"Building political hashtag affinity spaces: #HaStatoPutin vs. #FuckPutin"

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Abstract:

This presentation reports the findings of my sociopragmatic research on user reactions to Russia's military operation in Ukraine that began on 24th February 2022, with an eye to two political hashtags, namely #HaStatoPutin and #FuckPutin. The application of each of these two hashtags makes for users' polyvocal discussion in favour of/against the Russian President respectively. #HaStatoPutin appeared on Twitter in 2015 to mark tweets critical of what Italian users regarded as unsupported conspiracy theories targeting Vladimir Putin. On the other hand, #FuckPutin, which went viral after the military attack, can be conceived of as a long-standing legitimised form of public swearing oriented towards symbolically abusing the Russian President.

Based on automatically generated corpora of multimodal tweets (obtained through Twitter's API), the main tweeting trends (i.e. tweet categories) for both hashtags are discerned. The analysis of the diversified applications of the two hashtags yields interesting findings about tweeters' creativity, as well as the polarisation of political opinions. It is proposed that these jointly developed tweeting practices, which involve mutual learning and with which producers must be familiar when they decide to tweet, make for hashtag affinity spaces.

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