to publics they want to sway » (p.3).

In reference to Gitlin's perception that movements need to adapt to what was considered news by the mass media, for example, internet and specially social media will bring considerable changes. Not only because journalists will no longer be the exclusive mediators to choose what is or is not a story, but also because the concept of what is noticeable itself will be radically redefined. Become known on the internet – or become viral – will depend on different aspects that what took a journalist of an important media outlet to present a certain coverage. That means also that the ways the movements organize themselves to obtain the objective of having a media coverage will change and that has a concrete consequence on the movement itself.

So, the fact of being seen (and the reactions that might generate) will also influence the movement itself. “Control of the media, and of symbolic production therefore, becomes both an essential premise for any attempt at political mobilization and an autonomous source of conflict” (Della Porta, 2013, p.27). So the visibility dispute and the construction of the movement itself are two processes that take place side by side.

Maybe the most important shift in this relation is not how the movements deal with the necessity to capture the attention of others, but rather how the movements became capable of generating attention on themselves. With social media, they have tools that allow them to more easily participate on the public debate. Not on a separate media space, as it happened with movement's journals, for example, but in a space where people, parties, mass media, political organizations etc already are. Of course that participation does not happen on an equality of conditions for all these different actors, but they are participants with the potential to influence the debate.

What we want to highlight here is that the way this visibility dispute will take place is reconfigured by the inclusion of social media on the communication landscape. These new

media will defy the journalist gatekeeping power that for long was responsible for selecting what could or not enter the public sphere. This power does not disappear at all, but it is constantly challenged by alternative narratives that are presented on social media and have the potential to gain wide visibility (both thru social media channels or the cooptation of mass media itself).

The discussion about media systems seems to be a fruitful way in order to better understand this dynamic of visibility dispute intra and inter media.

### **Media systems: a comprehensive approach to the construction of public debate**

In regards to social media, much has been said about its potential capabilities to offer new speech opportunities to unheard social groups and challenge communication power structures in place. Although social media may be seen as an environment that increases possibilities to fight inequalities in terms of expression and participation on the public debate (Castells, 2013), it is still full of inequalities. At the same time that this new possibility gives voice to a number of social groups that didn't have a stage before, it does not guarantee an equitable division of visibility.

These inequalities become clear when we realize that social media cannot be analyzed neither as a homogeneous or isolated communication environment. Social media are not homogeneous for a lot of reasons (different logics of different platforms, different uses among different countries etc), but the main reason of heterogeneity that interests us here is the variety of actors that participate in this environment. Although social media is mainly remembered for spreading the share of voice to citizens and groups that did not have access to it before, the reality is much more complex. Governments, institutions, social movements, they are all present and active on social media. It is also important to notice that mainstream media is extremely present on social media and frequently has a central role on the debates that take place in those platforms. So, even though the logic of broadcast is challenged in many ways with the emergence of social media, the main players of that logic are also present on the new environment, what makes an opposition between the two completely false. They are much more complimentary than opposed.

Too often, research and theorization on media and/or communication practices in relation to activism and social movements are reduced either to a focus on the internet as a new panacea for social movements and activists, or a focus on the importance of

mainstream media representations of protest that resonate beyond like-minded individuals. However, it is precisely the interplay between different forms of mediation and a wide variety of media practices/formats that has particular relevance for present-day activism and practices of resistance. (Cammaerts, Mattoni and McCurdy, 2013, p.3)

This diversity of players leads to clear differences both in terms of structures behind the work on social media and the visibility they get. Mass media outlets and traditional organizations in general tend to have more resources (human and financial) to dedicate to the work on social media, while collectives or less structured organizations tend to have less resources. Even though the relationship between structure and visibility is not a direct one, this structure may impact the outcome of the message, especially in regards to the possibility of pay services, such as advertisements.

Online and offline are two extremely imbricated dimensions of the same reality. “The network is not just a place that we occasionally visit to look for something special, it becomes more and more the central ground of individual daily life.” (Dahlgren, 2012, p.16).

Because of that, inequalities existing in our societies may not be expected to disappear in the online environment. The critics about the debates being led by the main stream media on the offline world are not resolved just with the existence of online media itself. As the online dimension of reality is very strongly imbricated in the offline dimension, some of the inequalities are just reproduced between the two dimensions. But it is also interesting to see that the technology has also a central role in how the relations are established in this environment.

Our initial interest in analyzing the role of social media use on the Brazilian wave of protests of 2013 showed rapidly to be insufficient. Social media cannot be analyzed neither as homogeneous nor as an isolated media, what forces us to find a broader concept that allows us to understand both: the complexity of the social media dynamics that takes place in the media itself and the relation with other actors in play on the larger media landscape.

The concept of hybrid media system, proposed by Chadwick (2013) seems to be a suitable way to introduce this analysis. The author explains that the concept emerges from the premise that it is necessary to try “to integrate the roles played by older and newer media in political life” (p.4). That approach would avoid the reductionist analysis centered only on supposedly new or old media, instead focuses on their interactions.

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

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

The author considers that the notion of hybridity may be useful to understand three main elements: power relations among political actors, media actors and publics; the idea of system; and the idea of media logics.

