ARTICLE

THE BRAZILIAN FACT-CHECKERS CRITERIA:

an analysis of the guiding purposes, principles, and routines of this journalistic practice

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ABSTRACT – This research aims to know the purposes, motivations, and routines of the fact-checking practice in Brazil. We developed a self-administered questionnaire to understand the perceptions of journalists. The sample (n=29) expressed their level of agreement with a group of statements. The results show the central purpose is to detect and combat false and misleading content on digital channels. Also, the principle of transparency regarding news sources and data that support a content evaluation is firmly appreciated. Differences emerge related to the ease of using digital tools between IFCN members and non-members. Age is a relevant factor regarding the pressures during the journalism practice.
Keywords: Fact-checking. Verification. Journalism practice. Disinformation.

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OS CRITÉRIOS DOS FACT-CHECKERS BRASILEIROS: uma análise dos propósitos, princípios e rotinas desta prática jornalística

RESUMO – Buscamos conhecer propósitos, motivações e rotinas da prática de fact-checking no Brasil, a partir das percepções dos jornalistas. A pesquisa se baseia em questionário autogestionado, no qual 29 respondentes manifestaram seu grau de concordância com um conjunto de afirmações. Como resultados, temos que o principal propósito consiste em detectar e combater conteúdos falsos e enganosos nos canais digitais e que a transparência em mostrar fontes e dados que sustentam a classificação do conteúdo é um valor fortemente compartilhado. Há variações quanto à facilidade em usar ferramentas digitais entre membros e não-membros da IFCN, assim como diferenças nas pressões ao exercício profissional conforme a faixa etária.
Palavras-chave: Fact-checking. Jornalismo de verificação. Práticas jornalísticas. Desinformação.

LOS CRITERIOS DE LOS FACT-CHECKERS BRASILEÑOS: un análisis de los propósitos, principios y rutinas de esta práctica periodística

RESUMEN – Este artículo busca conocer los propósitos, motivaciones y rutinas de la práctica del fact-checking en Brasil a partir de las percepciones de los periodistas. La investigación se base en un cuestionario autogestionado, en el cual 29 periodistas manifestaron su nivel de acuerdo sobre un conjunto de afirmaciones. Los resultados muestran que el principal propósito consiste en detectar y combatir contenidos falsos y engañosos en los canales digitales y que la transparencia en mostrar fuentes y datos que sustenten la calificación del contenido es un principio fuertemente compartido. Hay diferencias en cuanto a la facilidad de uso de las herramientas digitales entre aquellos miembros y no miembros de la IFCN, así como en la influencia de presiones en el ejercicio profesional por grupos etarios.
Palabras clave: Fact-checking. Periodismo de verificación. Prácticas periodísticas. Desinformación.

1 Introduction

Even though fact-checking has become globally notorious on the internet, this journalistic practice precedes the era of digital platforms. Graves (2016) reminds us that Brooks Jackson anchored on CNN a segment in which he would confront data used by the United States presidential candidates back in 1992. At that same time, American printed newspapers used to check the information given by politicians. The Washington Post used to place images of the children's character Pinocchio to point out the level of inaccuracy of their statements. After his experience on television, Jackson helped to develop the project FactCheck.org, in 2003. The major boost came

with PolitiFact, which won the Pulitzer Prize, the most important award of North-American journalism, in 2009, for the coverage of the 2008 elections, in which Barack Obama was chosen to be the president of the United States. Using a Truth-O-Meter – the higher the temperature, the more inaccurate the speech – PolitiFact caught the attention of other media and started a kind of franchise, offering training to spread the practice of labeling public statements according to the level of truth that could be confirmed with public databases and other factual evidence.

This new practice spread from the US to the rest of the world, leading to the creation of the International Fact-checking Network (IFCN), in 2014. This organization, headquartered at Poynter Institute, in Florida, has five guiding principles: transparency related to the information sources, funding sources, checking methodologies and corrections, as well as nonpartisanship. In the Brazilian press, the verification of facts gained prominence particularly in 2018, during the presidential election campaign, but the first fact-checking specialized agencies and websites appeared in 2014 in Brazil (Seibt, 2019). Two of the pioneer initiatives in Brazil – Agência Lupa and Aos Fatos – are still currently active and have joined the IFCN, whose certified initiatives check viral content on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google, with their technical and financial support. Alongside, there are other local initiatives in Brazil, besides the coalition of journalistic media that cooperate in checking facts through Projeto Comprova (Heb, 2021).

