

ARTICLE

# FIGHTING DISINFORMATION IN A STRUCTURAL WAY:

a case study of the Desinformante  
as an organizational model



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**ABSTRACT** – This article presents a case study of Desinformante, a Brazilian project founded in 2022 as an organizational innovation in the fight against disinformation. Rather than restricting itself to a fact-checking agency model, Desinformante is a mix of media outlet – with a focus on covering disinformation in a structural and global way – and a center of articulation and coalition with various sectors, such as social movements and the judiciary. Although this dual role is common in the country's independent media, it had not been tested in initiatives focused on combating disinformation. Based on interviews with six Desinformante workers in 2023, the article presents the potential and limits of this Brazilian experience as an organizational model for combating disinformation, as evaluated by the people who work on this initiative. It discusses the following dimensions: a) organization and internal governance; b) work routines; c) editorial policies; d) coalition initiatives. The research shows that Desinformante is a prefigurative project for combating disinformation and can inspire other organizational forms in a Majority World context. **Key words:** Disinformation. Desinformante. Work. Organizational model. Fact-checking.

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## COMBATE À DESINFORMAÇÃO NO ATACADO: um estudo de caso do Desinformante enquanto modelo organizacional

**RESUMO** – Este artigo apresenta um estudo de caso do Desinformante, projeto brasileiro fundado em 2022 como uma inovação organizacional no combate à desinformação. Em vez de se restringir a um modelo de agência de verificação de fatos, o Desinformante é um misto de veículo midiático – com foco na cobertura da desinformação de forma estrutural e global – e um centro de articulação e coalizão com diversos setores, como os movimentos sociais e o poder judicial. Embora este duplo papel seja comum nos meios de comunicação independentes do país, isto não tinha sido testado em iniciativas focadas no combate à desinformação. Construído a partir de entrevistas com seis trabalhadores do Desinformante em 2023, o artigo apresenta as potencialidades e limites desta experiência brasileira como modelo organizacional para o combate à desinformação sob avaliação de pessoas que trabalham nesta iniciativa. Discute as seguintes dimensões: a) organização e governança interna; b) rotinas de trabalho; c) políticas editoriais; d) iniciativas de coalizão. A pesquisa demonstra que o Desinformante é um projeto prefigurativo de combate à desinformação e pode inspirar outras formas organizacionais em um contexto de Mundo Majoritário.

**Palavras-chave:** Desinformação. Desinformante. Trabalho. Modelo organizacional. Verificação de fatos.

## LUCHA CONTRA LA DESINFORMACIÓN DE FORMA ESTRUCTURAL: estudio de caso del Desinformante como modelo organizativo

**RESUMEN** – Este artículo presenta un estudio de caso de Desinformante, un proyecto brasileño fundado en 2022 como innovación organizativa en la lucha contra la desinformación. En lugar de limitarse a un modelo de agencia de verificación de hechos, Desinformante es una mezcla de medio de comunicación – con un enfoque en la cobertura de la desinformación de manera estructural y global – y un centro de articulación y coalición con diversos sectores, como los movimientos sociales y el poder judicial. Aunque este doble papel es habitual en los medios independientes del país, no se había puesto a prueba en iniciativas centradas en la lucha contra la desinformación. A partir de entrevistas con seis trabajadores de Desinformante en 2023, el artículo presenta el potencial y los límites de esta experiencia brasileña como modelo organizativo de lucha contra la desinformación, según la evaluación de las personas que trabajan en esta iniciativa. Analiza las siguientes dimensiones: a) organización y gobernanza interna; b) rutinas de trabajo; c) políticas editoriales; d) iniciativas de coalición. La investigación demuestra que Desinformante es un proyecto prefigurativo de lucha contra la desinformación y puede inspirar otras formas organizativas en un contexto de Mundo Mayoritario.

**Palabras clave:** Desinformación. Desinformante. Trabajo. Modelo organizacional. Verificación de hechos.

## 1 Introduction

Fact-checking agencies are positioned as dominant organizational models in the fight against disinformation around the world (Lelo, 2022). Disinformation research and studies have demonstrated the potential and limits of this model in epistemic and organizational terms (e.g. Graves, 2017; Albuquerque & Matos, 2022;

Steensen et al., 2023). However, these are not the only organizational possibilities in the fight against disinformation.

