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Web archiving of elections and Brazilian possibilities

Introduction

This research aims to identify some projects developed internationally regarding web archiving in the area of elections, analyzing the importance of these initiatives for the preservation of political and social virtual memory, as well as the applicability of such projects in the context of Brazil.

The analysis follows an exploratory and descriptive approach, from the web archiving projects of elections in the USA, Canada, United Kingdom and France. The methodology used was a bibliographical and documentary study, involving a search of academic papers about web archiving and other related knowledge areas. The sources of the research did not focus on a single institution and its respective webpages but considered other publications that describe relevant projects - thus being analyzed with complementary information whenever possible. In this qualitative approach, characteristics of these projects were collected and analyzed, especially regarding web archiving policies, technologies used and permissions to collect and make information available to users.

Main results and conclusions

Differences were observed among access to information collected, according to the country and its respective legislation. During the 2005 and 2010 elections, the UK requested permission to collect information, requiring curators to contact site owners about filing it before it could be collected and stored. Website owners who declined permission, did not respond or were not located, did not have their sites archived. The 2015 elections were collected after the introduction of new legal deposit regulations in 2013, which allows any UK site to be collected without permission (British Library 2017).

The French web archive, developed by the National Library of France, does not provide the pages collected online, because it understands that the content is protected by copyright and is subjected to legal deposit legislation. This means that access to the web pages collected by the National Library can only be done in reading rooms, with authorized computers (Bibliothéque Nationale de France 2017). Nevertheless, the 2017 French elections were collected by Stanford University Libraries (USA) through the Archive-It platform (Archive-It 2017), which provides online access to this information.

In the United States, web archiving has been carried out weekly by the Congress Library, during electoral periods, since 2000. This web archive documents the sites
associated with presidential, parliamentary and governmental elections. The archived campaign sites of the United States elections also include social networks, in order to get a fuller representation of how candidates were presented to the electorate via the Internet. These collections are comprised from websites of political parties, governments, advocacy groups, bloggers, and other individuals and groups that express relevant views (Library of Congress 2017).

In 2004, the Library and Archives of Canada Act authorized the Library and Archives Canada (LAC) to collect and preserve a representative sample of Canadian web content. LAC has been collecting federal and non-federal content since 2005. (Library and Archives Canada 2017). In the Canadian federal elections of 2015, tweet-gathering discussions emphasized the importance of archiving from the perspective of a historical record not dominated by conventional media. Thus, the collection of this material underscores the need for its ethical use by researchers. The credit of these reference sources in research should be seen as collaborative and information sharing processes, since the voices in the platform are multiple and independent (Ruest and Milligan 2016). In relation to Twitter, some initiatives file the tweets as a broader way of composing the historical moment of the elections along with the memory of the various voices of voters and media coexisting at that time. Despite the difficulties in archiving social networks, especially regarding the closed characteristics of these platforms for commercial reasons, such as with Facebook, it is still considered important to preserve memory from these sources. This possibility of consent is given by the legal permission coming from the contract and developer policy, made available by Twitter, in which this contract allows the capture of only public tweets (Ruest and Milligan, 2016).

The possibilities of web archiving in Brazil are still only emerging incipiently (Rockembach 2018), either through some exploratory research, or by independent initiatives, but have not yet been institutionalized by the Brazilian government in a systematic way. One of the challenges is centered on the legislation about web produced information in Brazil and the corresponding copyright, which is not yet clear, thus making it difficult to achieve a massive archiving of the Brazilian web. However, understanding that the information produced in the Brazilian political elections context should be guided by transparency and publicity, since it is public information, it is possible to understand that the collection and subsequent availability will not cause the same problems that can arise with information from people or private companies published on the web. This proprietary information generates claims possibilities, depending on the interpretation of the current copyright law. Accordingly, it is concluded that Brazil's 2018 general election seems to be an opportunity to test possibilities and web archiving models within the context of Brazil and develop further research.
The web has become a daily and ubiquitous source of information in the lives of many people around the world but, as Brügger and Schroeder (2017) argue, what does this say about historical and social change? Web archiving, then, consists in deliberate and purposeful documentation, with the necessary awareness that the material is being preserved and why it is being preserved, thus, giving many possibilities to researchers from different fields of knowledge. Based on observations and international initiatives, it is possible to justify the research of this digital memory constitution of elections and its multiple uses by various sciences, as well as understanding the methodologies and best practices related to web archiving policies and related technologies. This possibility of preservation and recovery of sites can guarantee the organic, unique, original and probative aspects of the information collected.

References