To Chadwick (2013), the power relations are at the core of the understanding of these complex systems and he highlights that the analysis must involve not only the relationship between social actors, but also the relation between social actors and technology, as suggests the Latourian actor-network theory. The notion of system will be addressed as a flexible, adaptable and evolutionary concept, as it emerges from the sum of social interactions. The notion of system also integrates a sense of interdependence. Even if the different actors that form a system are unequal and entail different power relations, there must be a level a cooperation that enables the existence of the system itself. This dynamic “sometimes gives those with fewer obvious resources the power to act in ways that force adaptation among those who seemingly had greater resources before specific interactions began.” (Chadwick, 2013, p.17). Power is seen as emerging from the system, in a relational and contextual manner.

Media logics, in its turn, is conceptualized after Peter Dahlgren as “the imperatives that shape the particular attributes and ways of doing things within given media and even within specific genres” (2009, p.52). The notion is useful to understand both the power of media and the power within media. It considers that the interactions between media and political systems are crucial to understand what is seen and built as publicly valued information and communication and that the logics power is co-created by media, political actors and publics. In the complex media

landscape of nowadays, there would be a variety of competing and overlapping media logics (Chadwick, 2013).

### **Who's talking on social media?**

The first step to understand the use of social media in the Brazilian protests of 2013 is to identify who were the different actors constructing the debate. Our aim is to understand how the communication system is formed and how does the interaction between actors take place.

To analyze the media ecosystem of the 2013 Brazilian protests we organized our findings around four major actors that produced information. These categories were not previously chosen, they were identified in the analysis of a test corpus of interviews and social media content.

The first one is formed by mass media outlets, which, with different framings, have made an intensive coverage of events. The second consists on the movement's own communication channels, including their action on digital social networks. The third one is based on independent media collectives who made real-time coverages of events, frequently from within movements. And the fourth actor is a broad, unorganized flow of information from the thousands of citizens who participated in events (online or offline) and produced and broadcasted contents on the subject. All these actors are producing and disseminating content on social media and nourishing the debate that takes place on it.

More than the different uses of each of these actors, what interests us here are the frequent interactions between these different media logics that form a multimedia communication network (Ahy, 2014). This interaction is largely produced via social networks, which function both as a publishing platform accessible to different information producers and as a place for interaction and dissemination.

Social movements in general, and protest movements more specifically, have always participated in the dispute over the construction of their images. "Indeed, whether they like it or not, any social group that manifests produces at the same time a public image of itself." (Champagne, 1984, p.24). That is the center of the visibility dispute we'll analyze here.



## **Visibility dynamics on Twitter**

Having in mind the different actors that are in play on social media when we talk about the Brazilian protests of 2013, we will analyze, in this section, how they interact and what inequalities emerge from that.

Our analysis is based on 97.707 tweets collected between July 1<sup>st</sup> and September 30<sup>th</sup> 2013 around the hashtag #vemprarua, one of the most active during the protests. This hashtag means “come to the streets” and was largely used as a call for participation on the protests. The data was collected and generously made available by the Laboratório de Estudos sobre Imagem e Cibercultura da Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (Brazil).

From the interviews we made, it became clear that there was a frequent and strong discourse of the interviewed about the possibilities of social media to oppose the mass media narrative and create an alternative discourse about the movements. The relation with professional media could appear in many ways. Lycarião (2011) for example identified a role of complementarity and enlargement given to digital communication in comparison to professional media, in a Greenpeace action. But in the case of the Brazilian protests of 2013, the discourses of the actors interviewed show a clear opposition.

Nevertheless, considering the variety and heterogeneity of actors that are in play in the environment of social media, we consider that the issue, built as a single opposition, may not be as simple as that. If we see social media as an environment of interaction between different actors and where inequalities exist, it is possible that professional media still drives the public discussion in this media, in certain circumstances.

To further investigate how these different actors appear on the discussions, we tried to do both an analysis of the share of voice, that is to say, who is talking and who's being heard on the discussion, but also an analysis of the source of the contents that are driving the conversation.

What interests us here is to characterize how the media system around the protests is formed and how do the different actors that are part of the system interact. So, what interests us on the corpus of tweets are the different practices that show these interactions.

The analysis of the practices of the users in this corpus of tweets seems also useful to understand the interactions between the different actors involved in the discussion. We tried to identify some of the different practices the users adopt on this online discussion on Twitter. We focused

on analyzing the practices that may help us to understand how the communication system works and which are the roles of the different actors.

The first and most obvious practice is the simple act of tweeting. As we can see in Table 1, the conversation around the hashtag is centered on a few users that post a lot and many users that post very few. The most active user posted alone 13.963 times, that is to say that he was responsible for 14,3% of the messages of the analyzed period. In total, 1001 users posted with the hashtag, which means that the average of posts is almost 98 messages per person.

That logic of concentration of the intense activity on few users and followed by the dispersion of few messages along a great number of users is solidly consistent with the power law model<sup>4</sup> (Hale et al., 2018).

The most active user, with 13963 tweets made in the period of analysis, was *anonymousfrai*. The profile name is Anonymous Fraiburgo and its description says only “FRAIBURGO – SC”, in a clear reference to a city located in the state of Santa Catarina, in the south region of Brazil. The profile, that was created in June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013, in the middle of the protests, also links to a blog with the same name, which is no longer active. The little information about this account leads us to image it is identified with the Anonymous organization, but the enormous number of posts the possibility of actually being a *bot*<sup>5</sup>. There is no apparent explanation for it to be in Fraiburgo, a small city, on the Brazilian country side. The last tweet of the account was made on May 7<sup>th</sup> 2015, but it seems an automatic message from an application. The last political content shared is from January 9<sup>th</sup> 2015. The profile has done 49.772 tweets, but has only 435 followers and follows 3 other twitter accounts<sup>6</sup>. The activity of the profile is mainly based on retweets from different profiles that tweet about the protests. Almost the totality of the tweets that are replicated contain the hashtag #vemprarua, which may indicate that the profile automatically retweets everything that is posted with the hashtag. But there is no way of knowing that for sure.