Organizational models – that is, how practices to combat disinformation are organized in the world of work and journalistic practice – are perspectives that are still underrepresented in disinformation studies and can be a useful approach to demonstrating a variety and diversity of practices to combat disinformation. The perspective of organizations – and how they engender labor practices – can be better articulated with studies on digital labor as Grohmann and Ong (2024) pointed out in relation to studies on digital labor and disinformation. By organizational models and organizations here we are not dealing with perspectives from organizational communication, but theories that understand the labor process (Braverman, 1987, for example), that is, that relate to the work organization and its production processes. This theoretical perspective makes it possible to understand labor processes and organizational forms in terms of how work is organized at Desinformante. In this article, this is done through the voices of the workers themselves.

The importance of understanding organizational diversity in combating disinformation is accentuated in the context of the Majority World – where countries have attempted, in recent years, to import concepts and practices for combating disinformation from the Global North. On the contrary, a Majority World perspective for disinformation studies (Ong & Cabanes, 2018; Alves et al., 2023) – which this article adopts – proposes shared learnings from local contexts rather than presenting “magic solutions” from elsewhere, in order to historicize and localize experiences (see Zhang & Chen, 2022).

This article presents a case study of Desinformante, a Brazilian project founded in 2022 as a possibility for organizational innovation in the fight against disinformation. Rather than restricting itself to a fact-checking agency model, Desinformante is a mix of media outlets – with a focus on covering disinformation structurally and globally – and a hub and coalition with various stakeholders, such as social movements and the judiciary. In fact, Desinformante has been a leader in Brazilian coalitions against disinformation since the 2022 presidential elections. Although this dual role is common in the country's independent media, it has not been tested in initiatives focused on combating disinformation.

Based on interviews with six Desinformante workers in 2023, the article presents the potential and limits of this Brazilian experience

as an organizational innovation for combating disinformation. The aim here is not to extrapolate generalizations about how all the initiative's workers think, but to present how the case of Desinformante can be interesting for thinking about organizational forms in the fight against disinformation, especially about the following dimensions: a) organization and internal governance; b) production routines; c) editorial policies; d) coalition initiatives. They demonstrate the experimental nature of Desinformante, in continuous learning, and not a model imported from elsewhere, even though it is still a small project with only a few workers. We, therefore, argue that Desinformante is a prefigurative project for combating disinformation and can inspire other organizational forms in a Majority World context.

## **2 Organizational forms, combating disinformation and the world of work in journalism**

The fight against disinformation can be understood from different perspectives, such as discourse and narrative, education, regulation, technology, and the role of platforms. However, one approach that has not yet been well developed in disinformation studies is the discussion on organizational models for combating disinformation. Organizational models can involve business models and funding schemes – which is present in the disinformation research, especially those focusing on fact-checking (e.g. Navarro et al., 2021; Lelo, 2022), but focuses especially on how disinformation-fighting practices are organized in terms of scope, organizations, production, and work routines, to understand the daily life of these experiences (Grohmann & Ong, 2024). Thus, the relevance of this approach is to highlight how organizations shape their practices to combat disinformation and how this results in different ways of combating disinformation. For example, a media literacy initiative to combat disinformation and a fact-checking agency have different purposes and also different ways of organizing themselves. Although there are no studies strictly focused on organizational models in the fight against disinformation, this subject is not new in journalism studies.

One of the solutions put forward by Moscoso (2020) to combat disinformation is fact-checking. The focus of the argument is that fact-checking tends to reinforce journalistic credibility while pointing to disinformative content and its respective issuers. In conjunction

with fact-checking, Moscoso (2020) mentions the role of Sleeping Giants, since its work is directed at ways of financing initiatives that promote disinformative content. Finally, the author advocates other actions such as “the closure of fake accounts and the removal of automatic accounts from social networks to reduce propagation” (Moscoso, 2020, p. 19). In this way, journalism stands as a kind of guardian against disinformation, either through short-term initiatives or by monitoring the funding of disinformative content.

