

GAME31208 Design Challenge Research Report

Tiago Massochin
Honours Bachelor of Game Design
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Introduction

In this article, the current issue of the doomscrolling role in contemporary society will be addressed, specifically how addiction to doomscrolling affects the perception of reality in Brazil and leads to extremist views and positions.

This research aims to understand how social networks and their algorithms have been affecting the perception of Brazilians about their reality, which has generated a disproportionate growth of extremists in recent years. Exploration and debate over this theme are essential to understand - and seek to avoid - how human beings' perception of their reality is easily moulded and has become increasingly susceptible to manipulation.

It is straightforward with this research that human beings' interests and natural desires in the search for dramatic and bombastic news were fed exponentially due to the imprisonment functioning of the algorithms of current social networks — culminating in a vicious cycle. This overload of bad news, caused by doomscrolling — and often accompanied by fake news and conspiracy — has the power to change the individual's perception of reality, causing him to adopt extremist positions as a defence mechanism.

Methodology

All articles, books and research used in this article are from the databases of renowned scientific journals of public prestige. Journals and publications from international universities were also used, including the database of Sheridan and the federal public universities in Brazil.

This research also had the assistance and review of Dr. Raphael Dal Pai, Ph.D. in history from the State University of Western Paraná (UNIOESTE).

Since doomscrolling is a recent topic, mainly related to COVID-19, this article's main difficulty was obtaining information on the topic that was not directly related to the pandemic. However, as this is a global phenomenon, it was possible to obtain several journals that enabled data correlation. Adding to this the data collected by other Brazilian researchers on the rise of the far-right in Brazil from 2014, it was possible to conclude this research.

In addition to being reliable, the selected sources have a deeper volume of information than this research cover; this will allow a broader approach to the theme in future game development.

Results

The thesis *The Use of Distractions* (Saindon, 2021) is a complex study of how recent events such as the pandemic have reinforced unpleasant social mores such as doomscrolling, procrastination and fixation on social networks. Increasing tension, worry, anxiety, despair consequently.

The presentation Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles of Fake News in Social Media (Zimmer, 2019) uses several studies and analyses on the functioning of algorithms of modern social networks, seeking to keep their users inside the platform, and for that, it always brings the content that keeps the user interacting longer.

The book A Onda Conservadora (Demier & Hoeveler, 2016) – The Conservative Wave – is a compilation of essays and periodicals that study the history of Brazil, going from its past with the military dictatorship of 1964 to the recent events of the rise of the extreme right in Brazil. XXI century.

Das Jornadas de Junho à Cruzada Moral (Machado & Miskolci, 2019) – From the June Journeys to the Moral Crusade – is a journal that discusses the role played by the networks in the creation of political polarizations that have marked Brazilian political life since the June Journeys of 2014.

The monograph entitled Fake News, Radicalização Da Polarização Política e o Constitucionalismo Autoritário No Brasil (Silva, 2020) – Fake News, Radicalization of Political Polarization and Authoritarian Constitutionalism in Brazil – is a study on how fake and sensationalist news spread by social media had a significant impact on Brazilian political radicalization and in the perception of the reality.

The thesis A Nova Direita no Brasil (Casimiro, 2016) – The New Right in Brazil – is a study on how the new Brazilian right manipulated social networks, financing the dissemination of fake news and alarming news to create a false sense of chaos in the country.

Discussion

Based on the analysis made in the thesis The Use of Distractions (Saindon, 2021), the growth of doomscrolling during the Covid-19 pandemic is evident and is related to experiences of tension and worry, anxiety, despair. In this thesis, the author also highlights the natural tendency of human beings, mainly due to anxiety, to be interested in more drastic and disturbing news. However, the author clarifies that this behaviour is most often not pleasurable but impulsive on the user's part.

In Zimmer's (Zimmer, 2019) presentation, she brings us evidence that the algorithms of social media platforms, to keep their users inert on the platform, end up creating - sometimes unintentionally - bubble filters where the content furnished to the user will be consequently the one that most interests them. Culminating in closed groups of extremists and social media miniatures that only provide sensational news, encouraging the habit of doomscrolling.

