

Revue des Interactions Humaines Médiatisées

Journal of Human Mediated Interactions

Rédacteurs en chef : Sylvie Leleu-Merviel & Khaldoun Zreik

Vol 23 - N°1/ 2022

(numéro spécial | special issue)

ISSN 2402-6522



© europia., 2021

15, avenue de Ségur,
75007 Paris - France

<http://europia.org/RIHM> | <http://rihm.fr>

Contact | e-mail : rihm@europia.org

Revue des Interactions Humaines Médiatisées

Journal of Human Mediated Interactions

Rédacteurs en chef / *Editors in chief*

- Sylvie Leleu-Merviel, Université de Valenciennes et du Hainaut-Cambrésis, Laboratoire DeVisu
- Khaldoun Zreik, Université Paris 8, Laboratoire Paragraphe

Comité éditorial / *Editorial Board*

- Thierry Baccino (Université Paris8, LUTIN - UMS-CNRS 2809, France)
- Karine Berthelot-Guiet (CELSA- Paris-Sorbonne GRIPIC, France)
- Pierre Boulanger (University of Alberta, Advanced Man-Machine Interface Laboratory, Canada)
- Jean-Jacques Boutaud (Université de Dijon, CIMEOS, France)
- Aline Chevalier (Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, CLLE-LTC, France)
- Stéphane Caro, (IUT Bordeaux Montaigne, France)
- Yves Chevalier (Université de Bretagne Sud, CERSIC -ERELLIF, France)
- Didier Courbet (Université de la Méditerranée Aix-Marseille II, Mediasic, France)
- Viviane Couzinet (Université de Toulouse3, LERASS, France)
- Milad Doueichi (Université de Laval - Chaire de recherche en Cultures numériques, Canada)
- Pierre Fastrez (Université Catholique de Louvain, GReMS, Belgique)
- Pascal Francq (Université Catholique de Louvain, ISU, Belgique)
- Bertrand Gervais (UQAM, Centre de Recherche sur le texte et l'imaginaire, Canada)
- Patrizia Laudati (Université Côte d'Azur, SICLAB Méditerranée, France)
- Catherine Loneux (Université de Rennes, CERSIC -ERELLIF, France)
- Marion G. Müller (Jacobs University Bremen, PIAV, Allemagne)
- Marcel O'Gormann (Univerity of Waterloo, Critical Média Lab, Canada)
- Serge Proulx (UQAM, LabCMO, Canada)
- Jean-Marc Robert (Ecole Polytechnique de Montréal, Canada)
- Imad Saleh (Université Paris 8, CITU-Paragraphe, France)
- André Tricot (Université de Toulouse 2, CLLE - Lab. Travail & Cognition, France)
- Jean Vanderdonckt (Université Catholique de Louvain, LSM, Blgique)
- Alain Trognon (Université Nancy2, Laboratoire InterPsy, France)

Revue des Interactions Humaines Médiatisées

Journal of Human Mediated Interactions

Vol 23 - N°1 / 2022

(numéro spécial | special issue)

Sommaire

Editorial

Sylvie LELEU-MERVIEL, Khaldoun ZREIK (rédacteurs en chef) iv

Les *fake news* comme objet pour penser l'information dans son écosystème numérique

Fake news as a tool to think news in an digital world

Pauline AMIEL, Alexandre JOUX 1

***Fake news* et publicisation d'une controverse médicale : le « cas Raoult » à l'heure de la pandémie de Covid-19**

Fake news and publicizing a medical controversy; the "Raoult case" at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Stéphanie LUKASIK, Marc BASSONI 7

***Fake News* et complotisme sur YouTube : comment l'algorithme favorise la polarisation des opinions**

Fake news and conspiracy theories on YouTube: how algorithm promotes polarisation of opinions

Florian DAUPHIN 17

Réinterroger les relations des unités journalistiques françaises de *fact-checking* avec les plateformes numériques : entre opportunistes et instrumentalisation

Re-examining the relationships of French journalistic fact-checking units with digital platforms: between opportunism and instrumentalization

Laurent BIGOT, Jérémie NICEY, Nicolas SOURISCE 29

Quand le *fact-checking* bouscule le rapport entre journalisme et vérité : une approche épistémologique

When fact-checking challenges the relationship between journalism and truth: an epistemological approach

Angelina TOURSEL, Philippe USEILLE 41

Fake News and the Corona Crisis in Germany: Public Broadcasting Counter Strategies on Instagram

Fake News et la crise de la Corona en Allemagne : Stratégies de contre-attaque des médias publics sur Instagram

Caja THIMM 55

The Brazilian fact-checking landscape under the platforms' guidance

Le paysage de fact-checking au Brésil sous l'égide des plateformes

Thales LELO

73

Editorial

Ce numéro spécial de la *Revue des Interactions Humaines Médiatisées* revient à une formule invitée comme cela s'est déjà produit par le passé, pour la dernière fois en 2018.