As of 2020, besides the electoral processes, which had already proven to be rich for the propagation of false content, as pointed out by Da Empoli (2020) and D'Ancona (2018), the coverage of public health issues was flooded by waves of "disinformation" or by the "information disorder" (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The covid-19 pandemic arose followed by a huge variety of misleading and distorted content on digital platforms, causing the World Health Organization (WHO) to consider the "infodemic" a risk in the combat against the pandemic. Defined as "an overabundance of information – some accurate and some not – that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it" (Pan American Health Organization, 2020, p. 2), the infodemic demanded a direct action from journalists and science popularizers for checking of information about the health crisis, that soon became a political crisis as well. The politicization of the virus and the polarization

of speeches boosted the disinformation about prevention and vaccination (Ferreira & Varão, 2021; Silva & Baalbaki, 2021) while strengthening anti-democratic and authoritarian speeches (Seibt & Dannenberg, 2021; Viscardi, 2020).

In the Brazilian scenario, president Jair Bolsonaro (Liberal Party – PL) became an advocate in the defense of demonstrably inefficient treatments and an active voice in verbal attacks against the press during his public appearances for his millions of followers on social media. As of Bolsonaro's 1.000th day as president, in September 2021, fact-checking website Aos Fatos had already counted 3.989 false statements and distortions said since he had taken office –1.937 were false or distorted allegations (48.6%) related to covid-19 (Ribeiro, 2021). Inflated by the nation's leader, not only by inaccurate data, attacks against journalists disseminated more intensely online and offline. According to the "Violence Against Journalists and Freedom of the Press" report, issued in January 2021 by the Brazilian National Federation of the Journalists (FENAJ), 2020 was the most violent year since the first records in the 1990s: there were 428 attacks, including two murders, a 105.77% rise compared to 2019 (Fenaj, 2021). President Bolsonaro was identified as the attacker in 175 cases (40.89%), followed by public servants and politicians.

Different monitoring computes the number of reporters who were blocked on social media by officeholders, which is seen as a threat to freedom of the press and to the exercise of journalism by class representative entities for limiting the access to information of public interest. The Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Abraji) mapped 100 journalists who were blocked by public authorities on Twitter from September 2020 to April 2021 – 54 of them were blocked by the President, including the Aos Fatos CEO, Tai Nalon (Cordeiro, 2021). In another campaign, open to all audiences, the professions most mentioned as blocked by politicians were journalists (22%), law professionals (12%), and education professionals (7%).

Besides avoiding professionals of the press to watch his appearances on social media, Bolsonaro infests his followers with groundless statements, without having the platforms apply their policies related to disinformation and their partnerships with fact-checkers. On a rare, isolated occasion, in October 2021, Facebook and YouTube took down videos of Bolsonaro's weekly live transmission for the first time – and the only one as of the closing of this article. The Brazilian President had associated covid-19 with aids (Gortázar, 2021).

In face of such contemporary journalistic coverage challenges, which is one of the reasons for the rise of fact-checking practices, it is necessary to investigate how journalists perceive their professional activities over fact-checking and deepen the understanding of the practices and principles that guide this journalistic activity on different countries. This is the main point of this paper, which focuses on the Brazilian reality over fact-checking to establish similarities and differences related to the practices and reference literature, which mostly originated from the United States and Europe. Through the review of the literature and a questionnaire answered by 29 journalists who work with fact-checking in Brazil, we try to understand the principles and practices in the perception of the Brazilian fact-checking professionals.

This paper is structured as follows: firstly, we comment on the principles and practical implications of fact-checking journalism; then we point out in detail the research methodology (questionnaire design and sample), which is elaborated based on a quantitative approach; finally, we present the results and discussion.

2 Principles and practices

Graves (2016, p. 9) sees fact-checking as a "reform movement" of journalism based on the very principles of journalism, including the search for factual truth – journalists no longer decide what news is, but what is true in the public debate. Truth, veracity, and verification, however, are principles of different orders. For Fogel (as cited in Heb, 2021), promising the truth in face of disinformation is a risk for journalism, because in public life there rarely is an agreement about the facts. According to Wilson Gomes (2009), the main point is not the truth, but the veracity as a standard from which journalism commits to "work objectively and methodically to exclude the risk of deceit or error" (p. 11). Objectivity emerges as an adjacent standard, as a practical criterion, translated as the "rigor in method" by authors such as Cornu (1998, p. 391): the collection of all confirmed facts available in order to oppose falsification, deformation, and lies. That is similar to what fact-checkers search with their verification practices in face of disinformation.