The second most active user is *vemprarua\_ja*. It was responsible for 2513 tweets, but is no longer active, so we cannot retrieve its information. *Oan\_max\_ik* is the third most active user, with 1418 tweets. This profile is entitled Alone Knight and describes itself as “Waiting for the revolution & nothing new on the front ... Where did I go wrong. Well, but to be wrong is to be

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<sup>4</sup> Or heavy tailed distributions more broadly, as prefer Hale, John, Margetts and Yasseri (2018).

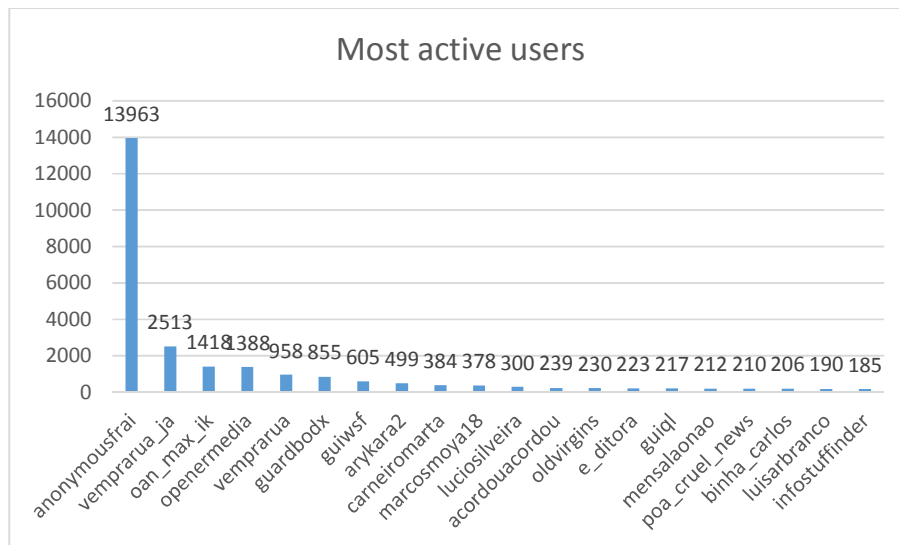
<sup>5</sup> An internet bot is a software application that runs automated scripts over the Internet.

<sup>6</sup> Data was collected on June 16th 2018.

right according to Popper and so the ship goes MAXIKOANS”<sup>7</sup>. It exists since September 5<sup>th</sup> 2012 and has tweeted 134.350 times, has 6.708 followers and follows 7.071 profiles<sup>8</sup>. The last post on the timeline was done on June 16<sup>th</sup> 2018, only 14 hours before the moment of these data collection, which shows that the profile is still active. Although there is no mention to the profile being a journalist or working for a media outlet, almost the totality of the posts are tweets about articles from the site Brazil Openermedia, whose twitter profile is exactly the fourth most active user.

The Openermedia profile entitles itself “Dissent and pax” and stamps the following description: “MAXIKOANS - This Tool Wants to Open Corporate Media and Their Hidden Interests. Protected ARTICLE 19LAW Freedom of Expression and Information”<sup>9</sup>. Its last post was also on June 16<sup>th</sup> 2018 and the profile has 902 followers while follows 357 profiles<sup>10</sup>. The profile, that exists since November 26<sup>th</sup> 2012, also shows a hyperlink to the website of the organization, registered under the blog host Blogspot (openermedia.blogspot.com). Its timeline is composed by tweets about articles from their website, but also by retweets of various profiles.

**Table 1**



<sup>7</sup> “Esperando pela revolução & nada de novo no Front... Aonde foi que errei. Well, but errar é acertar de acordo com Popper e assim La Nave Vá MAXIKOANS”, in the original in Portuguese

<sup>8</sup> Data was collected on June 17th 2018.

<sup>9</sup> “MAXIKOANS - Esta Ferramenta Pretende Abrir A Midia Corporativa E Seus Interesses Ocultos. Protegido ARTICLE 19LAW Liberdade de Expressão e Informação”, in the original in Portuguese

<sup>10</sup> Data was collected on June 17th 2018.

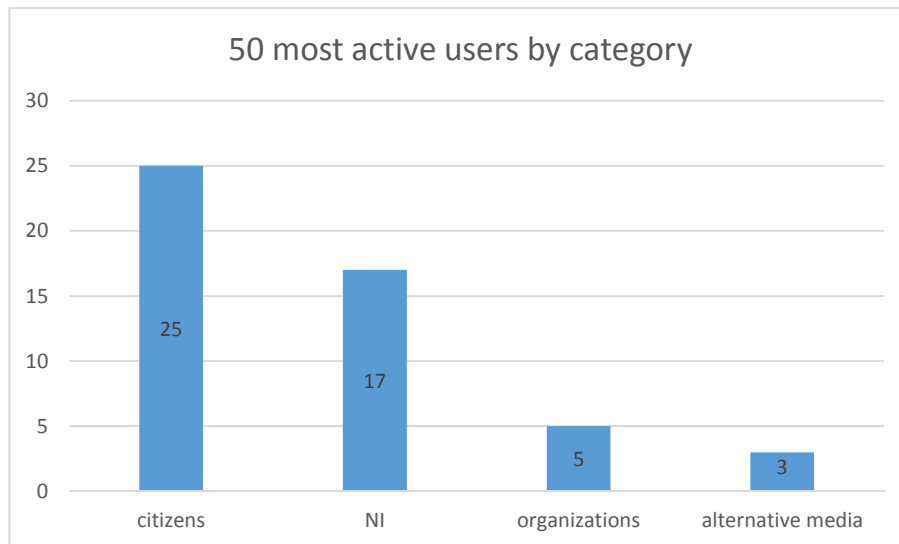
When we take a closer look to these users and try to categorize them in analytical categories (Table 1), we can see some interesting information. The categories we use were built from the analysis of the data, trying to regroup than in group more or less homogeneous that would enable us to identify some trends.