Il s'agit donc d'un millésime atypique dans la production de la revue, qui abandonne temporairement sa forme habituelle de trois articles longs en varia. En effet, le numéro propose sept articles plus courts, qui sont des versions retravaillées et complétées de travaux sélectionnés parmi ceux présentés lors du colloque international « Journalisme et plateformes 2 : information, infomédiation et *fake news* » organisé par l'axe 4 de l'IMSIC et qui s'est tenu à l'École du Journalisme et de Communication de l'Université d'Aix-Marseille (EJCAM), à Marseille, du 20 au 22 janvier 2021. Ce colloque international est le deuxième volet d'un rendez-vous « Journalisme et plateformes » dont le premier volet, « de la symbiose à la dépendance », a été organisé par le LERASS à Toulouse en 2019.

L'ensemble est consacré aux fake news, au fact-checking et à l'éducation aux médias et à l'information. Le numéro a été coordonné par Pauline Amiel et Alexandre Joux, qui ont effectué tout le travail de reviewing et de supervision scientifique. Ils présentent l'ensemble du numéro dans l'article d'ouverture. Nous les remercions pour l'exigence dont ils ont fait preuve dans ce travail.

Nous vous souhaitons à toutes et à tous une très bonne lecture et nous vous remercions de votre fidélité.

Sylvie LELEU-MERVIEL et Khaldoun ZREIK
Rédacteurs en chef

The Brazilian fact-checking landscape under the platforms' guidance

Le paysage de fact-checking au Brésil sous l'égide des plateformes

Thales LELO (1)

(1) Communication and Work Research Center, Université de São Paulo
thales.lelo@gmail.com

Abstract. This study examines the growth of the Brazilian fact-checking movement, considering the funding sources of active organizations and the relationship between the business strategies of these groups and their editorial guidelines. In particular, it assesses whether the financing models pursued by local fact-checkers influence the type of corrections they publish. The research is based on data from official websites of these firms and semi-structured interviews with 16 fact-checkers. Findings show that most Brazilian fact-checkers rely on a hybrid funding model to ensure economic sustainability, with growing support from Silicon Valley companies. In addition, it stresses that these firms have been increasingly focused on debunking online falsehoods rather than checking political claims. This “debunking trend” in the Brazilian fact-checking movement is discussed, bearing in mind the reduced staff of several organizations and their growing dependence on platform companies' revenue stream.

Keywords. Fact-checking, platform companies, economic sustainability.

Résumé. Cette étude examine la croissance du mouvement brésilien de fact-checking, en tenant compte des sources de financement des associations actives et de la relation entre les stratégies commerciales de ces groupes et leurs lignes directrices éditoriales. En particulier, il évalue si les modèles de financement utilisés par les fact-checkers locaux influencent le type de corrections qu'ils publient. La recherche est basée sur des données provenant des sites officiels de ces entreprises et des interviews semi-structurées avec 16 fact-checkers. Les résultats montrent que la plupart des fact-checkers brésiliens s'appuient sur un modèle de financement hybride pour assurer leur viabilité économique, avec le soutien croissant des entreprises de la Silicon Valley. En outre, l'étude souligne que ces groupes se concentrent de plus en plus sur la refutation de fausses informations en ligne plutôt que sur la vérification des déclarations politiques. Cette « debunking trend » dans le mouvement brésilien de fact-checking est examinée, en tenant compte des personnes réduites dans ces organisations et de leur dépendance croissante à l'égard du flux de revenus des entreprises de plateforme.

Mots-clés. Fact-checking, entreprises de plateforme, viabilité économique.

1 Introduction

In the last years, the rise of fact-checking organizations worldwide is evident. Some authors have argued that launching the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) in 2015 points to a ‘global movement’ that aggregates journalists in different countries (Graves, 2018), including Brazil. Nevertheless, although political fact-checking was established in the US by the mid-2000s (Dobbs, 2012; Graves et al., 2016), its dissemination worldwide has been characterized by adjustments and floating epistemic boundaries (Graves, 2018).

Inspired by the American movement, the first Latin American country to receive a fact-checking enterprise was Argentina, with the launch of the Chequeado in 2010 (Riera & Zoomer, 2020). The success of this organization had encouraged other journalists to implement similar websites. In Brazil, these projects began in 2014 amidst the presidential elections, with the launch of initiatives like *Preto no Branco* (from Globo Organizations), *É isso mesmo?* (from the newspaper *Zero Hora*), and *Truco!* (from the *Pública Agency*). These new initiatives were a laboratory and a showcase to the firms launched in the following years.