The rigor in method was also present in the "precision journalism" concept, in which Meyer (1973) defended the use of the scientific method in journalism, with the disclosure of applied

processes to enable validation by third parties – which is similar to the checking method transparency suggested by IFCN. Even before, Lippmann (2008, p. 294) already pleaded a "scientific spirit" for the journalistic practice based on the proof trial and verification. In the description of the "discipline of verification" as an element of journalism, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2004) recommend that the journalist should be as transparent as possible about their methods and motivations, because "[...] only by explaining how we know what we know can we approximate this idea of people being able, if they were of a mind to, to replicate the reporting. This is what is meant by objectivity of method in science, or in journalism" (p. 128).

Verifying the veracity of information is also one of the 12 purposes of journalism identified by Reginatto (2019), based on the perception of media vehicles, journalists, and readers. It is necessary to highlight a subtle difference between the fact-checking activity we are dealing with in this paper and the verification proper to journalism, before the publishing of informative content, performed in rare cases by internal checking departments or performed by an editor (Graves, 2018). The work of fact-checking journalists starts when the informative content (e. g., public statement or digital platforms content) has already caused social impact or repercussion in the public debate or has gone viral on digital platforms. After all, in the digital era, the journalist has been "moved higher up the editorial chain from the production of initial observations to a role that emphasizes verification and interpretation, bringing sense to the streams of text, audio, photos and video produced by the public" (Anderson et al., 2013, p. 43). Contemporary fact-checking reflects the media ecosystem.

Amongst the professionals dedicated to checking public statements and digital platforms' content, Seibt (2019) identified that transparency is a deeply shared normative principle, more than traditional journalism principles such as objectivity and precision. Skills of presenting the consulted sources and the checking processes, as well as putting into context the information that has already been publicized are more evident in the journalistic practice of fact-checking, according to the respondent professionals, which once again allows the correlation of verification and transparency in the methodological process of the fact-checking practices.

But the fact-checking practice is also a new business form in journalism because using journalism to fight disinformation

is something very powerful for the media dedicated to certifying content (Heb, 2021). The mobilization of traditional newsrooms towards fact-checking in the search for alternatives to restrain disinformation campaigns is a demonstration of such a market move. And the redirection of fact-checkers attention, who used to worry about public authorities' statements and now dedicate almost all their time and resources to "clean" social media (T. Nalon, personal communication, June 26, 2020), is another. The checkers' mental health became an issue and was one of the topics Claire Wardle approached in her opening speech at the GlobalFact8, IFCN's annual meeting, in 2021.

Journalism professionals have to handle new responsibilities and pressure in their everyday activities, whether they are full-time fact-checkers or occasional verifiers in newsrooms. Understanding the similarities and differences between these realities is one of the objectives of this research. We also intend to investigate the generational changes in the perception of fact-checking practices and if there is a difference in that perception between members and non-members of the IFCN, the entity that drives the efforts of its associates for verification of content on major digital platforms.

3 Methodology

The objective of this paper is to identify characteristics and peculiarities related to the purposes, motivations, and routines of the fact-checking activity in Brazil. For that, we asked how fact-checkers in Brazil guide their professional activity from the principles, purposes, and complexities of the exercise of verification journalism. We consider as purposes of verification journalism the journalists' intentions and objectives to integrate this journalistic practice. As principles, we mean the commitments that guide toward quality verification journalism as defined in the IFCN Code of Principles. We mention the complexities of the routines from the specific activities to elaborate the fact-checks.

This paper is part of a broader investigation project that studies the fact-checking movement in an Ibero-American reach. In this work, specifically, here is what we intend to understand:

RQ1: Are there differences between the fact-checkers related to media that signed the IFCN Code of Principles and those who have not?

RQ2: Are there differences between fact-checkers who perform the fact-checking activity regularly and those who do it occasionally?

RQ3: Are there differences due to their experience as fact-checkers?

RQ4: Are there differences due to the journalist's age?

3.1 Sampling

The questionnaire was addressed to fact-checking professionals who participate in verification initiatives in Brazil. The study used as reference the IFCN Code of Principles and the research conducted by Mena (2019) with fact-checkers in the United States justified based on Graves (2018) and Graves et al. (2016). The research team first identified the existing fact-checking media in Brazil at the beginning of 2021, consolidating a database for the questionnaire. Additionally, the questionnaire was shared via WhatsApp with groups of fact-checkers, and via email, on February 1st, 2021, by IFCN with its community of checkers.

The survey included a brief introduction that indicated the purpose of the research and identified the investigation team. It also explained our understanding of fact-checking (a journalistic practice that consists of evaluating and qualifying previously published content) to avoid confusion with the conventional practices of error verification before the information is published. The respondents did not receive any kind of incentive or retribution in exchange for their participation. All answers were anonymous since no record was made and nobody was asked to provide their name or email address. The answers were received between February 1st to the 18th, 2021.