Six categories were drawn from the initial analysis of the data: organizations, mass media, alternative media, celebrities, citizens and non-identified (NI). We categorized as organizations all users that are clearly identified with an organization. It might be a political party, a government or an online collective, what interests us is the collective dimension of this profiles. All the profiles related to mass media outlets or to professionals that are known by their work on one of these outlets (such as presenters of TV shows) were categorized as mass media. The alternative media category was built around the profiles that produce information and exist only online. The choice was to separate big communication structures from more simple and less funded communication projects. Although in the general categorization we did not take into account the position of these media in regards to the mainstream media (if it proposes or not an alternative regard on the production of news), in the description of the main actors we tried to deeper our analysis of this issue. All profiles with more than 176.750 followers that did not belong to any previous category were considered celebrities. The measure was built from the data that shows that in average a Twitter profile has 707 followers<sup>11</sup>. Regarding the data from our corpus, we decided, than, to consider that Twitter profiles with more than 250 times the average would be considered celebrities. All the other identifiable profiles were categorized as citizens. The non-identified profiles are those who were deleted or suspended between 2013 and our analysis (2018), so we do not have access to their information. The categorization of the profiles was done from the information available on the Twitter profile (name and description).

## **Table 2**

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<sup>11</sup> The data is from a research, done in 2016, by the company Kickfactory with 95.886.071 Twitter users who had tweeted at least once in the past 6 months. The result is 340% higher than the one found in the previous research of that kind, done in 2012. (<https://kickfactory.com/blog/average-twitter-followers-updated-2016/>)



We can see that citizens represent the most important category among the most active users, even though the first more active is related to the Anonymous organization. Organizations and Alternative Media also appear among the most active users. It is interesting to see that celebrities and mass media do not appear here. Nonetheless the information about what kind of users were most active is not so interesting by itself, when we put it together with some measurements of visibility, it can indicate some trends worth analyzing.

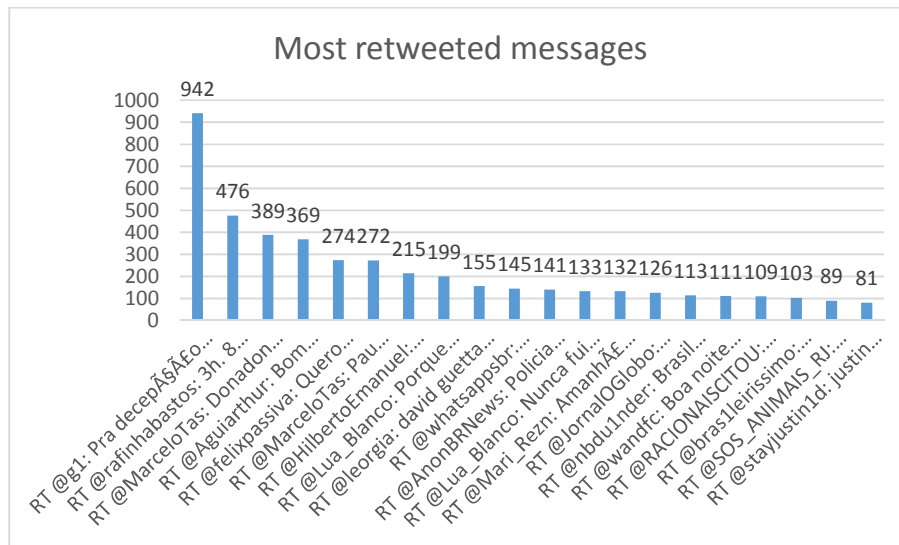
On a side note, the high volume of profiles that can no longer be identified less than five years after the protests shows the volatility of this kind of data and action.

Table 3, for example, shows which the most retweeted messages are. We understand the act of retweeting as an important measure of visibility both because it increases the number of people that potentially see the message and because it works as an endorsement of the message that is being replicated.

Again we can see that the power law model can be applied here, where a few messages are extremely replicated, while a lot of others are less retweeted. That is important to understand the overall visibility logic on social media, where the right to publish was democratized, but the visibility continues to be a rare good. "What is rare today is not information, it's 'the time of the brain available'" (Boullier, 2013, p.131).

It is important to highlight that the three most retweeted messages are from mass media outlets or professionals related to them. The first one is from G1<sup>12</sup>, the news website of the Globo Group, the most powerful media outlet in Brazil. The second and third are from two TV hosts Rafinha Bastos and Marcelo Tas, that at the time worked together in the TV political satire show CQC on the Band TV channel.