Nevertheless, the first Brazilian dedicated fact-checking websites were launched in 2015, directed by former mainstream media journalists. Cristina Tardáguila (the former *Preto no Branco* head) resigned from the *O Globo* newspaper to develop her fact-checking website, called *Lupa*. The *Piauí* magazine, an independent journalistic organization funded by João Moreira Salles, a filmmaker and heir of the *Itaú* bank (the most significant private bank in Brazil), hosts the initiative. The other organization launched in the same year was *Aos Fatos*, led by Tai Nalon. Like Tardáguila, she was also a former journalist of a legacy news media who resigned from her job – in this case, at the *Folha de S. Paulo*, the most widely circulated newspaper in Brazil.

Since then, plenty of new initiatives have started. Since 2017, several fact-checking units from mainstream media have been launched, like *UOL Confere*, from Folha Group; *Estadão Verifica*, from Estado Group; and *Fato ou Fake*, from Globo Group. In 2018, the presidential election background led to the peak of fact-checking projects operating simultaneously (17) (see fig. 1). That context strengthened fact-checking as a relevant editorial genre in Brazil. Notably, the Brazilian Election Justice had established partnerships with fact-checkers during the 2018 and 2020 elections to deter disinformation regarding the election process (Santos, 2021). In 2020, there were 15 active projects in Brazil.

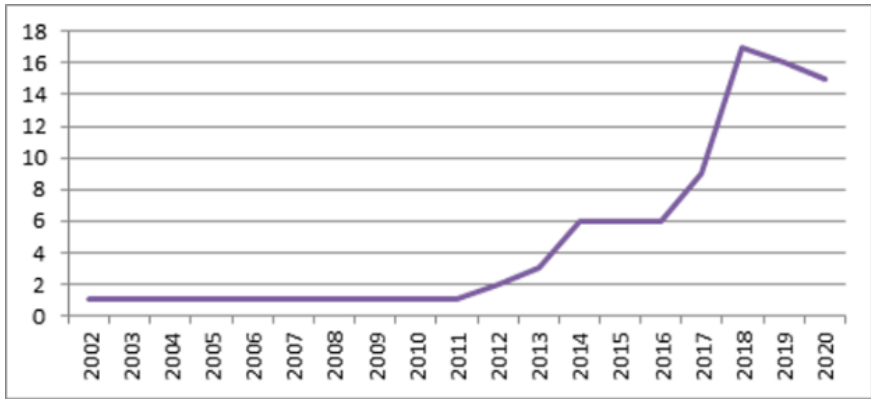


Figure 1. Number of Brazilian fact-checking organizations per year

Based on this backdrop, this article tries to grasp the funding sources of Brazilian fact-checkers and their possible impacts on the editorial guidelines of these initiatives. Moreover, it investigates a relationship between the type of corrections privileged by fact-checkers and their financing models.

2 Literature review

Studies dedicated to the fact-checking movement have been growing. Most of them have focused on tracking down the historical roots of fact-checking in American journalism in the early 2000s, outlining how that novel journalistic approach represents a rupture with the so-called “he said, she said” accounts that “refuse to take sides on factual disputes” (Graves, 2018, p. 613), especially when these disputes involve political figures (Dobbs, 2012; Graves et al., 2016). The typical “fair and balanced” report would have benefited demagogues, who safeguarded themselves on the “objectivist” culture. Contrary to the “horse race” reporting encapsulated by the *Fox News* slogan, “We report, you decide” (Dobbs, 2012), scholars have highlighted that fact-checkers are concerned with the journalistic truth-seeking approach, sustaining that “journalist’s primary obligation (...) is to tell the truth as best as he or she can determine it” (Ibid., p. 3).

Modern fact-checking aims to reinvigorate journalistic legitimacy for the public interest. Thus, it would act to hold political elites accountable for inaccurate statements, raising the costs of falsehoods (Amazeen, 2018). Simply put, fact-checking could be seen as a democratic accountability tool (Dobbs, 2012; Graves, 2018).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that checking the accuracy of a news piece before its publication is a standard procedure in the US modern journalism, at least since the 1920s (Bigot, 2017). So, even before fact-checking became a journalistic subgenre, the internal verification of texts was a standard procedure in American newsrooms. That convention was established in Brazil in the 1950s with the pioneering reform of the *Diário Carioca* newspaper (Albuquerque & Gagliardi, 2011). Scholars have argued that this reform institutionalized the American media model in the country (Albuquerque & Gagliardi, 2011; Albuquerque, 2018). Implementing the copy desk role in newsrooms was its most salient aspect. Copy desks were charged with checking each article written by journalists to shape them into the fact-centered approach of the US model (Albuquerque & Gagliardi, 2011).