We received 29 responses from Brazilian fact-checking professionals. The non-probabilistic sampling is considered sufficient for the analysis of the studied phenomenon. The studies that analyze the journalists' perceptions show that this professional category is willing to participate in this kind of questionnaire (Mena, 2019; Vu & Saldaña, 2021).

The analysis and statistical treatment were performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics program while the visualization of the results (Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3) used RStudio libraries.

3.2 Sampling description

Of all respondents, 55.17% (n=16) identified themselves as being of feminine gender, and 44.83% (n=13) as of masculine gender. 10.34% (n=3) said to be younger than 24; 41.38% (n=12) were 25-34 years old; 34.48% (n=10) were 35-44; 6.90% (n=2) were 45-54; and 6.90% (n=2) were 55-64. None of the participants stated to be older than 65. 93.1% (n=27) had a degree in journalism, social communications, or similar areas.

As for employment relationships, 44.83% (n=13) worked for a fact-checking initiative that was an International Fact-Checking Network member, while in the other 55.17% (n=16), 44.83% (n=13) said they were not part of IFCN and 10.34% (n=3) did not know if their organization was an IFCN member. Regarding their experience as a verification journalist, 51.72% (n=15) had less than two years of experience; 41.38% (n=12) had two to five years, and 6.90% (n=2) had more than five years of experience. The majority, 75.86% (n=22), declared they practiced fact-checking habitually, while 24.14% (n=7) performed this activity occasionally.

3.3 Research variables

The questionnaire was structured in three blocks centered on fact-checking purposes, motivations, and routines. In total, it had 23 questions that were evaluated based on a 5-level Likert scale.

3.3.1 Fact-checking purposes

The "fact-checking purposes" are presented in seven different propositions of the questionnaire: 1) The purpose of fact-checking journalism is to evaluate the accuracy of public statements from relevant people and institutions; 2) The purpose of fact-checking journalism is to fight and discredit false stories and information spread on social media; 3) The purpose of fact-checking journalism is to defend the ideals of journalism (independence, impartiality, and precision); 4) The purpose of fact-checking journalism is to change political-democratic behavior; 5) The purpose of fact-checking journalism is to improve citizens awareness of public affairs; 6) The

purpose of fact-checking journalism is to expose institutions and public figures that spread false information; and 7) The purpose of fact-checking journalism is to promote political and social activism. We set a 7-point Likert-type scale in which "1" is "I totally disagree" and "7" is "I totally agree", to which participants had to indicate how much they agreed with each of the propositions.

3.3.2 Fact-checking motivations

The IFCN has a code of principles that consolidates the fact-checking practice globally and dissipates doubts related to the practice within its signatories. These principles were evaluated through the following eight assertions: 1) Fact-checking journalism must be non-partisan; 2) Fact-checking journalism can take sides in public affairs or defend certain social causes; 3) A piece of fact-checking news must always be presented to the audience, with enough detail, the sources and data used to demonstrate the qualification of the evaluated content; 4) It is acceptable for a fact-checker to use the word "lie" or to say that someone lied when they qualify content as false; 5) Fact-checking journalism has a stronger civic responsibility commitment compared to traditional journalism; 6) Fact-checking journalism has a stronger commitment to informative transparency practices compared to traditional journalism; 7) In general, fact-checking journalism has some tendency to take sides with left-wing political positions; 8) In general, fact-checking journalism has some tendency to take sides with right-wing political positions. We set a 7-point Likert-type scale in which "1" is "I totally disagree" and "7" is "I totally agree", to which participants had to indicate how much they agreed with each of the assertions.

3.3.3 Fact-checking routines

The methodology of fact-checking defined by verification media implies a demanding activity that includes different types of sources, data, and digital tools to classify the level of (in)accuracy of the analyzed content or public statement. Based on typical actions of the verification process, the following assertions were made: 1) Selecting a statement or content to be checked; 2) Getting official data and

contacting official sources; 3) Getting specialized data and contacting specialized sources; 4) Analyzing databases; 5) Using verification digital tools; 6) Assessing content; 7) Influencing the media agenda-setting with verified content. We set a 7-point Likert-type scale in which "1" is "Very easy" and "7" is "Very complex", to which participants had to indicate how difficult each of the procedures is.

The last question is about autonomy and freedom in the exercise of their profession: 8) We would like you to indicate if you receive any political, social, or economic pressure when you perform your fact-checking journalism activity. For this assertion, we used a 7-point Likert-type scale where "1" means "Never" and "7" means "Very often", to which participants had to indicate how frequently they are pressured during their work.