In long-term terms, media and/or digital literacy have been identified as important ways forward that involves both pedagogical and communicational issues. For example, Wei et al. (2023) recommend that the Nigerian authorities invest in digital education for students, since digital education was considered a relevant factor in the study to combat disinformation. There have been examples in Brazil since 2016, such as the “Vaza Falsiane” project<sup>1</sup>, led by journalists Leonardo Sakamoto, Rodrigo Ratier, and Ivan Paganotti. In this way, media and/or digital education initiatives can also be considered an organizational possibility for combating disinformation.

Hacıyakupoglu et al. (2018) mapped the initiatives used by various countries to combat fake news. Predominantly, legal action against platforms constitutes the most common strategic approach, notwithstanding the availability of alternative educational strategies. The conclusion is that legislation alone is incapable of adequately solving or responding to the problem of disinformation. According to the authors, legislation is part of a multifaceted strategy of preventive actions involving actors and organizations. This strategy should consider the use of both short-term and long-term actions. In the short term, fact-checking and immediate responses to fake news are recommended. In turn, digital education, or media literacy, is indicated to deal with the prevention of the problem in the long term. Once again, education is considered one of the most effective remedies in the fight against disinformation.

Digital education in the field of disinformation, or media literacy, is also pointed out as a key element by Sádaba and Salaverría (2023) who, when analyzing the discussion in the European Union on how to combat disinformation, concluded that technological and legal measures are not efficient in a context of low media literacy. Another conclusion is that the set of multi-level solutions supported by a mix of legal, technological, and educational actions are currently the state-of-the-art models for fighting disinformation.

Alongside the emergence of media initiatives to combat disinformation, recent years in Brazil have seen a deepening of discussions about the need to regulate social media platforms as a measure to combat disinformation (Valente, 2019; Christofoletti, 2021). The issue has mobilized civil society, including NGOs, universities, social movements, and think tanks in the area of digital rights – with an impact on public policymakers. The main foundations of *Desinformante* are the articulation between journalism and articulation with civil society.

More than that, both *Desinformante* and other initiatives to combat disinformation are organizational responses to changes in the journalistic work context – which have been pointed out by journalism research in Brazil for more than a decade (Figaro et al., 2013; Mick & Lima, 2013). Since then, newsrooms have shrunk even more, and alternative arrangements to the big conglomerates have emerged (Figaro et al., 2018) as a way for journalists to survive in the job market. Journalism is currently dependent on the power of platforms (Poell et al., 2023), culminating in the platformization of journalistic labor (Barros et al., 2021). Thus, the emergence of a series of initiatives to combat disinformation in the field of journalism responds not only to a need to combat disinformation itself but is also a response from journalists trying to survive in the market. In addition, as Acosta (2024) argues, there has been greater investment by foundations and other philanthropic organizations in combating disinformation in Brazil, something that Papaevangelou (2023) had already detected in relation to the role of platforms funding journalism. Thus, there is an incentive to create initiatives of this kind.

The particularity of *Desinformante* in relation to these initiatives lies in the fact that it is not just a journalistic initiative, but also one that articulates movements with civil society, in dialogue with policymakers and other human rights organizations. This particularity lies in the broadening of what journalism means and what it can be (Deuze & Witschge, 2016). In short, it includes actors who are experts on the subject of disinformation and who are dedicated to debating the phenomenon and increasing media education. Another fundamental detail is the robust capacity for political articulation through the Articulation Room against Disinformation.

