

THE JOURNALISTIC NARRATIVE ON TWITTER OF A (NON)ATTACK IN PORTUGAL

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ABSTRACT

Thursday, February 10, 2022, “an 18-year-old student was arrested this Thursday by the Judiciary Police suspect of the crime of terrorism, as he had been planning to attack his colleagues at the Faculty of Science of the University of Lisbon for months” (Henriques et al., 2022, para. 1). A case without parallel in Portugal, in a media context characterised by immediate consumption and the growing importance of social networks and social media, such as Twitter, even in information dissemination. We start from the perception of Twitter as a relevant platform for contemporary journalism that connects information flows between parties (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Sadler, 2018). Some 3,577 tweets were extracted within 1 week since the occurrence from the five official Twitter accounts with the most followers of journalistic/information nature in Portugal. Of those, only 104 tweets focus on this particular case, with *Correio da Manhã* showing three times as many tweets as *Expresso*. This work uses a qualitative approach to perform a discourse analysis using word clouds, visually representing the frequency of terms. Determining the narratives, including macro and micro-narratives (Lits, 2015; Motta, 2013), serves as guidelines for identifying the macro-narrative of an attack on a faculty of the University of Lisbon. Although common in the general corpus, the terrorism narrative is not central since it is found in a non-uniform way among the five-word clouds, only identified in the word clouds of SIC Notícias, *Jornal de Notícias* and *Correio da Manhã*. The analysis seeks to help develop insights about the narratives employed to provide and construct meaning to the media coverage of this unmatched case in Portugal.

KEYWORDS

narrative, Twitter, Portugal, terrorism, Orientalism

A NARRATIVA JORNALÍSTICA NO TWITTER DE UM (NÃO) ATENTADO EM PORTUGAL

RESUMO

Quinta-feira, dia 10 de fevereiro de 2022, “um estudante de 18 anos foi detido esta quinta-feira pela Polícia Judiciária suspeito do crime de terrorismo, já que estaria há meses a planear atacar os colegas da Faculdade de Ciências da Universidade de Lisboa” (Henriques et al., 2022, para. 1). Um caso sem grande paralelo em Portugal, num contexto mediático caracterizado pelo que é imediato e pela crescente importância das redes sociais e média sociais, como o Twitter, inclusive para a circulação de informação. Parte-se de um entendimento do Twitter como uma plataforma relevante para o jornalismo contemporâneo que conecta fluxos de informação entre partes (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Sadler, 2018). Foram extraídos 3.577 tweets no espaço de 1 semana desde o caso, das cinco contas oficiais no Twitter com mais seguidores, de cariz jornalístico/informativo em Portugal. Desses, apenas 104 tweets se focam neste particular caso, destacando-se o facto de o *Correio da Manhã* apresentar o triplo de tweets do *Expresso*. Este

trabalho utiliza uma abordagem qualitativa para realizar uma análise discursiva, com recurso a nuvens de palavras, que representam visualmente a frequência de termos. A identificação de narrativas, inclusive macro e micronarrativas (Lits, 2015; Motta, 2013), orienta este trabalho, que resulta na identificação da macronarrativa da existência de um ataque numa faculdade da Universidade de Lisboa. A narrativa do terrorismo, apesar de comum no corpus geral não é central, já que se encontra de forma não uniforme entre as cinco nuvens de palavras, sendo identificada nas nuvens de palavras da SIC Notícias, do *Jornal de Notícias* e do *Correio da Manhã*. A análise desenvolvida procura auxiliar o desenvolvimento de entendimentos sobre as narrativas utilizadas para dar e construir sentido à cobertura mediática deste caso específico sem grande comparação em Portugal.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

narrativa, Twitter, Portugal, terrorismo, orientalismo

1. INTRODUCTION

The present world is progressively and rapidly becoming increasingly technological, particularly assuming digital forms and formats. Digital spaces can be perceived as differentiated from physical media spaces, namely because those spaces can be accessed from an increasing myriad of physical objects. Digitalisation implies changes in the processes of media consumption, namely at the level of information consumption. Media can be seen as ways of encoding and transmitting information, which can be differentiated by the type of information encoded and by how the information is transmitted (Ryan, 2021b). Nowadays, information is transmitted and retransmitted on social platforms, such as social media networks (van Dijck & Poell, 2013), which leads to an interest in identifying and even understanding media narratives on social platforms in the coverage of mediatised cases.