4 Results

Firstly, it is important to show the descriptive statistics associated with each one of the categories in the questionnaire. For fact-checkers, the most valued purpose of their journalistic activity is "Fighting and discrediting false stories and information spread on social media" (M=6.69), followed by "Evaluating the accuracy of public statements from relevant people and institutions" (M=6.52), "Defending the ideals of journalism (M=6.45) and "Improving citizens awareness of public affairs" (M=6.17). The lowest level of agreement is with the assertion "Exposing institutions and public figures that spread false information" (M=5.31). Journalists do not agree that the assertions "Changing political-democratic behavior" (M=3.41) and "Promoting certain political and social activism" (M=2.31) are the purposes of their activities.

Figure 1
Valuation of verification journalism purposes

	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max	Boxplot	Histogram
To evaluate the accuracy of public statements from relevant people and institutions	6.52	0.83	4.00	7.00	7.00		
To fight and discredit false stories and information spread on social media	6.69	0.81	4.00	7.00	7.00		
To defend the ideals of journalism (independence, impartiality, and precision)	6.45	1.06	3.00	7.00	7.00		
To change political-democratic behavior	3.41	1.80	1.00	4.00	7.00		
To improve citizens awareness of public affairs	6.17	1.28	2.00	7.00	7.00		
To expose institutions and public figures that spread false information	5.31	1.93	1.00	6.00	7.00		
To promote political and social activism	2.31	1.83	1.00	1.00	7.00		

The most valued motivations or principles that guide fact-checking were "A piece of fact-checking news must always be presented to the audience, with enough detail, the sources and data used to demonstrate the qualification of the evaluated content" (M=6.90) and "Fact-checking journalism must be non-partisan" (M=6.76). Considering the other categories, we found that opinions were quite divided concerning a "Stronger commitment to informative transparency practices compared to traditional journalism" (M=4.66) and if "It is acceptable for a fact-checker to use the word 'lie' or to say that someone lied when they qualify content as false" (M=4.14), as well as if a fact-checker "Can take sides in public affairs or defend certain social causes" (M=3.97). There is disagreement regarding the categories "Stronger civic responsibility commitment compared to traditional journalism" (M=2.90) and those about fact-checking having a "Tendency to take sides with left-wing political positions" (M=2.00) or a "Tendency to take sides with right-wing political positions" (M=1.41).

Figure 2

Valuation of verification journalism principles

	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max	Boxplot	Histogram
Fact-checking journalism must be non-partisan	6.76	0.58	5.00	7.00	7.00		
Fact-checking journalism can take sides in public affairs or defend certain social causes	3.97	1.92	1.00	4.00	7.00		
A piece of fact-checking news must always present to the audience, with enough detail, the sources and data used	6.90	0.41	5.00	7.00	7.00		
It is acceptable for a fact-checker to use the word 'lie' or to say that someone lied	4.14	1.94	1.00	5.00	7.00		
Fact-checking journalism has a stronger civic responsibility commitment compared to traditional journalism	2.90	2.04	1.00	2.00	7.00		
Fact-checking journalism has a stronger commitment to informative transparency practices compared to traditional journalism	4.66	2.19	1.00	5.00	7.00		
Fact-checking journalism has some tendency to take sides with left-wing political positions	2.00	1.54	1.00	1.00	6.00		
Fact-checking journalism has some tendency to take sides with right-wing political positions	1.41	0.87	1.00	1.00	4.00		

Regarding the complexity of the information production routines, we found out that journalists consider "Analyzing databases" (M=5.66) and "Influencing the media agenda-setting with verified content" as the most complex (M=5.66). In their perception, "Getting official data and contacting official sources" (M=5.34); "Getting specialized data and contacting specialized sources" (M=4.76), "Using verification digital tools" (M=4.52), "Assessing content" (M=4.48) and "Selecting a statement or content to be checked" (M=4.34) have a lower level of complexity. The participants do not mention "Receiving political, social or economic pressure when performing fact-checking journalism" (M=3.62) very often.

Figure 3

Valuation of verification journalism difficulties

	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max	Boxplot	Histogram
Selecting a statement or content to be checked	4.34	1.74	1.00	4.00	7.00		
Getting official data and contacting official sources	5.34	1.23	2.00	6.00	7.00		
Getting specialized data and contacting specialized sources	4.76	1.53	1.00	5.00	7.00		
Analyzing databases	5.66	1.26	2.00	6.00	7.00		
Using verification digital tools	4.52	1.38	1.00	5.00	7.00		
Assessing content	4.48	1.88	1.00	5.00	7.00		
Influencing the media agenda-setting with verified content	5.66	1.40	3.00	6.00	7.00		
You receive any political, social, or economic pressure when you perform fact-checking	3.62	2.03	1.00	4.00	7.00		