**Table 3**



When we classify the 50 more retweeted messages by category, we can see that citizens remains the most important one (Table 3). It is followed by eight messages from celebrities. These messages were posted in five different profiles (since one of them had 4 tweets among the most retweeted). From these five ‘celebrities’ profiles, four were from singers and one was from a UFC fighter. It is interesting to see that, in this case – the citizens –, all the profiles exist since 2009, showing that there visibility and authority in the network was already built when the protests started. From the five celebrities, only one is not Brazilian, the young American singer Christopher Drew, that tweeted only the hashtag “#vemprarua”. The messages posted by these celebrities were sharing content about the protests or convoking people to participate on them. Only one message seems not to have any relationship with the protests, it only invites people

<sup>12</sup> <https://g1.globo.com/>

to a performance of the Brazilian singer Diego Thug using the same hashtag used for the protests.

The mass media category appears here with seven messages, from five different news outlets. The website G1 appears responsible for the most retweeted message that says “To the disappointment of the media I say we will not continue the fight, this is just beginning! #BRASIL #VemPraRua”<sup>13</sup>. This message was retweeted 942 times, but it was actually done but the group Anonymous, that hacked the G1 account on July 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The group Anonymous had already hacked the website of the magazine Veja, the biggest Brazilian magazine in circulation and a media outlet well-known by its right wing affiliation. The hack on the G1 profile implicated on the change of the profile picture to an image that symbolizes the censorship of the press and the posting of several messages very critical to the mass media.

The second and third most replicated messages were posted by two TV hosts of a satirical show on the TV channel Band, one of the biggest of the country. Rafinha Bastoss tweet “3h. 8 degrees. #VempraRua”<sup>14</sup> was replicated 476 times, while Marcelo Tas’ tweet “Donadon is purgative name. And the Chamber of Deputies, the shame of Brazil #VemPraRua<sup>15</sup>” was retweeted 389 times. The first message is difficult to put in context. Maybe is convoking people to go to streets despite the cold weather. The second one is very clear on its critics to the political system and its suggestion that people adhere the protests. Marcelo Tas was also responsible for the sixth most retweeted message, that said: “Riot going in Rio de Janeiro. Where is the information? #VemPraRua<sup>16</sup>”. It was replicated 272 times.

The profile of the O Globo journal, that is from the same media group as G1, was responsible for the 14<sup>th</sup> most retweeted message. It says “#VempraRua but #semviolencia<sup>17</sup>: with his face covered, Caetano asks for pacific protests. <http://t.co/CoYySjU0rR><sup>18</sup>”. This tweet links to an

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<sup>13</sup> “Pra decepção da média eu digo que não iremos continuar com a luta, isso esta só começando! #BRASIL #VemPraRua”, in the original in Portuguese.

<sup>14</sup> “3h. 8 graus. #VempraRua”, in the original in Portuguese.

<sup>15</sup> “Donadon é nome de purgante. E a Camara dos Deputados, a vergonha do Brasil #VemPraRua”, in the original in Portuguese.

<sup>16</sup> “Pau comendo no Rio de Janeiro. Cade a informação? #VemPraRua”, in the original in Portuguese. This tweet was especially difficult to translate as the slang “pau comendo” has no exact translation in English.

<sup>17</sup> #semviolencia means without violence.

<sup>18</sup> “#VempraRua mas #semviolencia: de rosto coberto, Caetano pede protestos pacíficos. <http://t.co/CoYySjU0rR>”, in the original in Portuguese.

article about the participation of the well-known Brazilian singer Caetano Veloso in the protests and was replicated 126 times. It is the first of the media tweets that has an external link.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> most retweeted message was done by the profile Kibe Loco, that defines itself as “The best and most visited humorous blog of Brazil<sup>19</sup>”, on its Facebook page. It posted the message “The last guy I saw shouting "Hey, Zumbi, fuck you!" was arrested in flagrante for racism. #BrasilUmPaísDeTodos #VemPraRua<sup>20</sup>”, that was retweeted 78 times. It is difficult to put the tweet in context to better understand its message, but it makes a reference to an icon and one of the most important leaders of the movement against the slavery in Brazil, Zumbi dos Palmares (1655-1695). The website was created in 2002 by the advertising person Antonio Tabet, to publish his jokes and on 2005 started a close collaboration with the main mass media outlets in Brazil. From that time until today, he has had sketches in TV shows and the website is now hosted by one of the main television channels of the country.

The English journal The Guardian was responsible for the 33<sup>rd</sup> most retweeted message, saying: “How Brazilian protesters are using Twitter <http://t.co/wKUQARQGjn> #MudaBrasil #VemPraRua”. It is the only message from a foreign media outlet that gained major attention in our corpus. The last message from mass media among the most retweeted was the 34<sup>th</sup> more replicated and came again from G1, but again it seems a fake. The tweet says: “Protests today in the Guanabara’s Palace Rio de Janeiro everybody together #VemPraRua #BRASIL <http://t.co/h61o2aFfWe><sup>21</sup>”.

We also have one message from a profile considered as alternative media. This tweet was made by the profile of the blog Não Salvo, one of the major blogs of Brazil. It is a website that has a clear humoristic approach, created by Maurício Cid Fernandez Moraes, that describes itself as “On the first day of November 2008, a.C. Não Salvo was born with the purpose of selecting everything from the good and the best (and worst) of the internet in one place”<sup>22</sup>. As it is an exclusively online media and it has no clear attachment to a mass media outlet, it is considered in our categorization as an Alternative Media. But it is important to highlight that the purpose of this website is not to offer alternative information in regards to mainstream media and also that, today, the creator of the site is the owner of a portal with numerous sites working within,

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<sup>19</sup> “O melhor e mais acessado blog de humor do Brasil”, in the original in Portuguese.