Within the social platforms, Twitter stands out in this context by allowing vast and immediate dissemination of information (Kwak et al., 2010; Maireder & Ausserhofer, 2014). Twitter also stands out because of this wide-reaching capacity to circulate information in a new communication channel with a predominantly informal basis, thus being an entirely new media phenomenon (Ryan, 2021a; Zhao & Rosson, 2009), unlike other digital phenomena that have replaced previous analogue formats.

Media storytelling has gained, in recent years, new formats and, consequently, new uses due to the very characteristics of platforms like Twitter (Lits, 2015), namely by restricting the limit of characters in each tweet (Bhattacharya & Ram, 2012). This transformation points to Ryan's (2012) idea that linguistic skills, narrative capacity, and human culture evolve in a symbiotic relationship. Social platforms such as Twitter make it possible to reach a vast number of receptors (Reis, 2018). Twitter is restricted, more than other social platforms, to written language — but limited to a small number of characters, as mentioned — which is also significant from a perspective of the narrative capacities and limitations of this media. Hence, there is a growing interest in the narratological study of Twitter taking into account its impact on society, as in the discursive narratives of

politicians (Tellidis & Kappler, 2016), and taking into special consideration the fact that Twitter itself is an important locus of online radicalisation (Bastug et al., 2020).

This research focuses particularly on the case that occurred on February 10, 2022, in which “an 18-year-old student was arrested (...) Thursday by the Judiciary Police suspect of the crime of terrorism, as he had been planning to attack his colleagues at the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Lisbon for months” (Henriques et al., 2022, para. 1). It builds on Motta’s (2013) assumption of the importance of studies on narratives since “studying and retelling them gives meaning to human life” (p. 62). Through discourse analysis, it is sought to identify macro and micro-narratives in the tweets of the five official Portuguese Twitter accounts of journalistic/informative nature with the largest number of followers. In this sense, this research is guided by the following research questions:

1. In what way was this event characterised on Twitter?
2. Does a journalistic narrative associated with terrorism stand out?
3. Are there nuances in the narratives followed by the different media?

2. STATE OF THE ART

2.1. JOURNALISM, NARRATIVE AND TWITTER

The alarming idea that journalism is “dying” (Neveu, 2014) has been proclaimed and disseminated. Even if this idea is, in itself, a reflection of the sensationalism that sometimes overtakes journalism itself, there is a reflection to be carried out. Journalism has been challenged, namely by shifts in the processes of transmission, retransmission and circulation of information in digital spaces. Authors such as Lits (2015) and Neveu (2014) advocate the need for a redefinition of the journalism profession that emphasises the narrative model. While Keeble (2018) seeks the valorisation of narrative journalism — also called “literary journalism” — by considering that all journalism tends to be narrative. In this regard, it is possible to indicate that “narrative is, in fact, the privileged mode of the press discourse” (Peixinho, 2014, p. 1). Nevertheless, this idea is not unanimous. In fact, citing several authors, Fulton et al. (2005) address the idea that associates the narratives with the concept of soft news, linked to the stories, but not to the hard news, linked to the facts.

Technological proliferation has impacted the organisation of newsrooms and triggered professional transformations in the work of journalists, changing journalistic writing itself (Lits, 2015). This technological proliferation, which resulted in new media, increased the transmission of narratives and their reach, including through the possibilities of interactivity that digital offers (Reis, 2018). Narrative journalism itself, which can be understood as a journalistic genre, may be seen as a competitive strategy vis-a-vis the immediacy of accessing — at least apparently — totally free news of the online world (van Krieken, 2018).

