

INTRODUCTION

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By publishing the special issue *Fake news: challenges and risks for contemporary journalism*, *Brazilian Journalism Research* brings together studies and investigations that seek to shed light on the diverse and opaque fake news phenomenon, which gained notoriety with the 2016 American presidential electoral process. Less than five years later, it seems evident that fake news and similar occurrences have an inexhaustible power to reinvent themselves and establish new forms and modes of production and distribution.

In the call for papers, we sought to draw attention to the high level of toxicity present in the elements and agents that produce and circulate false news. It should be acknowledged, therefore, that the aggressive and often criminal ways of inciting dissonances and conflicts demonstrate that the fake news issue transcends the sociotechnical dimensions of content generation. Fake news is intended to misinform and destabilize the media ecosystem, exacerbating political-ideological processes and emotional states around certain themes marked by dissent and controversy.

Thus, the discussion of fake news requires (1) the careful examination of complex processes of contemporary mediation through which interconnected and globalized societies circulate fierce positions, speeches regarding intolerance and hatred, and intentional dishonesty, and (2) an urgent increase in in-depth journalistic investigations. This special issue presents the following studies.

In the article “Crosscheck as a legitimization strategy of the journalism field in response to fake news”, Maria Ivete Trevisan Fossá and Kauane Andressa Müller (Federal University of Santa Maria, Brazil) seek to understand what could be considered strategies for

legitimizing the journalistic field in the midst of misinformation provided by fake news. According to the authors, the main strategy is credibility obtained in an agreement between journalism and society, allowing a relationship of trust to be established. Another relevant note is that fact-checking has added a new dimension to the journalistic environment, because even when the facts checked are considered false, they have already gained visibility and spread in the press.

The problem of credibility in journalism in the context of fake news is also present in the relevant discussion offered by Marcelo Träsel, Silvia Lisboa, and Giulia Reis Vinciprova (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil). In “Post-truth and trust in journalism: an analysis of credibility indicators in Brazilian venues”, based on the diagnosis that the phenomenon of misinformation caused by fake news in digital networks intensified in the second decade of the 2000s in Brazil, the authors assume the distinct conceptualization of pseudojournalism, aiming to classify fraudulent texts that use journalistic narrative resources to deceive the audience. In the second part of the study, results of an analysis of 23 producers of political content with the largest audience on *Facebook* in Brazil are presented based on the credibility indicators developed by the Trust Project. The results suggest that, in the current scenario, it is not possible to distinguish quality journalism from pseudojournalism based on the characteristics of websites and articles published by producers of political content.

In *The agenda of disinformation: “fake news” and membership categorization analysis in the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections*, Adriana Braga and Mônica Chaves (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) discuss the moment of the 2018 presidential elections in Brazil, when false stories spread explosively in messaging and social media applications. Using the methodological tool membership categorization analysis, the authors examined more than 300 posts related to political themes during the 20 days between the first- and second-round runoffs, of which 228 were disproven false stories disseminated in messaging and online social media applications.

From a hermeneutic perspective, the contribution of Eli Borges Júnior (University of São Paulo, Brazil), “*What is the post-truth? Elements for a critique of the concept*”, critically examines the uses of the term post-truth, problematizing to what extent its appropriation

may or may not present itself as a useful device in reading a contemporary notion of public opinion. The author departs from what he considers to be an exaggerated use of the expression, especially in reference to the advent of the propagation of fake news. The aim of the article is twofold: (1) an investigation into what extent the term post-truth makes sense and (2) a discussion of underlying concerns in the context of the hypertrophy of communication technologies and their social networks to re-signify the very idea of truth.

In the article “Application Verific.ai: automation of news fact-checking in the 2018 Brazilian elections”, Dario Brito Rocha Jr., Anthony José da Cunha Carneiro Lins, Alice Cristiny Ferreira de Souza, Luiz Felipe de Oliveira, André Henrique Leitão and Flávio Henrique Santos present the results of applied research and detail the process of creating, developing, and testing the platform Verific.ai, an automated news fact-checking tool for devices that work with the Android operating system. The results show the possibility to delineate and apply criteria for rapid evidence identification of content with false potential.

In “Chaff, wheat, filters, and bubbles: a discussion on fake news, journalism, credibility, and affections at network times”, Sylvia Moretzsohn (University of Minho, Portugal) seeks to historically understand the context of the emergence of Brazilian fact-checking agencies. The author notes the misconception of establishing that the traditional press is the exclusive source for reliable information. In addition, Moretzsohn points out the need for a deepening of the discussion on credibility in a time when reference information standards are challenged, and beliefs seem allowed to prevail over evidence. To recover the role of journalism in this context, Moretzsohn advocates disabling the affections that lead to the formation of bubbles against any sort of criticism.

The paper “Viral content on Facebook: a case study on the run-up to the Brazilian 2018 presidential elections” aims to identify patterns in messages from sites producing and diffusing manipulated information to go viral on *Facebook*. João Canavilhas (University of Beira Interior, Portugal), Máira Bittencourt (Federal University of Sergipe, Brazil), and Marco de Andrade (Federal Institute of Rondônia, Brazil) analyze language patterns and content format produced by young Brazilian media outlets during the period between the impeachment process of President Dilma Rousseff (2016) and the pre-election context of President Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. The results

indicate that posts with more shares have common characteristics concerning three aspects: (1) content format, (2) language strategy, and (3) information source.

For this special issue of *Brazilian Journalism Research*, we invited authors Xosé López-García (University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain) and Pedro Jerónimo (University of Beira Interior, Portugal) to contribute articles. Pedro Jerónimo, together with João Carlos Correia and Anabela Gradim (University of Beira Interior, Portugal), wrote “Fake news: emotion, belief and reason in selective sharing in contexts of proximity”. The article reflects on fake news from the contexts of the influence of populist discourse and political actions being performed in Brazil, in the United Kingdom, in the United States, and in Italy. The authors discuss assumptions arising from limited effects theory, including (1) the effective participation of audiences in the distribution of fake news, (2) the fact that *prosumers* are involved in proximity contexts that facilitate selective exposure, perception, and memorization, and (3) the fact that it is in these contexts of proximity that the phenomenon tends to worsen. The indications provided by Xosé López-García’s article, created in partnership with Ángel Vizoso and Sara Pérez-Seijo (University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain), are timely.

In “Verification initiatives in the scenario of misinformation. Actants for integrated plans with multi-level strategies”, the authors problematize combat actions and prevention against fake news, using studies of actions taken by different actors with the ability to prevent the dissemination of fake news, such as European institutions and national governments, and the media and major technology companies. The research focused on legislative reports and the revision of the growth of fact-checking initiatives to give the reader an overview of how misinformation is addressed in the European Union.

We congratulate all the authors who submitted articles to this special issue and believe that the reader will have a pertinently updated picture of the main issues of the notions of fake news and post-truth. This special issue offers important indications about the serious risks and challenges that fake news represents to journalism, concerning its institutional dimension, its role and social function, its credibility, and its unequivocal relevance to the defense of the exercise of citizenship and democracy.

Enjoy the issue.