

Values in everyday language and inter-group conflict

Inter-group conflicts often revolve around cultural differences between groups (Dobewall, & Strack, 2011). Researchers repeatedly use values to describe cultures and many definitions for cultural values have been proposed over the last years. Geert Hofstede defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede, 1980/2001). Cultural values evolve as preferences for resolving basic issues in managing life in society, telling people what is appropriate in their social environment (Schwartz, 2006). We argue that people’s perceptions of their own cultural values as well as of other groups’ cultural values are accessible by means of an analysis of short informal statements on social media (for example, internet postings; Holtz, Kronberger, & Wagner, 2012). Within our project, we will relate value attributions to social conflicts such as debates on migration in Germany and other European countries.

Previous work

Recent research has shown that it is possible to extract personality traits and sociodemographic information very reliably from social media data such as Facebook status updates and postings (Kosinski, Stillwell, & Graepel, 2013; Park et al., 2015). Value-laden natural language can be processed in a similar way. For example, Boyd and colleagues (2015) compared both behavior essays (N=800) and Facebook status updates (N=150,000) to respondents’ answers to a version of the Schwartz Values Survey. They found that self-report questionnaires for abstract and complex phenomena, such as values, are inadequate for painting an accurate picture of a person.

Method

During this project, we want to construct a value dictionary based on the work of Christen and colleagues (2016) and use it to analyze discourse on social conflicts such as migration related debates. We will collect data from popular channels such as political party web pages and programs, open comment sections in online newspapers, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. We will use several software tools for linguistic analysis, such as word counting (e.g., LIWC), topic models (using the statistical programming environment *R*), and comparative keyword analysis (using software tools such as AntConc) to relate patterns of linguistic expressions to value expressions and value expressions consequently to conflict related discourse patterns.

Example

To provide a more concrete example, one possibility would be to analyze discourses within far-right social media platforms with regard to value-laden content using the aforementioned value-dictionary. In a second step, we could identify and automatically classify messages that refer to certain out-groups (for example, Muslims) and messages that express the authors’ own opinions and attitudes. These results can then be compared with analysis material from other sources such as, for example, left-wing websites. This will enable us to paint a comprehensive picture of the use of values within an inter-group conflict situation. This is important for conflict resolution because reframing issues in terms of values that the other group can understand facilitates agreement (Feinberg & Willer, 2015).

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