The media landscape has changed profoundly with the introduction of the internet, but above all, its widespread usage (van Krieken, 2018) becoming one more comprehensive (Couldry, 2012) and interactive space (Erjavec, 2014). The development of websites (and consequent online platforms and mobile applications) of social media and social networks has “revolutionised the way information is shared and consumed online” (Bhattacharya & Ram, 2012, p. 966), even to the extent that these can be sources of information for news (Lits, 2015). In this sense, one might even question the concept of “breaking news” since one piece of information has a high potential of being disseminated quickly in social networks and social media before being identified and transformed into the news by any journalistic organisation (Alejandro, 2010).

Within social networks and social media, Twitter has been progressively understood as important for journalism (Sadler, 2018) or the broader idea of news sharing (Papacharissi, 2015). It is a platform that connects flows of information between parties (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) and that stands out for the speed of virality that its publications achieve, as it allows rapid and easy dissemination of information, which makes it an attractive platform even for political uses (Howard, 2010). The viral potential exists even though this platform reduces the centrality of possible actions to sharing small pieces of information, constrained by a small limit of characters (Bhattacharya & Ram, 2012). Since its inception, this restriction of characters has led Twitter to be described not only as a social network or a social media but also as a microblogging platform (Java et al., 2007). It is called “tweet”, the type of publication of this platform which, despite allowing images and videos, continues to favour writing. Despite the restriction of characters, Twitter “exhibits key elements of narrativity” (Sadler, 2018, p. 3266), and there are authors like Dawson (2020) who argue that the specific characteristics of Twitter enable the creation of narrative phenomena, such as the “emerging storytelling”.

Twitter is inserted in a digital context of rapid dissemination of information, in which news circulates through “word of mouth on steroids” (Alejandro, 2010, p. 12). News organisations have needed and continue to adapt to this context, learning to use Twitter as an element of their communicational activity (Papacharissi, 2015). Frequently, this use has been limited to the repetition of news, in this situation in a condensed manner, between more and different platforms, especially in the cases of news about crime and public affairs (Armstrong & Gao, 2010).

2.2. DIGITAL RADICALISATION

Digital media can be seen as resources that assist the processes of rapid mobilisation (Papacharissi, 2015). However, some argue that such mobilisation needs to extrapolate the online space to be consolidated (Howard, 2010). In particular, social media and social networks can be important tools for mobilisation against the orders of authoritarian regimes (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

The mobilising potential of social networks and social media also increases the tensions of communicational relationships and interactions (Simões & Camponez, 2020),

generating media spaces that can be harnessed for the development of radicalism in society (Miranda et al., 2020; Thompson, 2011) such as terrorist movements (Dean et al., 2012; Huey, 2015; Ummah, 2021). This mobilising potential may justify the popularity of online radicalisation and recruitment themes in studies that intersect terrorism with social media/social networks (Antunes, 2022). In this sense, radical groups, be these of a supremacist, nationalist or religious nature, use the concept of “online revolution (...) by appropriating online technologies and options for their interest and spreading hateful comments and (mis)information with proclaimed ultimate goals of separatism and annihilation of other societal groups” (Quandt & Festl, 2017, p. 1).

The use of the internet is strategic and central in the recent activity of terrorist and radical groups, as online spaces “can also replace the role of mainstream media that radical-terrorist groups cannot have” (Ummah, 2021, p. 234). Social networks and social media are purposefully used “by extremist groups in order to manufacture a process of online hate” (Awan, 2017, p. 139). Terrorist cells employ a wide range of platforms, but Twitter stands out in terms of popularity, namely because this platform faces fewer technological hurdles for its proper functioning in geographical areas whose internet use mainly relies on mobile network usage in mobile phones (Klausen, 2015). Consequently, Twitter can be considered an important locus of online radicalisation (Bastug et al., 2020).