However, the copy desk work was mainly editorial, and the verification was prior and not included in the content, as in the case of professional fact-checking.

Most studies about the modern fact-checking enterprise have been concentrating on the US context, frequently addressing one of the three most influential organizations (FactCheck.org, Politifact.com, and *The Washington Post's* Fact-Checker). Articles that analyze the characteristics of the projects launched in the “Global South” are scarce. However, they are fruitful since they address socio-political particularities that escape from scholars who solely spot the “normative standards” of fact-checking practice (e.g., political pressure, linguistic barriers, and the scarcity of financial resources).

This paper addresses these literature gaps centering on the surge of Brazilian fact-checking firms. Scholars have been analyzing the funding strategies employed by active fact-checkers, pointing to a somewhat contradictory situation: on the one hand, there is a global development of this journalistic practice; on the other one, there is a high mortality rate of new fact-checking initiatives and various obstacles to active organizations get revenue (Lowrey, 2015; Amazeen, 2018; Singer, 2021). Some authors have been showing growing support for the global fact-checking movement from platform companies (e.g., Google, Meta) – especially after these corporations were accused of improper influence on Western democracies’ elections and referendums (e.g., the 2016 US presidential election and the Brexit referendum). In recent years, big techs have launched several partnerships with fact-checking initiatives to claim they are making all the workable efforts to fight against disinformation. Besides, journalism is economically dependent on digital platforms since services like Google Ads and Facebook Ads control the ad tech industry and generate revenue for websites by user traffic (Braun & Eklund, 2019). Based on this background, it is relevant to inquire:

RQ1: How do Brazilian fact-checking organizations are funded?

Likewise, several media scholars have been emphasizing that the news industry is gradually submitting to social media’ affordances (Bucher & Helmond, 2018), unbundling articles to distribute them on as many platforms as possible (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), and redirecting news values to digital media’ attention markets (Trilling et al., 2017). In the fact-checking ecosystem, partnerships established with platform companies have been apprehended as a turning point toward “debunking” (i.e., corrections of content flagged by social media users) at the expense of political fact-checking (Graves & Anderson, 2020; Nicey & Bigot, 2020). So, it is interesting to ask:

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the funding strategies of Brazilian fact-checkers and the type of correction they published?

3 Methods

This study draws on two complementary data sets to assess whether there is a relationship between the financial support of fact-checking ventures and their editorial guidelines. First, the number of active fact-checkers was gathered by accessing the catalogue maintained by Duke (University) Reporter’s Lab. Complementary research was undertaken on websites of international fact-checking networks (such as the IFCN signatories list), members’ list of fact-checking coalitions (e.g., CoronaVirusFacts Alliance, *Rede Internacional de Combate à*

Desinformação), and fact-checking consortiums coordinated by the judicial system during elections (e.g., Superior Electoral Court).

3.1 Textual data

Based on sampling the 15 active Brazilian fact-checking operations, their official websites were examined to understand their business strategies and editorial guidelines (e.g., type of content checked). At this stage, analysis was centered on open-access information in the “about us” section of websites. Data on the type of claims covered by each initiative and their funding sources were extracted and coded. Clues about the revenue stream of fact-checkers were identified by the presence or absence of programmatic advertising banners and sponsor banners on their websites, crowdfunding projects, subscription programs, and even institutional publications announcing new funded partnerships.

3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Potential interviewees were selected by searching the “about us” sections of websites. At least one representative of each initiative was contacted through their professional email accounts. Over six months (from August 2020 to February 2021), 16 fact-checkers (including five reporters, five directors, and six editors) were interviewed, representing 13 out of 15 active Brazilian fact-checking organizations. The sample includes 11 women and five men.

Because of the COVID-19 outbreak restrictions, all interviews were conducted online in a hybrid format, including text messages (six cases), audio records (three cases), and Zoom calls (seven cases). The Zoom call average duration was 1 hour and was recorded with the interview consent. Interview scripts include questions about organization infrastructure, partnerships established, and editorial guidelines. The right to anonymity was offered to all sources, but they waived it. Interview data were analyzed by open textual coding, and the answers were grouped by thematic axis to extract proper inferences.