### 3 Methods

The methodology used in this research consists of in-depth interviews with six members of Desinformante. This article aims to present Desinformante through the voices of its employees – and how this relates to issues such as production routines and editorial policies. The interviews were conducted remotely, via Microsoft Teams, between August 18 and September 27, 2023. The choice of the digital format was based on the criteria of practicality and availability, since Desinformante's employees are located in various states in Brazil and, occasionally, in other countries. Thus, the adoption of digital interviews allowed them to be carried out in a relatively short space of time – just over 30 days between the first and last interviews, as well as making it possible to best fit in with the participants' schedules. The average duration of the interviews was 1.5 hours. All respondents were asked the same 18 questions. The interviews were recorded in video format for later analysis of their content and stored privately, restricted only to the researchers involved in the research. The interviews were transcribed automatically using the functionality of the software used, Microsoft Teams. Once the videos and transcripts were available, the next step was to analyze the content, looking for approximations and distances between the statements, as well as compiling the interviewees' answers in order to find trends in the way the Desinformante is seen by the main experts on the subject: its workers.

To conduct the interviews, a semi-structured script based on five axes was created beforehand. The first of these, called "Organization and internal governance", has the main objective of understanding the role and length of time they have been involved with Desinformante, as well as exploring, from the perspective of these members, how they define Desinformante, what its thematic areas of activity are, its relations with public policy makers/public authorities, as well as an assessment of how Desinformante's internal governance is and what characteristics distinguish it from companies specializing in fact-checking/verification.

The second pillar of the roadmap concerns the everyday life of Desinformante. This includes information on how often the group meets, what the main products currently on offer to consumers are, Desinformante's two greatest qualities, and, finally, the two main challenges the initiative will face in the future. The third topic,

entitled “Editorial Policies for the site”, covers just two questions: 1) What sets Desinformante apart in its editorial policies?; and 2) Is there any partnership between the Desinformante site and another company/initiative in the fight against disinformation?

Known as “Coordination initiatives (civil society and government)”, the second-to-last dimension delves into the impact of Desinformante’s connections with other significant entities involved in combatting disinformation. In the first of the three questions asked, respondents were to comment on the partnership with the Superior Electoral Court for the 2022 elections. The second question aimed to understand the approach between Desinformante and the Disinformation Coordination Room (SAD), as well as to ascertain the main purpose of this project. At the end of this topic, the last question concerns how the platforms have responded to Desinformante’s demands related to disinformation on social networks, as well as the main challenges in the relationship with these companies. The last topic of the semi-structured script, called “Closing”, sought to assess the respondents’ perception of the results obtained by Desinformante in the digital disinformation ecosystem, as well as to understand Desinformante’s main challenges for the final stretch of 2023 and the whole of 2024.

This was followed by a thematic analysis based on previously defined dimensions: a) organization and internal governance; b) work routines; c) editorial policies; and d) coalition initiatives.

## 4 Context

Desinformante is an initiative founded in 2021 to fight disinformation. On its official website<sup>2</sup>, Desinformante is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to uncomplicate the debate on disinformation and “offer an arena with plural visions from all those interested in confronting disinformation” (Desinformante, 2024). Also on its official website, Desinformante describes itself as “an initiative of *Ponteio Comunicação, Informação e Cultura* and *Instituto Cultura e Democracia*” which is “dedicated to debate, the production of knowledge and the formation of networks in the field of culture, politics and society” (Desinformante, 2024). At the time of the interviews, the official website listed seven members of Desinformante, including the General Coordinator, Nina Santos. It



is worth noting that Nina Santos was not interviewed in this series of In-Depth Interviews carried out between August and September 2023, as she had already been interviewed at an earlier point in this research project, with another semi-structured script and another data collection method. In this way, the interviews in this study followed the same protocol at all stages of the project.

The website of the Institute for Culture and Democracy<sup>3</sup> defines Desinformant as “a project aimed at establishing ‘common ground’ on diagnosing the impact of disinformation on democracy, human rights, and social justice” (ICD, 2024). The Institute defines the initiative’s objectives as fourfold: 1) to offer an arena for debate that raises the quality of the discussion on disinformation; 2) to gather information on disinformation in order to become a place of reference for those interested in the subject; 3) to bring together actors from the fields of human rights, social justice and democracy in order to seek structural solutions to disinformation; and 4) to address the axes of Communication, Culture and Democracy in the 21st century (ICD, 2024).

The Rede Brasil Atual website (2021) pointed out that the Desinformante website was published on September 16 of the same year. The portal interviewed one of the founders of Desinformante, researcher João Brant. In the interview, Brant reveals that Desinformante was born to fill a gap in looking at disinformation at a wholesale level and that, in this way, it would be possible to establish more robust resolutions to disinformation.

