Black Pete on Social Media: Echo chambers or Interactive Debate?
Calculating Argument Diversity in Online Discussion Threads

Cedric Waterschoot, Antal van den Bosch, Ernst van den Hemel
KNAW Meertens Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

BACKGROUND

Twitter Thread 1:

*Con, Racial stereotype: contemporary*

**Pro, Innocent**

ohh yeah go back to your country that's a classic, over her (sic) we also got "zwarte piet" which brown but mostly black people get called a lot

Most whites actually know the full story and don't let the narrative be pushed towards "white supremacistsl with black slaves". For us he is a symbol of kindness. Freeing poor children from a life of abuse. Praising "good" kids, punishing "bad" kids. Your see evil because you are.

**Con, Racial stereotype: historical**

whatever the full story behind zwarte piet is, your "symbol of kindness" it is still used by whites as a way to insult and hate black and brown people. It is literal black face in the 21st century, we dont see evil because we are, but because of the evil we've had to endure

black pete is losing support fast because people know it was only created in 1850 for the same reasons minstrel shows were. Especially for a country with such deep and lasting colonial history it's very painful to watch some excuse blackface.

Level1 (11) Level2 (12)

Pro Dutch tradition, Christian tradition, Innocent, Intention, Pre-christian, Oriental
Con Racial stereotype: historical, Racial stereotype: contemporary

**METHODODOLOGY**

Assumptions:
1. Each post contributes at least one specific argument.
2. Each argument is either 'pro' or 'con'.
3. Repeating arguments leads to less interactivity/diversity.

The thread as a whole receives a score based on the interactivity and diversity detected in the posts. This real-valued indicator (TIS) provides information on whether the presented arguments 1...N constitute an echo chamber, opposition flood or a balanced discussion. Repetition of a single reasoning weighs heavier towards the extremes, either echo chamber or opposition flood.

\[
TIS_N = \sum_{i=1}^{N} Share_i
\]

Individual posts receive a diversity score MICi representing the extent to which this post at the time of posting contributed to the thread in terms of interactivity. Simply put, if the new post presents an argument that has not been part of the discussion, it contributes more to the thread compared to when perspectives are repeated. Subsequent repetition of identical arguments decreases the contributory factor.

\[
MIC_i = \frac{1 - \log_2(i(x_i))}{1 - \log_2(i(x_i))} \times w^{-1}
\]

RESULTS

Dynamic scores of Twitter threads:

Opposition Flood

Echo Chamber

Reddit discussion results in balanced discussion with the exception of two threads. Previous research put forward varied results depending on the subreddit in question [2].

The 21 Twitter threads plotted here do collectively shift slightly towards echo chambers. This divergence in thread status is reflected in previous research, which report a variety in results regarding bias and homophily on Twitter feeds [3, 4].

REFERENCES


CONTACT

E-mail: cedric.waterschoot@meertens.knaw.nl
Website: https://better-mods.uvt.nl/
KNAW Meertens Institute
Oudezijds Achterburgwal 185
1012 DK Amsterdam, The Netherlands