

ARTICLE

CREDIBILITY IN DAILY PROFESSIONAL LIFE: perceptions of Brazilian journalists



ROGÉRIO CHRISTOFOLETTI¹

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis – Santa Catarina – Brazil

ORCID: 0000-0003-1065-4764

DENISE BECKER²

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis – Santa Catarina – Brazil

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ABSTRACT – Increased political polarization, the proliferation of conspiracy theories, and widespread misinformation are factors that contribute to increased distrust in institutions, and journalism is not immune to these effects. This article focuses on how Brazilian journalists perceive and relate to the trust-credibility binomial. Based on a survey applied to journalists in June and July 2024 (n=446), recruited online and in person during a national professional event, we obtained responses on the functioning and importance of credibility with sources and audiences, and on determining factors for maintaining public trust in journalism. The results show different levels of concern among professionals, fragility in corporate policies to retain credibility, and awareness of the erosion of trust in the face of new configurations of the attention economy.

Key words: Perception. Credibility. Trust. Brazilian journalism. Professional practice.

¹ Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis – Santa Catarina – Brazil. Email: rogerio.christofolletti@ufsc.br

² Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis – Santa Catarina – Brazil. Email: denisebeckerjor@gmail.com

CREDIBILIDADE NO COTIDIANO PROFISSIONAL: percepções de jornalistas brasileiros

RESUMO – Aumento da polarização política, proliferação de teorias conspiratórias e desinformação generalizada são fatores que contribuem para o aumento da desconfiança nas instituições, e o jornalismo não é imune a esses efeitos. Este artigo se concentra em como jornalistas brasileiros percebem e se relacionam com o binômio confiança-credibilidade. A partir de uma survey aplicada a jornalistas em junho e julho de 2024 (n=446), recrutados online e em abordagem física durante um evento profissional nacional, obtivemos respostas sobre o funcionamento e a importância da credibilidade junto a fontes e audiências, e sobre fatores determinantes para a manutenção da confiança pública no jornalismo. Os resultados mostram diferentes níveis de preocupação dos profissionais, fragilidade nas políticas corporativas para reter credibilidade e a consciência da erosão da confiança diante de novas configurações impostas pela economia da atenção.

Palavras-chave: Percepção. Credibilidade. Confiança. Jornalismo brasileiro. Prática profissional.

CREDIBILIDAD EN LA VIDA COTIDIANA PROFESIONAL: reflexiones de periodistas brasileños

RESUMEN – La creciente polarización política, la proliferación de teorías de conspiración y la desinformación generalizada son factores que contribuyen a una mayor desconfianza en las instituciones, y el periodismo no es inmune a estos efectos. Este artículo se centra en cómo los periodistas brasileños perciben y se relacionan con el binomio confianza-credibilidad. A partir de una encuesta aplicada a periodistas en junio y julio de 2024 (n=446), reclutados en línea y en contacto físico durante un evento profesional nacional, obtuvimos respuestas sobre el funcionamiento y la importancia de la credibilidad ante fuentes y audiencias, y sobre factores determinantes para mantenerla. Confianza pública en el periodismo. Los resultados muestran diferentes niveles de preocupación entre los profesionales, debilidades en las políticas corporativas para mantener la credibilidad y conciencia de la erosión de la confianza ante las nuevas configuraciones de la economía de la atención.

Palabras clave: Percepción. Credibilidad. Confianza. Periodismo brasileño. Práctica profesional.

1 Introduction

Based on the understanding that human experience is essentially intersubjective, social psychology views “perception” as a social and cultural dimension, which occurs mainly “as an activity of social subjects, in a socially contextualized world” (Veríssimo, 2019, p. 302). We must realize that a large part of our lives takes place in the cultural world and is therefore connected to diverse forms of *praxes*, such as journalism, which helps bridge the gap between facts and audiences, sources and versions. Consider journalists: their

workspaces are filled with people, technology, and everyday office items. From a philosophical point of view, “the first of the cultural objects is the one through which they all exist, it is the body of another as a bearer of behavior” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 401).

Guided by the idea of perception as a social and cultural dimension, we present and discuss the perceptions and concerns of Brazilian journalists on the issues of trust and credibility. Capturing their perceptions gives us an insight, even if only indirectly, into how these professionals view journalism as a whole. The idea here is to better understand what these professionals think about credibility – a value that they work hard to maintain in their profession – and how it affects their work when it comes to reporting the news. We also look at the role that trust (in journalists, media outlets, and information sources) plays in this deontological universe.

Journalism and media studies indicate that trust and credibility are not the only elements of concern for news organizations regarding their existence or continued survival in an increasingly competitive and accelerated landscape. They are, however, fundamental constructions that serve as guides or bridges that shape beliefs and behaviors, favoring a safe connection and a common future between journalism and society (Radcliffe et al., 2023). This makes the trust/credibility binomial a central object in debates about the social functions of journalism, essentially when it comes to security and access to quality information in times of misinformation, refusal of mediation, audience fragmentation, and political polarization.

Different studies have already investigated the public's perceptions about the credibility of news, such as Flanagan and Metzger (2007), Johnson and Kaye (1998), and Kiousis (2001); however, these studies are dated and do not consider the Brazilian context. What we hope to accomplish in this paper is to update the debates and fill in local gaps on the topic.