4.1 Fact-checkers perceptions regarding being an IFCN member or not

The results do not seem to indicate that being an IFCN member or not is statistically significant for the purposes that guide the exercise of the activity. We discovered differences in the motivations category, specifically when asking if fact-checking has a "Stronger civic responsibility commitment compared to traditional journalism" (F=3.811; p=.061; $t_{(27)}$=3.344; p=.002). Journalists working for initiatives that are members of the IFCN (M=1.69; SD=1.182) demonstrated higher disagreement; while those who do not work for the signatories of the code of principles or are not aware of their organization's membership (M=3.88; SD=2.094) demonstrate a higher tendency to be more favorable to this principle. In order to measure this difference, we standardized the series of data to apply Cohen's *d* coefficient to measure effect size. This indicator revealed a very important effect size since the statistical result was d=1.069.

In addition, being an IFCN member or not becomes a relevant factor for fact-checking activities in two important routines: use of digital tools (F=.7113; p=.406; $t_{(27)}$=3.411; p=.002; d=1.084) and content assessment (F=1.386; p=.249; $t_{(27)}$=2.169; p=.039; d=.761). In both cases, the results indicate, with statistical significance, that these tasks are evaluated as more complex by those who work for media that are not part of IFCN. Specifically, the use of tools for verification is evaluated, by those who are not IFCN signatories, with an average of M=5.19 (SD=1.047) in comparison with the lowest complexity average resulting from the answers of those who work for IFCN signatories (M=3.69; SD=1.316). Assessing content is more

complex for those who do not work for an IFCN signatory (M=5.13; SD=1.586) in comparison to the higher ease acknowledged by the fact-checkers associated with the IFCN (M=3.69; SD=1.974). For both, Cohen's statistical value *d* is relevant and highlights a big difference in both routines, and that difference is higher for the use of digital tools than for classifying content.

4.2 Fact-checkers perceptions regarding regular or occasional work

The dedication to fact-checking is a relevant factor in the analysis of purposes, motivations, and production routines. Firstly, the results indicate a significant difference regarding "Exposing institutions and public figures that spread false or questionable information" (F=7.470; p=.011; $t_{(26.607)}$=-3.023; p=.005; d=-.764). Those who occasionally work as fact-checkers (M=6.43; SD=.535) preset a higher level of agreement with this purpose than those who habitually fact-check (M=4.95; SD=2.08). This is an important significance in effect size (d=.764). Likewise, the t-test also reveals a difference related to the purpose of "Fighting and discrediting false stories and information spread on social media" (F=8.614; p=.007; $t_{(21)}$=-2.113; p=.047; d=-.507). Both groups show an elevated tendency to agree with this category (occasional fact-checkers: M=7.00; SD=.00; habitual fact-checkers: M=6.59; SD=.908). The reported effect size *d* is moderate.

The results also indicate significant differences in the principle "It is acceptable for a fact-checker to use the word 'lie' or to say that someone lied when they qualify content as false" (F=3.841; p=.060; $t_{(27)}$=-2.146; p=.041; d=-.876). In this case, occasional fact-checkers (M=5.43, SD=1.272) indicate a higher tendency to agree with this assertion than habitual fact-checkers (M=3.73; SD=1.956). Cohen's *d* measures the size difference between the groups as big.

Lastly, the frequency of the fact-checking activity also emerges as a relevant aspect to explain the complexity of "Using verification digital tools" (F=.062; p=.806; $t_{(27)}$=-2.538; p=.017; d=-1.007). Occasional fact-checkers value (M=5.57; SD=1.134) their use as more complex than those who perform fact-checking habitually (M= 4.18; SD=1.296), and the effect size, measured through Cohen's *d* value, is big.

4.3 Fact-checkers perceptions regarding their experience

The experience in the exercise of fact-checking journalism is not a differential aspect between the groups for any of the assertions about the purposes, motivations, and difficulties in the journalistic practice of fact-checking. The activity "Using verification digital tools" is the one that presents the highest differences ($F_{(2.26)}$=2.766; p= .081), but they are not significant between the groups. It can be observed that more experience reduces the perception of the complexity of this task. Those with more than five years of experience position the average complexity in M=2.50 (SD=.707), a lower value than the one registered by those with two to five years of experience (M=4.50; SD=1.508) and those with less than two years of experience (M=4.80; SD=1.146). The previous behavior is also observed with the tasks related to choosing the content to be checked, getting official and specialized sources, analyzing databases, qualifying content, influencing the agenda-setting with verified content, and being less vulnerable to pressure. In all of the above cases, more experience means a lower perception of difficulty.