Online spaces such as social media and social networks have made radicalised content more accessible, which corroborates the normalisation of social and political violence (Huey, 2015). This proliferating online violence can take the form of hate speech, prompting even approaches to the phenomenon of “cyber-hate” (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017), which tends to be strategic and is targeted at a specific group — differing from the term “cyber-bullying” as such is not directed at a single person (Quandt & Festl, 2017).

In this paper’s particular case under study, the focus is on the journalistic narratives that accompany the case’s mediatisation itself. However, to understand the (non)attack, it may also be important to address the individualised, sometimes solitary, processes of online radicalisation, which, if they result in attacks, tend to be less lethal and dangerous than those organised by groups (Cohen et al., 2014). One may speak here of people of whom any antecedent history of extremist connection or affiliation is unknown but who act — or plan to act — in ways that tend to be designated as “terrorist”. Johnson et al. (2016) suggest that these individualised radicalisation processes may be justified by a false sense of belonging to a terrorist group.

However, terrorism is also thought of and undertaken without a group or even the false sense of belonging to a terrorist group. In this context, the term “lone wolf” terrorism has become popularised (Cohen et al., 2014; Phillips, 2011) — regarding cases such as that of Anders Breivik, who, on July 22 2011, caused the death of 77 people in Norway (Jordán, 2011) — however, it is not unanimous (Paixão, 2019). That is a phenomenon that, although typically less lethal, is highly unpredictable and intricate to predict or to establish type profiles (Paixão, 2019; Spaaij, 2010).

Radicalisation processes are individualised but not unique (Pisoiu et al., 2020). In this sense, and in order to seek to identify patterns for this radicalisation, there is relevance

to the idea that the internet “appears as the most important element driving individual radicalisation processes” (Koehler, 2014, p. 131). In the corpus of this work, the potential of internet radicalisation is not focused on since the internet tends to reveal itself only as a digital place to carry out journalistic work and, in particular, social networks/social media stand, above all, as spaces of dissemination of that same journalistic work.

3. EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.1. METHODOLOGY

Through a qualitative approach, this work is rooted in the narrative capacity of media, either in general terms or in the specific case of digital media, namely by focusing on social media networks and platforms. Underpinned by the argument that discourse is “the main instrument in the process of meaning construction” (Figueira, 2014, p. 25), a discourse analysis (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017; Leeuwen, 1995) aware of the study of narratives (Motta, 2013) is carried out. In this manner, the idea that any media selects certain aspects of a world is considered, implying that narrative worlds are fundamentally incomplete entities (Ryan, 2021a). This study seeks to identify the narratives used on Twitter concerning the case in focus, which occurred on February 10 2022.

The tweets of the five official journalistic/information Twitter accounts in Portugal with the most followers were collected: SIC Notícias (887,400 followers), *Público* (848,600 followers), *Expresso* (537,600 followers), *Jornal de Notícias* (535,300 followers) and *Correio da Manhã* (455,100 followers)¹. These five official Twitter accounts correspond to the accounts of five media organisations in Portugal, even though they have distinct editorial characteristics and periodicities. All five media in question have a generalist and informative national character. Since its creation, SIC Notícias has been a relevant thematic television informative channel in Portugal, whose programme schedule is mainly “composed of extended news, short news and information programmes” (Gaspar, 2004, p. 45). *Público* and *Expresso* are newspapers considered information media of reference (Araújo & Lopes, 2014). In its turn, *Jornal de Notícias* and *Correio da Manhã* carry “closer editorial orientations, with themes and narrative styles that tend to raise the participation of the public, although the first one is closer to the tabloid format” (Lima & Reis, 2014, p. 669).

Tweets were extracted in the 7 days starting from the case under study. Thus, the news coverage is studied between February 10, 2022, and February 16, 2022. This study aims to identify macro and micro-narratives (Lits, 2015) in the tweets of the five official Portuguese Twitter accounts of a journalistic/informative nature with the largest number of followers. In this sense, this study is guided by the three research questions explained in the introduction of this work.