4 Results

4.1 Funding sources of Brazilian fact-checking organizations

The mapping of the funding sources of the Brazilian fact-checking groups reveals a trend towards diversification of revenue streams. As previous studies have shown (Lowrey, 2015; Singer, 2021), most Brazilian fact-checkers bet on a hybrid funding model (see Figure 2), including programmatic advertising; funding from NGOs, public foundations, and state funding; donation; subscription; editorial partnerships; propaganda; conferences, workshops, and consulting projects. All firms analyzed bet on at least two financing sources, although the editorial partnerships, donations, and subscriptions prevail in the sample.

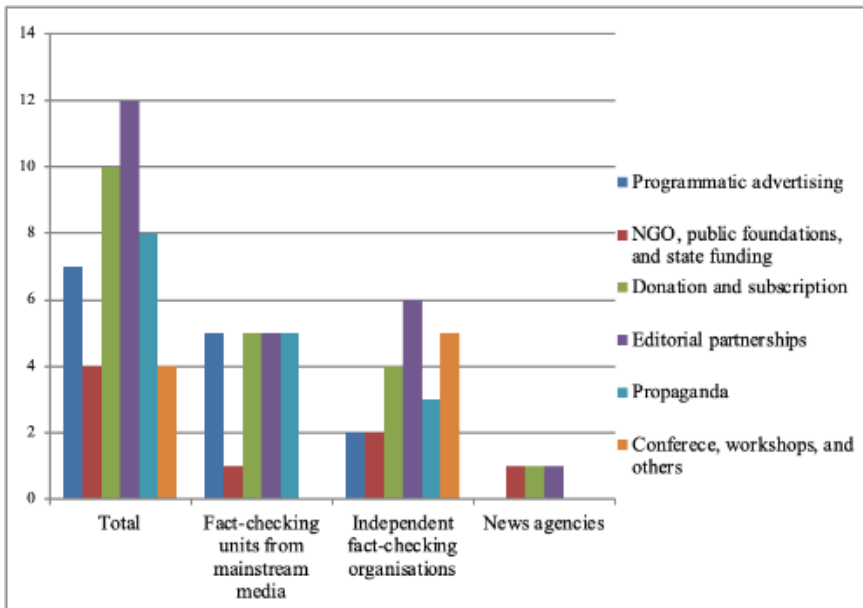


Figure 2. Funding sources of active Brazilian fact-checking organizations

However, there are differences between the funding models of fact-checking units of mainstream news media and independent start-ups. The first ones use the same financial strategies adopted by the media conglomerates to which they belong, centered on editorial partnerships, propaganda, programmatic advertising, and subscriptions. In contrast, independent fact-checkers bet on more diversified funding sources to guarantee their economic sustainability, including support from public foundations, NGOs, workshops, and consulting projects.

As expected, platform companies are a vital support for Brazilian organizations. Overall, most sites (whether independent start-ups or units of legacy news media outlets) rely on programmatic advertising (7 out of 15) and editorial partnerships with big techs (i.e., Google and Meta) (8 out of 15).

Since all fact-checkers who profit from programmatic advertising make business accounts on services like Google AdSense to include banners in their websites, it is more relevant to analyze partnerships established between fact-checkers and platform companies.

First, big techs hire some fact-checkers as service providers. Currently, the four Brazilian fact-checking initiatives which are IFCN signatories (i.e., AFP Fact Check, *Aos Fatos*, *Estadão Verifica*, *Lupa*), are also Meta’s partners in its Third-Party Fact-Checking program and have received Google’s fact-checking stamp, ratified by the ClaimReview standard. Google and Meta fact-checking partnerships aim to limit the reach of stories signaled as false by journalists, increasing the visibility of fact-checking content (Graves & Anderson, 2020; Nicey & Bigot, 2020).

According to content director Natália Leal (of *Lupa*), the leading financial source of her enterprise comes from content production – which corresponds to 70% of annual revenue. *Lupa* signs fixed and short-term contracts with other organizations, and its principal business partner is Meta. Likewise, Ana Freitas

(executive director of *Aos Fatos*) argues that assistance from big techs is essential to her initiative's economic sustainability.