Much information about the extremist rise in Brazil over history is founded in the book A Onda Conservadora (Demier & Hoeveler, 2016). The most interesting is about the 1964 military dictatorship that took place in Brazil. One of the most shocking points was that – to maintain popular support – the military used the media at the time to spread news that to prevent

communism from taking over Brazil, their dictatorship was necessary; otherwise, the communists would tear everything away from the Brazilian people. This type of media manipulation spread a sense of chaos and fear in the population, who supported the military government for years, fearing a communist threat, which never really existed.

Machado and Miskolci's journal (Machado & Miskolci, 2019) brings fascinating points about how the social media algorithms aim to keep the user connected as long as possible, both to collect data and to sell ads; in which user behaviour on the network, so as environmental data collected by smartphone sensors and geolocation, it feeds big data sold to third parties for various purposes – included that of political manipulation; others draw attention to emotional-cognitive processes that the use of the network has caused in subjects. Addressing how content selection based on its "viralization" tends to favour a poor diversity of themes instead of a positive and democratizing pluralism. Online communication platforms introduced the user to a highly individualized context in which relationships, even being direct, gain impersonality. Behaviours and opinions that would not be tolerated in face-to-face relationships start to express themselves, generating support and rejections to become polarized consensuses. Concerning the platforms in question, its algorithm that creates relationships indicates "friends" and offers "personalized experiences", adds conditions for the user to live within an "opinion bubble" that reinforces their convictions and expands their divergences from others not only concerning macro-political issues but above all behavioural issues.

The thesis *A Nova Direita no Brasil*, from Casimiro (Casimiro, 2016), explores how the current extreme right has been using institutions and groups supposedly without ties and non-partisanship in social networks, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to promote, in a paid manner, content, such as fake sensationalist news, to reach a large audience and to spread among young people the presupposed call for libertarianism. This conditioning confers great mobilizing power. Acting within educational institutions and intensely through the internet on social networks, recruiting young people for political action. In this way, the Brazilian extreme right organizes, finances, and establishes action guidelines, mainly from its virtual groups linked to social networks, with the financial power of large institutions favouring a government that supports them.

Conclusion

During the research, it was possible to identify that doomscrolling is not a current factor but a natural aspect of the human being to be interested, even if not pleasantly, in seeking bad and calamitous news. This type of behaviour was responsible for the massive manipulation that occurred in Brazil during the military dictatorship in 1964. This same type of behaviour became worse after the growth of social networks.

The algorithms of social networks, seeking always to offer the content that draws the most attention of users, often provide sensationalist and false news to the user. Although this is often not the content that the user seeks, it is the content that he ends up interacting with the most due to anxiety, fear, and tension. Since this news is normally connected and linked by extremist media and groups,

the user ends up closing himself in a social bubble where he only receives negative and extremist information, without the algorithm showing plural information with other opinions or events.

At the same time, Brazilian organizations affiliated with extremist political parties encouraged this behaviour by paying to push and direct posts of false and threatening news on social media, which facilitated mass manipulation by these governments — creating an imminent fear over the population.

Because of this, a large portion of the Brazilian population was manipulated into thinking that Brazil's condition in 2014 (during a left-wing government) was one of the worst in history with the most corrupt government ever. Leading thousands of Brazilians to believe that the only way out of this problem would be to believe in an extremist leader, leading to the establishment of an extremist right in Brazil.

Recommendations

As a recommendation based on this research, social networks need to establish a more sophisticated mechanism/algorithm for targeting content to their users. Because not necessarily the content most consumed by the user is the one that gives him the most pleasure. We are not talking about necessarily excluding it from all the bad news but rather trying to find a formula that delivers more plural and heterogeneous content to users.

At the same time, the payment feature to push content into the network can be a very strong manipulation tool, especially when used by large companies with political interests. This raises the question of how far social networks - like Facebook, Twitter, etc. - are responsible for the political crises they were used to cause.

Lastly, it is also important that not only social networks improve their algorithms but that users also learn to deal with and notice when they are being manipulated. Children of today should already learn how to identify when they are being presented with false or sensational news. After all, a good portion of the population, as in the case of Brazil, was deceived by clearly false news, but which they could not understand at the time — explaining how an elected government went from 65% approval at the beginning of its term to 25% after three years of poor management.

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