¹ The number of followers shown here refers to the number of followers of these accounts in April 2022.

The advanced search engine Twitter provided presented 881 tweets from SIC Notícias, 846 tweets from *Público*, 661 tweets from *Expresso*, 590 tweets from *Jornal de Notícias* and 599 tweets from *Correio da Manhã*. Interestingly, the advanced Twitter search did not provide any tweets from the official *Expresso* account referring to February 10, 2022 (the day the case in question was mediatised). The tweets were later extracted using PhantomBuster² and compiled into a “csv” file. This way, it was possible to reach 3,577 tweets in the corpus for analysis, whose distribution by each account can be seen in Table 1.

DAY	SIC NOTÍCIAS	PÚBLICO	EXPRESSO	JORNAL DE NOTÍCIAS	CORREIO DA MANHÃ	TOTAL
February 10	167	128	0	118	89	502
February 11	146	153	145	110	100	654
February 12	61	95	65	75	80	376
February 13	62	79	52	58	65	316
February 14	145	119	117	66	83	530
February 15	154	138	139	60	87	578
February 16	146	134	143	103	95	621
Total	881	846	661	590	599	3,577

Table 1 Total number of tweets extracted according to official accounts and the respective days

After extracting the 3,577 tweets of the initial corpus, the tweets that did not address the case studied were identified, reducing the corpus to 104 tweets worthy of analysis, which are distributed in 33 tweets from *Correio da Manhã*, 29 tweets from SIC Notícias, 18 tweets from *Jornal de Notícias*, 13 tweets from *Público* and 11 tweets from *Expresso*, whose distribution by days can be seen in Table 2.

DAY	SIC NOTÍCIAS	PÚBLICO	EXPRESSO	JORNAL DE NOTÍCIAS	CORREIO DA MANHÃ	TOTAL
February 10	7	1	0	1	4	13
February 11	16	7	10	12	18	63
February 12	5	3	1	4	9	22
February 13	1	0	0	1	1	3
February 14	0	2	0	0	1	3
February 15	0	0	0	0	0	0
February 16	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	29	13	11	18	33	104

Table 2 Number of tweets about the case under study, extracted according to official accounts and the respective days

The texts of the 104 tweets of the final corpus concerning the case in question underwent discourse analysis aided by word clouds, a tool of particular adequacy in

² More information at <https://phantombuster.com/>.

discourse analysis (Heimerl et al., 2014)³. Six-word clouds were created using the online platform Flourish⁴, one of the word clouds that seeks to identify the macro-narratives of the news coverage, in this case, via Twitter, through the identification and analysis of the most frequent words. The remaining five-word clouds correspond to a word cloud for each journalistic/informative account. Word clouds allow the identification of narratives, including macro and micro-narratives, in the media coverage of the case under study. Macro-narrative is understood as the general narrative that, moreover, is built through the conjugation of micro-narratives, that is, particular narratives (Canilha, 2019). All terms in the 104 tweets were rewritten to their lowercase version only, thus avoiding errors in counting the frequency of terms, and some Portuguese discourse connectors such as “de”, “a”, “e”, “o”, “da”, “do”, “das”, “dos”, “que” and “é” (“of”, “the”, “and”, “that”, “by”, “from”, “which”, and “is”) were also eliminated. The word clouds of this study display the 100 most frequent terms in a given corpus, represented according to a linear scale.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results demonstrate that, although this specific case seems, at the outset, to have high media interest, in fact, of the 3,577 tweets initially collected, only 104 addressed this very case, resulting in a percentage of tweets included in the final corpus of under 3%. Although research stipulated 1 week as the time frame of possible media relevance, no tweets about the specific case were identified on February 15 and 16. On the other hand, February 11, with 63 of the 104 tweets in the corpus, was the day with more tweets about the specific case.