4.4 Fact-checkers perceptions regarding their age

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that age is a differential factor to perceive the purpose of "Exposing institutions and public figures that spread false or questionable information" ($F_{(3.25)}$=3.689; p=.025). For that category, we could not find a clear relation that associates a rise or decrease due to age. The group of those older than 45 (M=6.50; SD=.577) demonstrated more accordance with this principle, followed by the group younger than 25 (M= 6.33; SD=.577). With a lower favorable tendency are the groups of those between 25 and 34 (M=5.83; SD=1.267) and of those between 35 and 44 (M=3.90; SD=2.424).

Lastly, results show the vulnerability of freedom and autonomy to inform among the younger fact-checkers. Age is a relevant factor for the analysis of "political, social or economic pressure when performing fact-checking journalism activity" ($F_{(3.25)}$=3.324; p=.036). Journalists younger than 25 indicate a higher frequency (M=5.33; SD=1.528), followed by the group of those between 25 and 34 (M=4.33; SD=2.229), the group of those between 35 and 44 (M=3.00;

SD=1.333) and the group of those older than 45 (M=1.75; SD=1.500). Cohen's *d* shows how the effect size raises as the group of those younger than 25 is confronted with the others (T-test between the groups of those younger than 25 and of those between 25 and 34: F=2.112; p=.170; $t_{(13)}$=.481; p=.481; d=.493); T-test between the groups of those younger than 25 and of those between 35 and 44: F=.078; p=.785; $t_{(11)}$=2.586; p=.025; d=1.152); T-test between the groups of those younger than 25 and of those older than 45: F=.001; p=.981; $t_{(5)}$=3.105; p=.027; d=1.769).

5 Discussion

This paper presents results that allow recognizing characteristics and peculiarities, related to the purposes, principles, and routines of fact-checking journalists' activities in Brazil. In addition, it analyzes how factors such as if a journalist works for the signatories of IFCN's Code of Principles, if their activity as a fact-checker is regular or occasional, and if their years of experience and age impact the exercise of their profession.

Firstly, it is important to highlight that the main principles of fact-checking as a journalistic activity in Brazil maintain the most relevant principles of such activity: fighting false information spread on social media and performing scrutiny of public speech. However, we observed a slight projection for checking viral content in comparison to public speech. This new order in priority differs from Mena's (2019) findings in the United States. The data for this paper was collected amid the covid-19 pandemic when several academic studies (Ferreira & Varão, 2021; Ribeiro, 2021; Seibt & Dannenberg, 2021; Silva & Baalbaki, 2021; Viscardi, 2020) indicate an intense work of Brazilian fact-checkers in the verification of political content related to covid-19 on digital networks.

Besides that, the most important Brazilian verification media receive technical and financial support from big technology companies and, as the Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2021) points out, the consumption of information by Brazilian citizens comes mostly from the online news (83%), even though the level of reliability of information posted on social media is as low as 34%. In addition, in the Ibero-American context, journalists in Brazil are

importantly inclined to adopt new technologies (social media and online searchers) into their journalistic routines (Arcila-Calderón et al., 2020). Also, Brazil is the country where "the use of content generated by social media users, the participation of audiences in the news production and the news feedback loops have mostly grown" (Arcila-Calderón et al., 2020, p. 8), which on the other hand implies, as claimed by Thomson et al. (2020), that journalists have to know the credibility level of such content.

Fact-checkers in Brazil positively value several considerations related to the trust in journalism, which is consistent with previous inputs that value fact-checking as a reform movement (Graves, 2016) in face of the deterioration of journalistic practices (Amazeen, 2019). In Brazil, it has been pointed out that there is a scenario where it is difficult to distinguish quality journalism based on the characteristics of web pages and journalistic articles posted by political content producers (Träsel et al., 2019). The purpose of informative production that was best-evaluated consists of revealing the sources and data used to demonstrate the qualification of the content, which supports Seibt's (2019) finding amongst fact-checking professionals, related to presenting the consulted sources as well as the checking process. This motivation is linked to the commitment to informative transparency about which there is a slight tendency of agreement that it is higher in fact-checking media than in traditional media.

The purpose of neutrality or impartiality in informative coverage is also highly valued, even though it is necessary to know the Brazilian citizen's perception and to cross-check if this occurs in Brazil as it does in the United States and Europe, where breaches in the acceptance of fact-checking are starting to show due to political ideology (Lyons et al., 2020; Robertson et al., 2020). However, the fact-checkers sample show disagreement in considering their activity as politically biased, whether to the right or to the left, which matches the nonpartisanship idea mentioned in IFCN's Code.