<sup>20</sup> “O último cara que eu vi gritando "Ei, Zumbi, vai tomar no cu!" foi preso em flagrante por racismo. #BrasilUmPaísDeTodos #VemPraRua”, in the original in Portuguese.

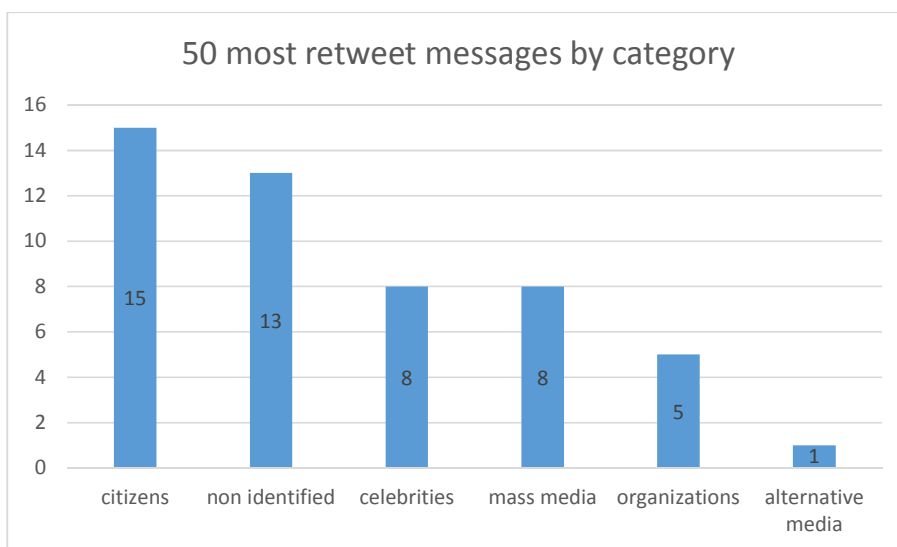
<sup>21</sup> “Protestos hoje Palácio da Guanabara Rio de Janeiro todos juntos #VemPraRua #BRASIL <http://t.co/h61o2aFfWe>”, in the original in Portuguese.

<sup>22</sup> “No primeiro dia de novembro de 2008, d.C. nasceu o NaoSalvo com o objetivo de selecionar tudo do bom e do melhor (e do pior) da internet em apenas um lugar.”, in the original in Portuguese.



which means an considerably big structure of work. The profile posted the message: “Sex day and the #vemprarua hashtag in TTs? Can that be?<sup>23</sup>”, that was replicated 48 times.

**Table 4**



Another way of analyzing visibility and dissemination is to look at the most shared links. While for the most retweeted the logic is to see the messages from one source that were replicated many times, here the logic is to see how a same content (a hyperlink) appears from different sources. So, it is not necessarily the replication of a same message, but rather the inclusion of a same content in different clusters of conversation.

The two next tables are about the source of these most shared links. So, they are not about who tweeted them (since there are many sources for the same link), but about where do these links come from (and lead to). What we are trying to see is not only who is talking on social media and who is gaining attention, but also what are they talking about, what media are setting the agenda.

In Table 5 we can see that most of the links present in the tweets lead to another twitter address (an account or a tweet). Although it is interesting that a social media appears in first place we have to take into account that we're analyzing a conversation that takes place in Twitter so it is easier for people to make references to content share in that same network (via citations and retweets). The mass media appears in second place with 13 of the 50 most shared links. That means that 26% of the most shared links lead to content produced and published by traditional media outlets.

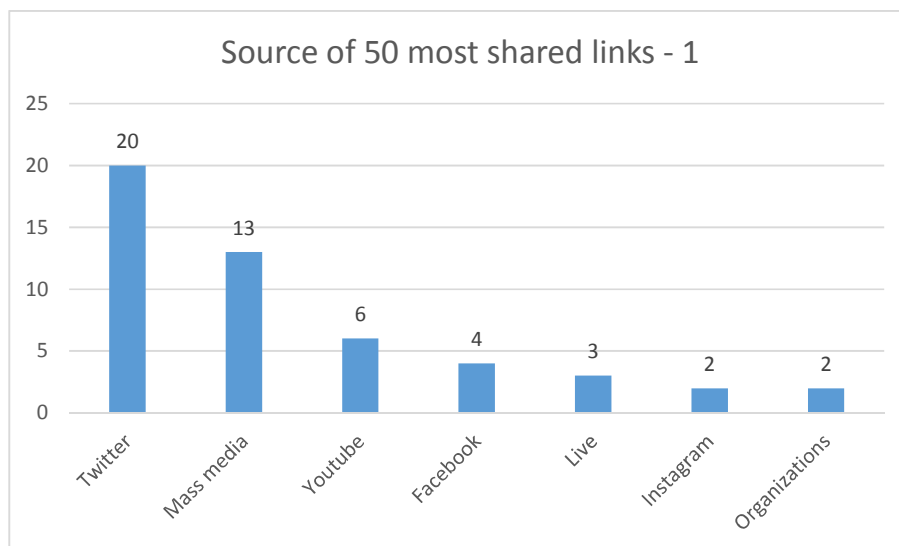
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<sup>23</sup> “Dia do sexo e a hashtag #vemprarua ta nos TTs? Mas pode?”, in the original, in Portuguese.