Figure 1 displays the word cloud for the visual representation of the 100 most frequent terms in the set of 104 tweets of the corpus. In this visual discourse analysis resorting to word clouds, the terms “ataque”, “jovem”, “universidade”, “lisboa”, and “faculdade” (“attack”, “young man”, “university”, “Lisbon” and “faculty”) stand out. In that sense, these terms that stand out visually centralise the analysed media discourse in the idea of an “attack of a young man on a faculty of the University of Lisbon”. This central media narrative can be understood as the macro-narrative in the corpus under analysis. The idea resulting from this macro-narrative does not highlight, at least with equal frequency and centrality, motifs or adjectives that contextualise that “attack”.

³ Word clouds are also used in other types of content analysis (Vilela et al., 2020) and for any focus identification of a given written material (Atenstaedt, 2012). They compose visual representations of the frequency of any term in a specific corpus, as the most frequent terms in that corpus are graphically highlighted.

⁴ More information at <https://flourish.studio>.



Figure 1 Word cloud of the corpus of 104 tweets

Note. “Ataque” = “Attack”, “jovem” = “young man”; “universidade” = “university”; “lisboa” = “Lisbon”; “faculdade” = “faculty”; “vídeos” = “videos”, “suspeito” = “suspect”, “ciências” = “sciences”; “portugal” = “Portugal”; “estudante” = “student”; “terrorista” = “terrorista”; “atentado” = “bombing”; “terrorismo” = “terrorismo”; “massacre” = “massacre”; “preparava” = “prepared”; “planeava” = “planned”.

One can highlight other terms from the word cloud in Figure 1, such as “vídeos”, “suspeito”, “ciências”, “portugal”, “estudante”, “terrorista”, “atentado”, “terrorismo”, “massacre”, “preparava” or “planeava” (“videos”, “suspect”, “science”, “Portugal”, “student”, “terrorist”, “bombing”, “terrorism”, “massacre”, “prepared” or “planned”). These terms may suggest other narratives present in the corpus of the 104 tweets about this specific case. The media narratives each official journalistic/news organisation account used for the coverage of this case can be further explored through the discourse analysis using the respective word clouds.

Figure 2 is the visual representation of the 29 tweets extracted from the official account of SIC Notícias. In this word cloud, the words “ataque”, “faculdade”, “jovem”, “universidade”, and “lisboa” (“attack”, “faculty”, “young man”, “university”, and “Lisbon”) stick out initially. These are the exact same five terms found with greater prominence in Figure 1 and the identified macro-narrative of a young man’s attack on a faculty at the University of Lisbon. The terms “tentativa” and “ciências” (“attempt” and “sciences”) also draw attention, although with less visual representativeness, which corresponds to a lower frequency of both words. In what concerns words that add to the identification of the “suspeito” or “detido” (“suspect” or “detained”), we find “18” — the age of this young man.

relevance after 5 days of occurrence. Notwithstanding the immediate nature that characterises the digital space, social networks and social media, it was not from the day of the event itself that more tweets about this case were found, but rather from the following day, February 11, 2022 (with 63 of the 104 tweets of the corpus), which corroborates the idea that “usually, the narrative emerges after the event” (Lits, 2015, p. 20), even in the digital space. A critical perspective of the tweets of the corpus about this case reinforces the understanding that the news media behind the five accounts in question use Twitter essentially as another platform for the dissemination and spreading of the journalistic work they do within a trend of underutilisation of the conversational capabilities that Twitter offers (Puebla & Gomes-Franco, 2015).