The second type of financial support platform companies' offer to fact-checking enterprises is grants to advance innovative products. Up to now, only *Lupa* and *Aos Fatos* have received grants to advance automated tools for monitoring disinformation, visualizing data, and improving user interaction. Ana Freitas and Natália Leal informed that their organizations encourage the constant idealization and design of new projects, which could be eventually submitted to open grants of platform companies. According to Leal, this financial support is fundamental to the economic health of independent journalistic ventures: "*Nowadays, our fixed and short-term contracts do not fund us. So, many times, the rise in brand awareness compensates the initial investment involved in the design of new projects.*"

The third type of sponsorship of the Brazilian fact-checking ventures by platform companies is financial support for fact-checking alliances. In this case, fact-checkers who are members of these alliances receive grants from big techs. The most famous coalition is the *Comprova* (a Brazilian version of Cross Check). Launched on 28 June 2018 and coordinated by the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Abraji), *Comprova* was proposed by First Draft News, a nonprofit coalition sponsored by Google News Lab. First Draft aggregates grantmaking networks (such as Open Society) and corporate entities (e.g., Meta, Twitter). In 2020, *Comprova* had assembled 28 media outlets, including local and national news outlets and five fact-checking organizations (i.e., AFP Fact Check, *Coletivo Bereia*, *Estadão Verifica*, *Prova Real*, and *UOL Confere*). As reported by José Lima, *Comprova*'s assistant editor, Google News Initiative and Meta Journalism Project provide financial support to coalition members as a counterpart to their participation in *Comprova*. Three members of the alliance must ratify fake news corrected by the project.

Overall, outlining Brazilian fact-checking financial strategies shows Silicon Valley corporations' centrality in ensuring the economic sustainability of these groups (particularly the independent ones). Just 3 out of 15 fact-checking initiatives do not trade programmatic advertising banners on their websites and are not partners of Google and Meta. These organizations (*Eté Checagem*, *Fonte Exclusiva*, and *Veritas*) are mainly funded by consulting and market research. However, two were discontinued at the end of 2020 (*Eté Checagem* and *Veritas*). The project leader of *Eté Checagem*, Viviane Tavares, underscores that the difficulty in extending their funding sources impeded the initiative's continuity.

4.2 Editorial capture by platform companies

Even though almost all Brazilian fact-checkers rely on big tech capital, it is noteworthy that interviewees unequivocally deny any editorial influence of their corporate partners in their work. Fact-checkers have stressed their autonomy to decide which claims they will examine. The sole external influence mentioned by IFCN signatories who are partners of Meta on the Third-Party Fact-Checking program is in the monthly corrections published. Fact-checkers have also noticed that partnerships established with Silicon Valley corporations give them access to additional tools and engines to monitor online disinformation, increasing brand awareness. Alessandra Monnerat, assistant editor of *Estadão Verifica* illustrates this point:

Especially the partnership with Meta has an essential role for us to extend our visibility. When we flag some Facebook content as false or misleading, people will be notified, and the post

circulation will decrease... So, I think we see more directly the impact of our work on Facebook and Instagram users.

However, another sort of influence that platform companies exert on fact-checking ventures is in their correction policies. As previous studies have shown (Nicey & Bigot, 2020; Graves & Lauer, 2020), fact-checkers funded by big techs worldwide have been privileging corrections of social media content at the expense of checking political statements. In a sense, this “debunking turn” in modern fact-checking results from the policies of programs like Third-Party Fact-Checking, which inhibits the verification of opinion and political discourse based on the American conception of freedom of speech – that protects any claim as long as it is considered an opinion expression.

Nevertheless, debunking sounds very appealing even for fact-checkers who are not partners of Silicon Valley corporations but include programmatic advertising in their funding model. Corrections based on user-generated content are often cheaper and faster than inspecting the subtleties of political speech, which are more open to contentions and alternative interpretations, as scholars have argued (Uscinski & Butler, 2013). For this reason, debunking is easier to label on a black-and-white scale, reducing the time spent in the newsroom to reach a verdict regarding the veracity of some content. As many interviewees have emphasized, it is essential to highlight that Brazilian fact-checkers operate with reduced teams and usually call freelancers to ensure the production pace. In this context of staff scarcity, the commercial logic of producing content that reaches diverse audiences and generates revenue through click-bait strategies is particularly appealing. Guilherme Goulart, the editor of *Holofote*, underlines this issue: “*For instance, if I tweet about classic fake news such as ‘fennel tea prevents coronavirus’, it spins a lot on Twitter; but if I check a political claim, it gives me just two, three retweets. It is much less shareable.*”

Currently, seven Brazilian fact-checkers include political statements in their editorial guidelines, whereas the other eight are centered on debunking. Organizations like AFP Fact Check and *Comprova*, supported by platform companies since their launch, prioritize user-generated content and only check political claims in exceptional circumstances. Cecília Sorgine and Maria Clara Pestre, reporters from AFP Fact Check in Brazil, say that the agency performs political fact-checking only in incontestable public relevance cases (e.g., when the President holds a critical press conference). Likewise, the assistant director of *Comprova*, José Lima, argues that his organization has recently included political statements in their editorial guidelines to cover disinformation about the COVID-19 outbreak spread by politicians.