Under the umbrella of Disinformation is SAD: Articulation Room against Disinformation. According to the information published on the official SAD website<sup>4</sup>, work began in 2022 and it aims to bring together “civil society organizations and academic bodies to discuss the scenario, draw up studies and articulate actions to foster increasingly safe, healthy and democratic digital spaces” (SAD, 2024).

The initiative’s website also makes it clear that SAD intends to monitor the development of disinformation published in digital environments and the decision-making by social platforms and authorities. SAD publishes the documents it produces on its own website, making its work even more transparent. The main axes monitored by the SAD can be divided into five: 1) electoral integrity; 2) political ads; 3) political violence based on race and gender; 4) socio-environmental negationism; and 5) platform regulation (SAD, 2024).

In 2023, the SAD was mentioned in an article published by the Estado de São Paulo newspaper. The text states that the SAD

brings together 100 civil society organizations and that in April 2023 it sent a document in favor of regulating digital platforms in Brazil. According to the letter, it is necessary to increase demands for transparency. The text also points out proposals to strengthen the fight against disinformation, such as the presence of accredited academic researchers to monitor the platforms (Teles, 2023).

The fact is that just over two years since it was founded, Desinformante has qualified the debate on disinformation and, at the same time, has become a reference in the area. The interest in Desinformante is based on the novelty that the initiative represents, from a more comprehensive and structural look at disinformation, as well as its strength of articulation with civil society through the Articulation Room against Disinformation.

The ability to monitor relevant actors, formulate proposals, and provide concurrent reports demonstrates Desinformante's embeddedness within both the broader populace and key Brazilian disinformation networks. The popularity and prestige of Desinformante as a hub for information and articulations related to disinformation sparked an interest in understanding how the initiative is seen by those who produce it. Understanding the perspectives of Desinformante also means understanding the main difficulties, the main trends, and the possible future paths that the project can take.

As mentioned in the methodology section, the interviews were conducted in different months and online. In total, 18 questions were asked in an average time of 1 hour and 30 minutes, which amounted to numerous pages of content. Guided by the aim of detailing the information collected, the results section will be divided into topics in the same way as the questionnaire, in order to make it easier for readers to understand what Desinformante is, based on the analysis of its own members. Specific and/or specific questions that may make it easier to identify the authors of the answers will not be commented on in this study.

## 5 Analysis

Based on the interviews conducted with Desinformante employees, we structured the analysis into four dimensions: a) organization and internal governance; b) work routines; c) editorial policies; and d) coalition initiatives. The first two dimensions address Desinformante's organizational issues, both at an institutional and



have been with Desinform since the start of the project, i.e. July 2021. This characteristic is seen as facilitating a good rapport within Desinformante and allowing the work to be optimized and any possible noise to be reduced. Time at home is also seen as a factor that contributes to improving the harmony of the group, enabling one to complement the other's service in a remote working context.

The unanimous definition of Desinformante is that the initiative does not deal with disinformation at the retail level, but rather at the wholesale level. The project is considered a space that structurally debates disinformation, as well as being a niche media outlet and a space for dialogue with organized civil society. Terms such as “independent media on disinformation” (respondent 4) and “journalism project specializing in disinformation” (respondent 3) were also used to affirm that the initiative focuses on issues such as the factors that lead to the production of disinformative content.

The respondents' efforts to make Desinformante increasingly open to the general population can be seen. “Making the findings of scientific research into disinformation palatable” (respondent 5) is one of the phrases that reveals Desinformante's interest in reaching the general public. SAD was mentioned specifically in this question and in the context of exemplifying that Desinformante seeks to create a network of actors to combat disinformation.