At a quantitative level, there are differences in the media coverage of this case for each news organisation connected to the five Twitter accounts included in the corpus, as shown in Table 2. SIC Notícias and *Público* published, respectively, 881 and 846 tweets between the 7 days of the corpus, the two accounts with more tweets collected. However, of the 881 tweets from SIC Notícias, 29 address the case studied. On the other hand, from the 846 tweets from *Público*, only 13 are about this case. That amounts to less than half the SIC Notícias’s tweets incorporated in the corpus of 104 tweets under analysis, despite the similar number of tweets in the 7 days of the corpus. Moreover, *Correio da Manhã*’s account has the highest number of tweets about the case (33) and the second lowest total number collected in the 7 days of analysis (599). This prevalence may constitute a potential indicator of greater perceived relevance of this case, for this journalistic organisation, through a higher frequency of tweets, compared to the other journalistic organisations behind the analysed accounts, which may be a mere reflection of the informative matrix of *Correio da Manhã*, considered to be closer to the tabloid format (Lima & Reis, 2014).

According to the discourse analysis, by resorting to the visual representation of word clouds, a macro-narrative is identified in Figure 1, which allows answering the first research question — “in what way was this event characterised on Twitter?”. The discourse of the 104 tweets corpus focuses on an idea that connects the most frequent terms: “ataque”, “jovem”, “universidade”, “lisboa”, and “faculdade” (“attack”, “young man”, “university”, “Lisbon”, and “faculty”). This journalistic macro-narrative is somehow present in every word cloud, referring to the tweets of each of the five journalistic/informative accounts. The exception is *Expresso*’s word cloud (Figure 4) since the small number of tweets (11) possibly does not constitute a sufficient corpus for identifying narratives in the form of word clouds that visually represent the 100 most frequent terms.

Figure 1 shows, still with relative frequency, terms like “terrorista” or “terrorismo” (“terrorist” or “terrorism”), which allows starting an answer to the second research question that guides this work — “does a journalistic narrative associated with terrorism stand out?”. It is identified as a narrative that associates this case with terrorism. However, it is not a central macro-narrative in the corpus.

The word clouds concerning each Twitter account of a journalistic/informative nature allow answering positively to the third research question — “are there nuances in

the narratives followed by the different media?”. There are nuances, in other words, subtleties in the narratives applied, namely at the level of the use of the terrorism narrative, since terms that refer to this idea are found in the word clouds of SIC Notícias, *Jornal de Notícias* and *Correio da Manhã*, but not in the remaining ones.

The actual discursive construction of the central character in this event is differentiated between the five journalistic/informative Twitter accounts. There are cases in which a more legal approach, where this character is constructed as a suspect of any illicit activity, is particularly frequent in comparative terms. This approach may be a consequence of adherence to the Portuguese Journalists’ Code of Ethics, in particular Point 8, which covers the need for the journalist to safeguard the presumption of innocence of defendants (Sindicato dos Jornalistas, 2017). In any case, the use of the term “suspeito” (“suspect”) differs between the word clouds, appearing with relative frequency in the word clouds of SIC Notícias, *Expresso* and *Correio da Manhã*. There are cases in which the age (SIC Notícias) or the name (*Correio da Manhã*) of this young man is highlighted, which constitutes relevant discursive nuances in the construction of the central character of this case — since, inevitably, the real figure of an event goes through a work of narrative and journalistic composition and construction (Peixinho, 2014).

A further possible nuance at the level of micro-narratives has to do with the high frequency of the word “travado” (“stopped”) — by association, for example, with “ataque travado” (“attack stopped”) — in *Público*’s word cloud. With only this term, *Público* ascribes great importance to this micro-narrative, which conveys the idea that the event itself did not occur because it was stopped, thus being a non-event. One does not find this micro-narrative in the other word clouds, at least not with a similar level of prominence, whereas the frequency of the word “tentativa” (“attempt”) in SIC Notícias’ word cloud may correspond to a micro-narrative very similar to the one identified in *Público*’s because it also expresses the idea that the attack did not happen.