Another constraint to political fact-checking is the sheer volume of content daily verified by partners of platform companies’ fact-checking programs. Interviewees informed that in small newsrooms, the amount of work demanded by Google or Meta partnerships prevents them from covering a broader scope of claims. As stated by Alessandra Monnerat, since her team comprises four journalists, “*the work of monitoring social media takes up a lot of our time, and we end up not being able to dedicate more time to produce other types of corrections.*”

According to Natália Leal (of *Lupa*), the fixed contracts with platform companies have influenced the editorial guidelines of fact-checking organizations:

Since we established these fixed contracts with platform companies, maybe if you look at what we have published monthly, you could conclude that we have been publishing less political fact-checking to privilege corrections from social media content [...] Modern fact-checking starts as an accountability tool for political speech. So, we are no longer this tool for political compliance with citizens and have become a content verifier on social media to prevent people from being deceived.

Consequently, there is a change in the fact-checking role since it has established these partnerships with digital platforms.

In Leal's viewpoint, the inherent risk of partnerships between fact-checkers and big techs is the instrumentalization of the fight against disinformation by proprietary platforms, which have been blamed for allowing the spread of fake news in social media. So, it could lead fact-checkers to assume a reactive attitude towards disinformation and redirect their activities to the very agenda of junk news, which has systematically come up on digital platforms.

5 Discussion

This study has shown that most Brazilian fact-checkers rely on a hybrid funding model to ensure economic sustainability (such as their counterparts worldwide). The growing importance of economic incentives offered by Silicon Valley companies to the global fact-checking movement (Graves & Lauer, 2020) complements this finding. In Brazil, these corporations provide two different financial supports for fact-checkers. First, including programmatic advertising on their websites, fact-checking ventures can profit from user traffic without hiring an advertising team. According to Edgard Matsuki, editor-in-chief of *Boatos.org*, Google ads allows his organization to dedicate only to journalistic work without negotiating directly with advertising agencies. Second, several fact-checkers have established fixed contracts with platform companies to verify flagged content on social media.

In addition, Brazilian fact-checkers have been increasingly focused on debunking Internet rumors at the expense of correcting political claims. This “debunking trend” in the Brazilian fact-checking movement can be related to the reduced staff of several organizations and their growing dependence on platform companies' support. Debunking is based on viral content that can increase user traffic on fact-checking websites, generating income through programmatic advertising. Moreover, as interviewees have contended, corrections of online falsehoods are easier and faster because they can be labeled on a black-and-white scale.

In short, platform companies have outsourced content moderation by establishing partnerships with fact-checkers. Claims classified as disinformation have their reach diminished on social media. Platforms have also included links to the corrections published by journalists. Consequently, these partnerships are an institutional response of the platform companies to their alleged improper influence on Western democracies' elections and referendums. With these programs, they can argue that they are making all the feasible efforts to fight against fake news – sidestepping their business model's discussion by calling the journalistic authority.

The funding of fact-checking compounds this spin-doctor strategy focused on diverting public attention from advancing the regulatory policies of digital platforms (Yarrow, 2021). It is not by chance that IFCN and the fact-checking coalitions (such as the *Comprova*) have received financial support from Google and Meta since their launch (Nicey & Bigot, 2020). Big techs are indifferent to editorial decisions of fact-checkers financed by them because, as long as these journalistic organizations do not violate the general policies established by the partnership, they will already serve the general purpose of reiterating the platform companies' commitment to deter disinformation.

6 Final Remarks

Institutional reforms in American journalism have historically influenced the transformations of Brazilian newsrooms. For instance, the modernization of the Brazilian press that occurred in the second half of the XX century was promoted by the US government through the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), which had financed the education of several Brazilian journalists into the objectivity standards of news coverage (Albuquerque, 2008). The emergence of fact-checking in Brazilian journalism represents the latest phase of this isomorphic trend.

Fact-checking has begun as a professional reform movement that appeals to US journalism's most respected epistemological and ethical standards (Graves et al., 2016; Amazeen, 2018). The truth-seeking tradition (Dobbs, 2012) promoted by the US fact-checkers tries to restore the accountable role of journalism. Considering this, it is unsurprising that the first Brazilian fact-checking projects were launched amidst the presidential elections to verify the accuracy of political statements.

In recent years, Silicon Valley corporations interested in promoting themselves as allies of democracy in the fight against disinformation have captured the normative discourse surrounding modern fact-checking. Thus, the “debunking trend” in the Brazilian fact-checking movement can be discussed against journalism's growing financial dependence on platform companies' investments. To conclude, at a normative level, the most significant risk of that “phantomization of fact-checking” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) is the loss of its transformative potential. As a result, the truth-seeking tradition of journalism that pioneer fact-checkers have tried to restore can give way to a market-based movement well accommodated to platforms' business logic.

