Story 6 SCRIPT:

Do you remember our story on what makes a TED talk successful? If you do, you should also remember that I showed you how top talks are correlated to a variety of topics. If you don’t, before watching this video, please enjoy part 1.

In this sequel to our previous story, I will tell you how I interpret these findings giving you a little bit more information on the Topic model fitted to identify the 10 topics to which words relate.

The Topic model is a probabilistic model that maps similar words in meaning to a specific topic. This is an extremely reductive description of it, but it may help us understand what it means to identify a topic by key words.

As this table, already presented in part 1, depicts, for each of the topic, there exists a set of key words.

Now, wouldn’t it be interesting to speculate on the theme behind each topic? This is what we will do first although as evident this deductive process is not straightforward.

For one, we can take a look at topic 1, my guess as theme is the latin word scire, namely to know. In latin, this word is the root of the word knowledge, science and a variety of related ideas.

Topic 2 deals with femininity. You may want to have a look at the key words briefly.

whereas topic 5 – sharks.

Topic 4 could be interpreted as geopolitics.

Now using our defined themes, let’s reconsider the talks mentioned in our previous video. If indeed the video ‘Open science now!’ by Michael Nielsen’ is a talk about knowledge, that ‘Why the African diaspora is crucial to the continent's future’ by Lindiwe Mazibuko, is a talk about geopolitics, that ‘Why the world needs sharks’ by Ocean Ramsey is a talk on, well, sharks, then does ‘Do schools kill creativity?’ by Sir Ken Robinson mention knowledge, sharks, and geopolitics? Probably not.

An explanation we explored before is that the more popular ted talks use simpler words which fit into a plethora of topics and consequently our defined themes. We know that the more popular talks cover a higher number of topics. As we can also see by this different visualization plotting the standard deviation on topic weights for each video.

However, there is another possible explanation: that these ted talks concern ideas important for everyone and therefore they are broader and not as niche, as say, a video about sharks. This could be indicated by the correlation of topics between the most viewed video, seen as darker oranges. After all, everyone loves hearing motivational speeches: wouldn’t you want to be a great leader?