This study allows the identification of narratives, which, in turn, raises necessary reflections about these same narratives. Portugal’s history of cases represented as terrorist attacks is particularly slight. The specific case studied here can fit several definitions of terrorism, including that of “lone wolf” (Cohen et al., 2014; Phillips, 2011; Spaaij, 2010), although those same definitions are controversial (Paixão, 2019). Some even speak of “old terrorism” and “new terrorism” (Neumann, 2009) and how “new terrorism” as a concept gained visibility after the attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States of America (Rezende & Schwether, 2015). These attacks contributed to the stereotypical, Orientalist and Islamophobic association and binding of terrorism to Islamism (Altheide, 2006; Nayak, 2006). Moreover, inclusively in a country like Portugal, in which the cases described as “terrorism” are a detail, most media representations of Muslims reproduce Eurocentric power discourses (Rodríguez Maeso, 2018), related to an Orientalist tradition (Matos, 2002). Hence, it would be interesting to understand how a similar case to this one would be represented if the character was Muslim or perceived as such — since terms like “Arab” or “Muslim” are commonly, but erroneously, used as synonyms in various media narratives (Shaheen, 2001).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The elaborated word clouds serve as tools for discourse analysis regarding the coverage of the five Twitter accounts of a journalistic/informative nature in Portugal with the most followers. It is considered that this qualitative analytical approach can contribute to the development of scientific understandings about the narratives used to give and construct meaning to the media coverage, particularly journalistic coverage on Twitter, of this specific case with few parallels in Portugal. A journalistic macro-narrative central to the 104 tweets is identified, entailing the idea of an attack on a faculty of the University of Lisbon. Despite being common — but not uniform among the five-word clouds — the terrorism narrative is not the most central in the corpus, as shown in Figure 1. In fact, the journalistic narrative that associates this case to terrorism is not highly present in the five accounts, despite standing out in three of the five (namely, the cases of SIC Notícias, *Jornal de Notícias* and *Correio da Manhã*). Therefore, the study points towards nuances of the most frequent narratives in each of the five news media associated with the official Twitter accounts. In this regard, other narrative nuances are identified, be it the emphasis given to the idea of “attack stopped”, mainly in *Público*, or from the perspective of the construction of the central character of the case, since the word clouds show, among themselves, different highlights given to aspects such as his age or name.

This paper may contribute to studying media narratives, particularly journalistic, in this type of case in Portugal. The critical analysis of the 104 tweets also allows for deepening the understanding that the news media in Portugal show a tendency to use Twitter as a space for the dissemination of their work and not, at least overtly, for the conversational and interactive potential of this platform (Puebla & Gomes-Franco, 2015). Other studies focusing on this case might analyse other media and journalistic objects, reaching beyond the immediate nature that characterises how information circulates online, particularly Twitter.

Nevertheless, this paper reiterates the consideration of what would be the central macro-narrative in the corpus if this case under study had as a character a young Muslim or an individual even perceived as Muslim. Furthermore, if the micro-narratives identified in the accounts of *Público* and even SIC Notícias, which seem to want to demonstrate that the attack did not happen, was “stopped” and was only an “attempt”, would have similar frequencies. Especially if the identity profile of the young man, this case’s central character, had religion — especially not the Catholic religion — as a prominent element.

Based on the word clouds of the posts — tweets — of the five official accounts corresponding to the five information media in Portugal with more followers on Twitter, this study allowed the identification of a journalistic macro-narrative that focuses on an attack at a faculty of the University of Lisbon. As far as this case’s central character is concerned, no narrative focused on his identity element stood out particularly, as opposed to what occurred in vast accounts of media representations associated with attacks that typically follow an Orientalist and Islamophobic tradition (Altheide, 2006; Nayak, 2006). Such a representative tradition, which focuses on an identity element, tends to contribute to the religious — particularly Islamic — association with terrorism. Regardless, in

the case under study in this paper, and although it still has a relevant frequency, the journalistic narrative of terrorism did not stand out uniformly or centrally in the 104 tweets of the corpus, which helps understand the media coverage, especially journalistic, of this specific case with few parallels in Portugal.

Translation: Eduardo Antunes

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