References

- Albuquerque, A. (2008). « Aconteceu num Carnaval: algumas observações sobre o mito de origem do jornalismo brasileiro moderno », *ECO-Pós*, vol. 11, n° 2, 2008, p. 95-116.
- Albuquerque, A. & Gagliardi, J. (2011). « The copy desk and the dilemmas of the institutionalization of “Modern Journalism” in Brazil », *Journalism Studies*, vol. 12, n° 1, 2011, p. 80-91.
- Albuquerque, A. (2018). « Journalism and Multiple Modernities: The *Folha de S. Paulo* Reform in Brazil », *Journalism Studies*, vol. 20, n° 11, 2018, p. 1546-1562.
- Amazeen, M. (2018). « Practitioner perceptions: Critical junctures and the global emergence and challenges of fact-checking », *The International Communication Gazette*, vol. 81, n° 6-8, 2018, p. 541-561.
- Braun, J. A. & Eklund, J. L. (2019). « Fake news, real money: Ad tech platforms, profit-driven hoaxes, and the business of journalism », *Digital Journalism*, vol. 7, n° 1, 2019, p. 1-21.
- Bigot, L. (2017). « Le *fact-checking* ou la réinvention d'une pratique de vérification », *Communication & langages*, vol. 192, n° 2, 2017, p. 131-156.
- Bucher, T. & Helmond, A. (2018). The Affordances of Social Media Platforms, in Burgess, Jean, Marwick, Alice E., Poell, Thomas, dir., *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, London, Sage Publications, 2018.

- Dobbs, M. (2012). *The Rise of Political Fact-checking: how Reagan inspired a journalistic movement*, New America Foundation, 2012.
- Graves, L., Nyhan, B. & Reifler, J. (2016). « Understanding innovations in Journalistic Practice: A field Experiment Examining Motivations for Fact-Checking », *Journal of Communication*, n° 66, 2016, p. 102-138.
- Graves, L. (2018). « Boundaries not drawn », *Journalism Studies*, vol. 19, n° 5, p. 613-631, [<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1196602>].
- Graves, L. & Anderson, Cw. (2020). « Discipline and promote: building infrastructure and managing algorithms in a 'structured journalism' project by professional fact-checking groups », *New Media & Society*, vol. 22, n° 2, 2020, p. 342-360.
- Graves, L. & Lauer, L. (2020). « From Movement to Institution: The 'Global Fact' Summit as a Field-Configuring Event », *Sociologica*, vol. 14, n° 2, 2020, p. 157-174.
- Lowrey, W. (2015). « The emergence and development of news fact-checking sites », *Journalism Studies*, vol. 18, n° 3, 2015, p. 1-19, [<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1052537>].
- Nicey, J. & Bigot, L. (2020). « Le soutien de Google et de Facebook au *fact-checking* français : entre transparence et dépendance », *Sur le journalisme, About journalism, Sobre jornalismo*, vol. 9, n° 1, 2020, p. 58-73, [<http://www.surlejournalisme.kinghost.net/rev/index.php/slj/article/view/417>].
- Nieborg, D. B. & Poell, T. (2018). « The platformization of cultural production: Theorizing the contingent cultural commodity », *New Media & Society*, vol. 20, n° 11, p. 4275-4292, [<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818769694>].
- Riera, A. & Zoomer, L. (2020). « Using Fact Checking to Improve Information Systems in Argentina », *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 91, n° 3, 2020, p. 600-604.
- Santos, G. F. (2021). « Social media, disinformation, and regulation of the electoral process: a study based on 2018 Brazilian election experience », *Revista de Investigações Constitucionais*, vol. 7, n° 2, 2021, p. 429-444.
- Singer, J. B. (2021). « Border Patrol: The rise and role of fact-checkers and their challenge to journalists' normative boundaries », *Journalism*, vol. 22, n° 8, 2021, 1929-1946, [<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920933137>].
- Trilling, D., Tolochko, P. & Burscher, B. (2017). « From newsworthiness to shareworthiness: how to predict news sharing based on article characteristics », *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 94, n° 1, 2017, p. 38-60.
- Uscinski, J. E. & Butler, R. W. (2013). « The Epistemology of Fact Checking », *Critical Review*, vol. 25, n° 2, 2013, p. 162-180.
- Yarrow, D. (2021). « From Fact-checking to Value-checking: Normative Reasoning in the New Public Sphere », *The Political Quarterly*, p. 1-8, [<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12999>].