Other social networks follow as important sources of content. We highlight that among the links attributed to social media here there we did not identify any profile from the press on social media. They are mostly citizen profiles with some celebrity ones among them. The category “live” gathers links to different sources of livestream that we used during the protests. Even though the category “alternative media” does not appear here, the most shared link among the “live” category is from a live transmission done by the communication collective *Mídia Ninja*, one of the major alternative media groups that emerged during the protests. The two organizations that appear are the National Association of Federal Police<sup>24</sup> and the political party PT-SP (the section of the Workers Party in São Paulo).

The analysis of this table shows us once more that communication dynamics cannot be drawn only by analyzing platforms. Traditional media must not be seen just as television channels, radio stations, journals and magazines; alternative media are not just websites or fanzines; and social media are definitely not just an environment of citizen conversation. There is no sense of opposing social media to other media platforms, not only because they coexist, but mostly because different kind of communication structures are participating on this environment. So, understanding the interaction and the power relations created from them can be more fruitful in the complexity of the issue.

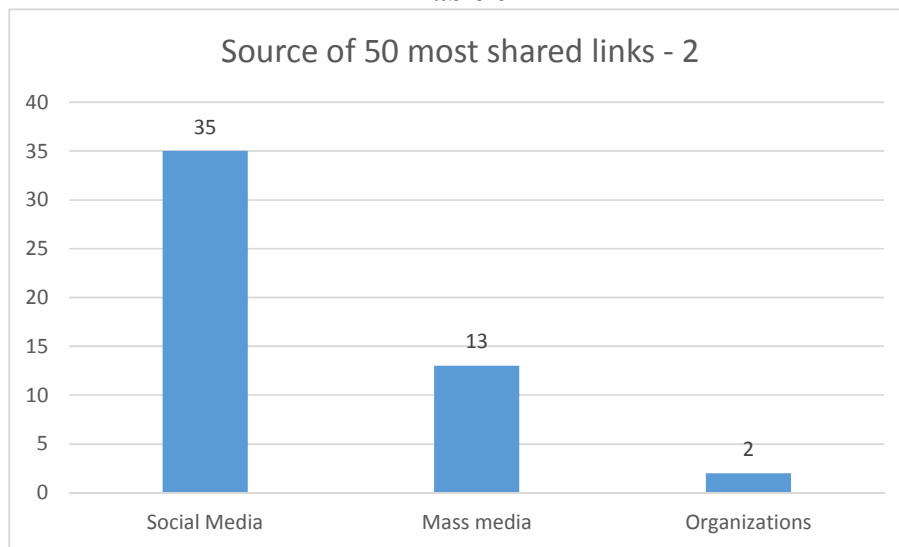
**Table 5**



<sup>24</sup> The links to this association is probably due to the discussion about the PEC37 (a proposal of constitutional reform to change the responsibilities over crime investigations) that became one of the many issues for the protesters after the initial claim about the price of public transportation.

If we regroup all social media (we base our analysis on Boyd and Ellison’s concept of social media<sup>25</sup>), it becomes clearer that they are responsible for more than the double of the most shared links compared to the press (Table 2). It is important to highlight, though, that what this table shows is not how much the traditional media profiles are responsible for the conversation, but it shows that citizen talk on social media is, in part, guided by the traditional media content. And we are considering as a measure only direct links to websites of traditional media and not all the words and topics related to them that may be going around. So, when citizens talk about a political issue on social media (the Brazilian protests of 2013 for instance) they are also basing their discussion on traditional media content.

**Table 6**



The most shared link appeared 368 times in our corpus and led to a youtube profile that is no longer available. The second one appeared 230 times and was a video from the Youtube account of the UFC fighter Wanderley Silva calling the people to go to the streets on September 7<sup>th</sup>. The video has been seen 115.190 times until the date of this analysis. The same celebrity had also appeared between the most retweeted messages. The third one links to the National Association

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<sup>25</sup> “We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.” (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, p.211)

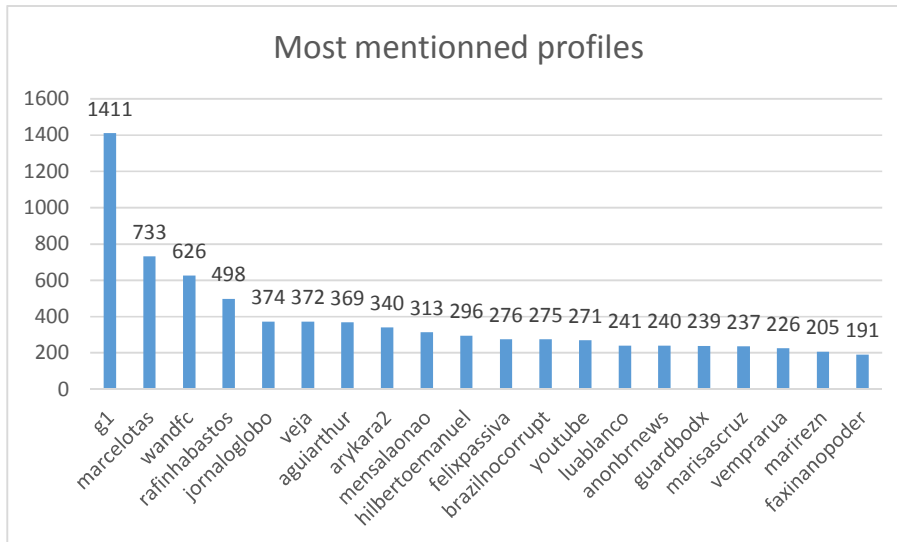
of Federal Police website. The exact page it refers to does not exist anymore, but we can see it is in the domain of the organization.