Desinformante does not have a specific thematic axis of action, since the aim of the initiative is to deal with disinformation in general. There is no specific theme such as health, sport, or politics, on the contrary: Desinformante investigates disinformation broadly and, as a result, often touches on different topics. Approaches such as the social impacts of disinformation, the sources of funding, what can be done in terms of legislation, what initiatives public authorities and civil society have taken to tackle it and the role of Big Tech in this context are some of the most relevant topics that Desinformante focuses on. Two themes appear here: concern about the use of artificial intelligence to produce disinformation and concern about “getting out of the specialized academic bubble” (respondent 6) and reaching the general public.

The SAD is seen as one of the main arms of Desinformante, and is defined as a space that brings together various civil society actors and produces documents with recommendations for social platforms on what can be improved in the fight against disinformation. There were mentions of SAD meetings to deal with Bill 2630/2020, which establishes the Brazilian Law on internet Freedom, Responsibility, and Transparency.

Overall, the SAD is seen as the main cause of the connection between the Desinformante and the Government/public policymakers.

This means that the organization and its internal governance respond both to journalistic parameters – as a media outlet – and as a think tank or organization concerned with relations with different civil society entities. In other words, Desinformante is not just a journalistic outlet, but acts as a hybrid between a media outlet and a kind of think tank, seeking to influence policies to combat disinformation in Brazil.

The rest of the responses presented are specific, such as the case of João Brandt, founder of Desinformante, who has taken up a position in the federal government, which tends to open up the possibility of a better connection with the public authorities. Past partnerships with the Instituto Pró-Comum, Instituto Vladimir Herzog, Instituto Marielle Franco, and the Superior Electoral Court were also mentioned as success stories.

Regarding the internal governance of Desinformante, it is worth noting that the organization has very strong horizontal traits concerning the creative process and the publication of content. The trajectory of Desinformante began with João Brandt, the founder, and Nina Santos, the current general coordinator of the initiative after Brandt's departure. The creation and trajectory of Desinformante became more solid as the issue of disinformation became increasingly relevant in public opinion.

The horizontality of the decision-making process in Desinformante is represented by the feeling that the members are listened to and feel safe in sharing their opinions. The arrival of Nina Santos as general coordinator is seen as the start of a more participatory phase in the group's actions. The freedom to express ideas without reprimand is praised and seen as a sign of openness to the members. Hierarchically, Desinformante unfolds on two fronts: 1) the Editorial Hub and 2) the SAD. The editorial flow is seen as organic and with well-defined roles, with no disputes between colleagues.

The main difference between Desinformante and Brazilian fact-checking initiatives, such as Agência Lupa, is that Desinformante does not carry out fact-checking, but rather produces content about the context in which disinformation is formed and circulates, as well as its impacts on society. Although fact-checking is seen as fundamental in the fight against disinformation, the main understanding is that Desinformante aims to deal with the issue conceptually and not as an event. In general terms, it's about analyzing the object from a broader perspective, not limited to verifying information on a one-off basis.

## 5.2 Work routines

The Desinformante team is based remotely, and there is no physical hub or headquarters for the initiative. The interviewees are located in various states of the country: Bahia, Rio Grande do Norte, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and, occasionally, there is a registered presence abroad, more precisely in Portugal. About the workflow, there are two meetings a week, held on Mondays and Thursdays. The Monday meeting is considered to be more operational, while the Thursday meeting is seen as more comprehensive, punctual, and technical, to set deadlines for the delivery of material, as well as resolving administrative, editorial, and, occasionally, team issues.

When asked about the main products that Desinformante currently offers to the public, two stood out: 1) Papo Desinformante (Chat with Desinformante) and 2) Desinformante Explica (Desinformante Explains). Papo Desinformante (Chat with Desinformante) is broadcast on the radio station of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) every week. The product is praised because it deals with hot topics on disinformation that have occurred during the week, and broadcasting on UFRJ radio helps to increase the reach of the content produced by Desinformante.

### Image 2

*Papo Desinformante and Desinformante Explica*



Desinformante Explica (Desinformante Explains), on the other hand, are videos that, according to the respondents, talk about disinformation in a simpler language that is accessible to the public, which also helps with the goal of increasing reach. Desinformante Explica seeks to discuss disinformation with a curious, yet non-expert audience. Desinformante Explica is seen as vital to Desinformante's operating model, as it is a show that aims to be attractive to the general public over a long period.