Journalists who fact-check occasionally value higher assertions "Exposing institutions and public figures that spread false or questionable information" and "It is acceptable for a fact-checker to use the word 'lie' or to say that someone lied when they qualify content as false", compared to those who work with fact-checking habitually. In both assertions, journalism is pictured as more combative for being able to label falsehood or

even a lie. These indicators seem to reveal that fact-checking is used in the elaboration of political news, of belligerent character (watchdog), where some negativity or conflict of the informative figure is visible. Variation is reasonable, and it is expected that professionals regularly dedicated to fact-checking tend to be more cautious regarding the verification methodology and the use of veracity labels in accordance with this methodology, whereas occasional fact-checkers can have higher expectations in revealing incoherencies by the verified actor when investing in such format. In Brazil's polarization scenario (Ferreira & Varão, 2021; Silva & Baalbaki, 2021), there are new lines for exploring which are the informative criteria or factors that emerge in the routine of the media and of those journalists who are not fully dedicated to fact-checking in order to choose this informative format.

Regarding news production, the most complex activities are related to the new skills to be developed by journalists, such as database analysis, use of digital tools, and a diversity of sources, an aspect emphasized by Rezende and Patrício (2020) due to its relation to the credibility of Brazilian fact-checking media. It is interesting that "Getting official data and contacting official sources" was voted as a simple task by the participants, considering that, during the covid-19 crisis, it was necessary to create a venture of press vehicles so that journalists could publicize an updated daily balance of epidemiological data after the federal government decided to inform in its daily bulletins only the number of covid-19 diagnostics and deaths registered in the previous 24 hours (Bello & Campagnucci, 2021). The unavailability of data and lack of updates is an obstacle to the plain exercise of fact-checking.

Being an IFCN signatory and the regularity of practice influence the use of digital tools, which is continuously becoming more relevant considering the progressive sophistication of disinformation – especially visually – and the increasing alarms about the growth of deepfakes (Thomson et al., 2020), that require certain skills for the detection and checking. Likewise, it is appropriate to consider the first phase of the whole verification process: choosing the content, which is easier for the IFCN signatories due to privileged access to notification engines for viral content on social media, which is key to assure the fact-checking rigor. For instance, Uscinski and Butler (2013) pointed out that fact-checkers might choose opinions instead of data to verify.

It is also interesting to observe that journalists and organizations that are not IFCN signatories show a slightly higher agreement with the assertion that fact-checking has a "Stronger civic responsibility commitment compared to traditional journalism", which can be related to organizational restraints experienced in traditional newsrooms, frequently criticized for not adopting measures against disinformation in their regular practices—not only for content that will be checked. Writing declarative titles is an example mentioned by Recuero et al. (2020) of a vector for disinformation in polarized groups.

Also, we found out that economic, political, or social pressure incur more often on younger journalists. Considering the young age of Brazilian fact-checking media and its personnel such a threat could actually happen. Ever since its epistemology, fact-checkers relate to autonomy (Graves, 2018), which along with freedom of the press is key for the exercise of journalism (Josephi, 2013).

6 Conclusion

To synthesize the findings of this article, we highlight the main purposes of fact-checking in Brazil, as perceived by the journalists who practice it, of balancing the viral content on social media as well as the public statements from relevant actors and institutions. The main purpose consists of detecting and fighting false and misleading content on digital channels, which is key considering the elevated consumption of information in Brazil and digital channels and platforms. Plus, there is a major agreement between Brazilian fact-checkers concerning the principles related to impartiality and a rigorous and transparent verification that shows in detail the sources and data that support the content classification – central aspects in the epistemology of this journalistic practice. Doing so implies that the journalist has to analyze data and check different sources, two tasks that respondents evaluated as of some complexity.

Also, the relation with IFCN converts into a factor that influences two important fact-checker activities: the selection of content and the use of digital tools. Both are essential, especially due to the threat of sophisticated disinformation (deepfakes) and because a significant amount of criticism that tries to invalidate this journalistic procedure originates from the selection of

content. Regarding this selection, we can suppose that the work of IFCN signatories is somehow made easier due to their privileged access to tools owned by the platforms themselves, which must also be critically analyzed: after all, who is selecting what should be checked?

The constancy of the fact-checking practice is an element to be considered in the analysis of how simple or complex it can be to use digital tools, as well as in the assumption that fact-checking is more belligerent, capable of qualifying a public figure as a liar and expose them.

Lastly, the fact-checking movement in Brazil is relatively young, both because of the media and the group of journalists who practice it. The acknowledgment of the influence caused by pressure against journalists is higher among the youngest, who are more vulnerable to not working autonomously and freely.

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