The fourth most shared link leads us to another video calling for participation on the September 7<sup>th</sup> protests, but this time posted in an account of an ordinary citizen, that has only 36 followers. The video was seen 8935 times. The fifth most shared link appeared 125 times and is the first one that points to a mass media website. In this case it refers to the online page of the O Globo's journal talking about the demands of pacific protests done by the well-known Brazilian singer Caetano Veloso. The article had already appeared among the most retweeted.

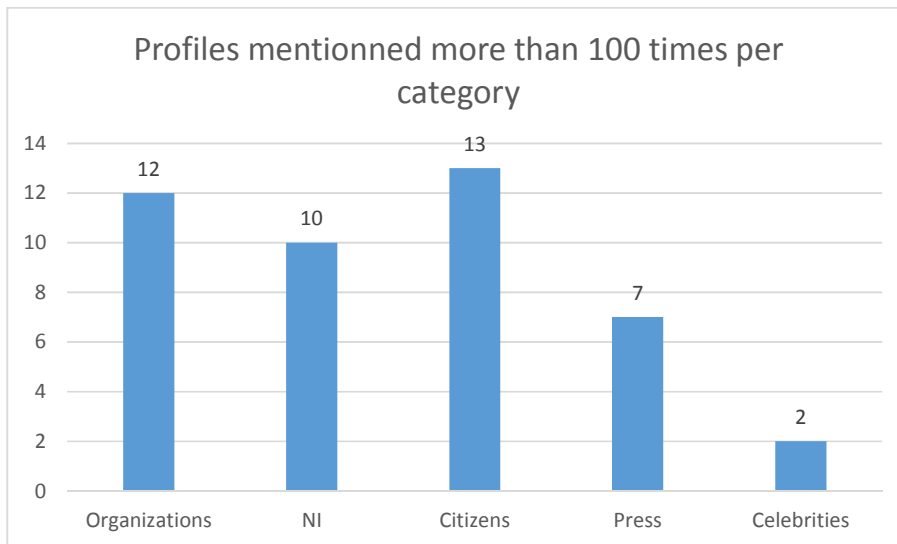
We can also see how visibility is constructed on the Twitter conversation analyzing who are the most mentioned profiles (Table 7). Here we are not talking about who is sending the message or what is that message about, we are rather focusing on who are the profiles people mostly mention while talking about the protests. On a methodological note, it is important to see that there is an overlap between the number of times a profile is mentioned and the number of times it was retweeted (Table 3) because each retweet counts as a mention.

Nevertheless it is interesting to see that among the five most mentioned profiles, four are from the mass media or from professionals related to them. The only one that is not from the media is the well-known Brazilian UFC fighter Wanderley Silva, that has already appeared among the most retweeted messages and the most shared links. The four media profiles that appear here are also the four that were already mentioned earlier when talking about the most retweeted messages.

### **Table 7**



**Table 8**



The analysis of the data shows that our hypothesis has substantial basis. Although traditional media are not among the most active users in the discussion about the Brazilian protests of 2013, they appear as a significant actor in the discussion. Content shared by profiles of the press are among the most retweeted, links to content produced by the press are frequently the most shared and media profiles are one of the most mentioned on the discussion.

Those findings corroborate the importance of the conclusion we drew at the end of section 3.1: social media is a complex reunion of different and unequal actors that goes far beyond the usual vision of it as the primordial space of citizens. It also shows that media logics cannot be

confused with media platforms. That is to say that the logic of production of media products, especially news, that is what interests us here, is not directly related nor limited to one platform (Lycarião, 2011). The logic of traditional media, for example, based on the gatekeeping role of the journalists, the broadcast system, among other characteristics, may as well exist also on social media, in frequent interaction with other logics of production (Chadwick, 2013). In the same logic, alternative media may be produced through live streaming shared on social media.

That means that saying that someone consumes more political information on social media than on news websites has no direct relationship to consuming alternative media or information produced by citizens. In the same sense, the discussion about an issue on social media may have the same point of view expressed in traditional media. Because the communication system is complex and integrated, hybrid, so the consumption of different media overlaps between them.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis of the interviews and the data retrieved from Twitter allows us to draw some interesting conclusions about the media system around the 2013 Brazilian protests.

The first one is about the composition of the media system itself. As we analyze the data from Twitter, it becomes clear that citizens are a central actor in the construction of the public debate around the protests. Not only the information published and replicated by citizens are responsible for an important part of the discussion, but they are also in permanent interaction with the various kind of media involved in the process. So it seems clear that, to think about the media system around the 2013 Brazilian protests, it is essential to incorporate the citizens as an active actor in terms of the production and circulation of information.

Also in regards to the formation of the media system itself, it is interesting to see how personal profiles divide the scenario with organizational ones. Personalities such as journalists and celebrities are an important part of the communication system, many times with even more followers than the respective organizations they work for.

A third interesting point to be observed is that the peaks of conversation around the protests may happen either due to events that happen outside of the media system (such as protests or other political actions) or due to communicative actions that happen inside the system itself (such as the release of a video, an live stream or the hacking of a website). So, the communication system itself is able to produce facts that trigger conversation and debate about

a political event. That makes it even clearer the power that the actors in play in the system have on the construction of public debate.

A fourth point that emerges from our analysis is the criticism of the system from inside the system itself. The case of the most retweeted message, which was done by the mass media account G1 while it was hacked by the Anonymous group shows an example of how the structures in place to maintain a certain power relation may now be used to defy it.

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