The most recurrent qualities attributed to the Desinformante are related to the subject that is the central object of the investigations – disinformation in a more structural way – and the quality of the team. The first point is based on the personal satisfaction of working on disinformation in a didactic way, aimed at the general public and establishing the intersection between journalism and scientific practice. Praise for the team, on the other hand, is mainly focused on the good alignment between Desinformante's workers. The main challenge for Desinformante is the long-term sustainability of the project. There is a strong understanding that Desinformante's growth is linked to its ability to continue 'breaking bubbles' and reach new audiences through accessible language.

Growth is also linked to challenges such as staying interesting over time and escaping possible sanctions from social platforms, such as shadow banning, which is a kind of punishment adopted by platforms that implies restricting the reach/visibility of content published by a particular page or profile (Are, 2021).

Also related to the context of social platforms, the "fight for visibility" is also an aspect of concern. In addition to visibility, the content needs to remain attractive to the point of continuing to arouse users' interest. Sustainability also encompasses the importance of continuing to fund Desinformante, since the initiative's business model is via direct funding through donations, and this requires the pursuit of continued relevance in the debate on disinformation.

In this way, the work routines are related to Desinformante's purpose of, instead of constantly checking disinformative content, promoting media/digital education in relation to what disinformation means in Brazil – and with a Global South perspective – in cultural, political, and economic terms – something that translates into its own editorial policies.

### **5.3 Editorial policies**

Desinformante's main particularities in relation to the editorial policies are: content, design, and format. The content is seen by the workers as a differentiator because it brings an academic view of the phenomenon of disinformation through accessible and systematized language. The didactic language is seen as a way of broadening the ways of communicating to the general public.

The website is seen by the majority of working people as attractive and a facilitator for people to consume the content published there. However, there was occasional self-criticism that the site needed to be reformulated in order to make the editorials more obvious. It was also pointed out that there is a shortage of professionals to deal with the complexity of the subject worked on by Desinformante, which tends to lead to an overload in the functions of these professionals and also generates debate as to whether it is feasible to expand content production to more social media platforms with the current staff, such as the more recent Tik Tok and Kwai.

The growth of Desinformante is also a concern, especially given the platform's funding model, which is via sponsorship. Therefore, given the context of competition for audiences on social networks and websites, maintaining relevance is seen as a primary concern to guarantee the initiative's sustainability. This sets up a cycle in which it is necessary to remain relevant in order to continue growing sustainably, but it is also necessary to invest in increasing the number of professionals to cover disinformation in a way that appeals to the general public on as many digital channels as possible.

The format is another distinguishing feature of Desinformante due to its multiplatform nature. In general terms, the content produced is diverse in terms of format, including audio, video, and text topics. As for Desinformante's most memorable partnerships, the main highlight is the one with the Superior Electoral Court in 2022 to combat electoral disinformation. Other memories were those made with the Marielle Franco Institute, the Vladimir Herzog Institute, and the Pro-Common Institute, as well as collaborative publications on Instagram and collaboration with Women Affected by Disinformation.

A central point of the editorial policies is to treat disinformation as a complex issue in political, economic, and cultural terms – involving everything from the consumption of disinformation to the disinformation industry itself. In this way, by looking at it “wholesale”, or in a more structural way, disinformation is not just seen as something one-off, but as something that structures platformized society. This also means understanding disinformation not just in digital territory or in the sphere of party politics, but as something that permeates all the important issues for Brazilian society, such as the environment and science, for example.

One of the most important issues in terms of editorial policies is the attempt, which has not yet been fully consolidated, to present disinformation from the perspectives of the Global South



or the Majority World. On the one hand, this means questioning epistemologies of disinformation that do not serve to explain contexts such as Brazil. And one of the ways to do this is to bring the debate closer to countries like the Philippines (Alves et al., 2023).

## 5.4 Coalition initiatives

Regarding the project with the TSE, the body sought out a number of institutions to combat disinformation in the context of that year's elections. One of these institutions was Desinformante. The agreement officially began in July 2022 and its second objective was to curb distrust in institutions.

In operational terms, the relationship with the TSE involved the creation of a section on the Desinformante website to deal with disinformation in the 2022 elections, as well as the production of an educational series that taught, among other things, protocols for reporting disinformative content on networks such as Telegram and WhatsApp. The section on the website was also dedicated to publishing topics of interest to the TSE on electoral disinformation. The fact that the cooperation with the TSE took place less than a year after the launch of Desinformante is seen as a sign of the great prestige the initiative has gained in a short space of time.

As previously mentioned, SAD is the civil society liaison arm of the Desinformante umbrella. Both SAD and Desinformante are funded by philanthropy. More than 70 institutions have signed the joint SAD document. The Disinformer eventually signs documents produced by the SAD. In general terms, SAD's main aim is to be a hub for major organizations to demand improvements in the context of disinformation. Operationally, the SAD creates documents that are the result of debates between the organizations that are part of it and opens them up for signatures.

Regarding the relationship between the Desinformante and the digital platforms, there is an understanding that the behavior of the social networks towards the Desinformante is protocolary and not very effective, with homogeneous responses from the platforms, and mostly cordial, but with few effective results.

When contact was made with the press offices of these companies, the responses were generally generic and superficial. Overall, the respondents' assessment of the platforms' communication

is negative. Telegram and X (Twitter) were listed as the worst networks in terms of communication with the Desinformante, while Meta and Google/YouTube were praised for being professional in terms of press relations. TikTok was praised for its speed of response.

## 6 Conclusions

The article argues how it is possible to experiment with other organizational models in the fight against disinformation, in addition to traditional fact-checking and media education projects. By mixing a journalistic vehicle focused on covering disinformation – in a structural way, considering the various disinformative manifestations – and an important institution in the coalition to combat disinformation in partnership with stakeholders such as social movements and the judiciary. We present Desinformante from both its internal and external dimensions, involving governance, editorial policies, work routines, and its role in coalition building.

We highlight the experimental nature of the initiative, which cannot be replicated automatically in other contexts. This prefigurative nature – in other words, imagining and trying out journalistic practices – of Desinformante shows that it is possible not only to innovate in terms of organizational models for combating disinformation but also for journalism itself, by reclaiming its role as an articulator for society. As a limitation, this means that the experiment may not be long-lasting, depending on funding, and that the initiative will have to reinvent itself according to each political and economic context in order not to lose its relevance in relation to the informational context.

In practical terms, Desinformante innovates as an initiative in the fight against disinformation in Brazil because it is more complete in its approaches: it is a repository of reliable information on disinformation on its portal and networks; it works with fact-checking – but is not limited to it; it is, above all, a hub that goes beyond the limits of digital and reaches political actors through SAD and, increasingly, it is moving towards becoming an educational reference on the subject of disinformation both through its partnerships such as the one with the Superior Electoral Court, as well as by disseminating its content within classrooms to young audiences.

The organizational form of Desinformante is a hybrid between a journalistic vehicle, with an orientation towards media education of

the public, and a kind of think tank capable of producing links with civil society entities in terms of influencing public policies. On the one hand, this means an organizational innovation in terms of the work process and a response to the changes taking place in the world of journalistic work, in terms of the deepening platformization of journalistic labor and its work relationships. In this way, the Desinformante perspective contributes to proposing solutions that blur the boundaries of what may or may not be considered journalism, or what may become journalism, according to the perspectives of Deuze and Witschge (2016). On the other hand, this is still an experimental, prefigurative initiative, in terms of being a small organization that has not yet managed to stabilize itself institutionally and/or “transfer technology” to other entities around the world. Thus, as a “laboratory” of journalistic labor, Desinformante is subject to continuous learning, limits – for example, in terms of coverage of the topics it wishes to delve into and also in terms of team size – and uncertainties about the future.

## NOTAS

- 1 More information at: <https://vazafalsiane.com/sobre>
- 2 More information at: <https://desinformante.com.br>
- 3 More information at: <https://culturaedemocracia.org.br/projetos/desinformante>
- 4 More information at: <https://contradesinformacao.com>

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