2 Theoretical bases

Journalism credibility and trust in news media are concepts that have been discussed since the printed word began to circulate (Briggs & Burke, 2009; Pettigre, 2014). Ever since the pioneering research from Hovland et al. (1953), the study of credibility in journalism has recognized its changing and intricate dynamics,

which must be monitored from time to time. The understanding is that the consumption of news and information follows a complex and varied set of aspects that also depend on the degree of trust individuals have in what they are accessing. Decades after these pioneers, Gaziano and McGrath (1987), Kohring and Matthes (2007), Daniller et al. (2017), and Hanimanni et al. (2023) proposed systems for measuring trust in the media, highlighting certain conditions that make one news source more reliable than another, for instance. In the beginning, the focus was to demonstrate that the consumption of information was a social relationship – and therefore also based on trust. Later, scholars began to observe the dynamics of the various actors involved, including their adversarial aspects. Other authors have also focused on placing the trust/credibility binomial on the shelves of journalism values (Blöbaum, 2014; Bucci, 2002; Burgueño, 2010; Hayes et al., 2007; Koliska et al., 2023; Roberts, 2010; Stockwell, 2006).

In addition to this trust/credibility binomial and its relation to journalism values, there is also a concern, in democratic societies, regarding the circulation of reliable information and the provision of qualified sources for good and orderly social functioning. Reliable information is crucial for sound decision-making and risk assessment. Well-informed citizens can feel more confident when choosing their political representatives and may feel more encouraged to make demands of them in their daily activities. Governments provided with reliable data are better able to formulate and implement public policies that better meet social demands. In turn, organizations, non-profit or otherwise, can have greater control and be more effective if they base their judgments on reliable and supported information (Coleman, 2012).

Nevertheless, it is not that simple. Understanding credibility is critical for producing reliable and effective information, yet it can be unstable and situational. It is important to remember that one's perception of what is credible can be different for different receivers (Stockwell, 2006).

In light of this, there is a constant effort to “build symbolic capital that evolves into journalism credibility” (Christofoletti, 2019, p. 56). The profession and the industry need to address this, just as they need to address the issue of trust (a genuine problem). A good starting point might be to embrace the idea that trust in journalism and journalism credibility are not mutually exclusive; they rely on a process of shared, complementary construction that involves several factors.

But what can we say about trust and credibility in journalism today? Based on literature in the field and how the profession views itself, these are two attributes that add value to journalism. Credibility can be understood as “a goal, a tool, an asset and a justification behind most professional creeds” (Tsfati, 2008, p. 2.598). Additionally, public trust in the media reinforces “our willingness to trust other abstract systems” and this relationship “provides a framework for trusting each other” (Silverstone, 1999, p. 120).

For Henke et al. (2019), credibility and trust are distinct; they overlap and are widely used in the literature, but are always (or almost always) complementary. For many decades, journalism credibility has been rooted in the principle of objectivity (Schudson, 2001), a concept that has been both contested and maintained within the profession. The reason for this is based on the idea that the more objective a report is, the more credible it appears to people.

Radcliffe et al. (2023, p. 26) state that in order to play an integral role in the current information landscape, journalism will need to let go of its past and look to the future for its resurgence.

For a profession and an industry almost entirely based on communication, journalists and news organizations “can appear to be oddly inept” at understanding their practices (Toff et al., 2023, p. 170). News organizations took a long time to understand that, to deal with their economic, trust, and news evasion issues, they would need to look at and address the credibility of those who mediate and report on events (Radcliffe et al., 2023). That is, who are the ones who report the events and versions to us? Are they trustworthy?

According to Anderson (2023), journalism serves a higher purpose than simply providing products and services as just believing the veracity of information in a news story carries with it a certain risk or uncertainty: in order to trust the news, one must believe in the journalistic system, its components, and its individual activities (Blöbaum, 2016). As per Anderson, problematizing the credibility of journalism also means distinguishing the different points of reference to which credibility is directed. In the context of our study, journalists are in some way members of a journalistic system and represent one of the reference points for credibility, as indicated by Blöbaum. Finding out what they think about credibility and trust, as well as mapping their perceptions, can help us understand how newsrooms operate, not only about how

they inform but to continue doing so, as we place our trust in them to do this.

As journalists go about building a relationship of trust with the public, they end up leaving an impression of credibility. This is the beginning of building a long-lasting relationship of trust with the public (Moran, 2023). For Moran, credibility is an important component of the trust process, but can easily degrade given the instability of trust nowadays.

In terms of the journalists themselves, relying on their own professional impressions, brands or positions can lead to this instability (Fisher, 2023), particularly in our current world of misinformation, conspiracy theories, political polarization, expansion of social networks, and platformization. How can we trust content that newsrooms receive from third parties? Which sources can we trust?

According to Moran (2023), trust in journalism is vital for its economic survival and needs to be embedded in the infrastructure of news production. It is this trust that allows news outlets to be profitable, as well as allows journalists to pursue their sources and win over the audiences.

Christofoletti (2024) provides some insight into restoring credibility, and uses the word “partially” to refer to the dynamic, intricate, and volatile effect to which this restoration is subject:

Credibility depends on the fulfillment of several requirements and is related to the satisfaction of individual or collective expectations; it can be built, cultivated, and through continuous wear and tear, can deteriorate. Concentrated efforts and well-defined strategies can contribute to partially restoring the credibility lost in journalists and the media. (Christofoletti, 2024, p. 4).

Trust what? Trust whom? These are important questions given the different types of information media available nowadays. In light of the aforementioned authors' statements, we argue that a key indicator toward determining whether a journalist and/or a news organization becomes a credible source with a relevant public voice has to do with the construct and concept of what it means to report credible news that builds trust. In a society ruled by information that is increasingly dominated by algorithms and artificial intelligence (Han, 2022), bringing credibility back

may require journalists and news organizations to pay more attention to two fundamental aspects: accuracy – a previously established element of journalism (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010) – and transparency incorporated as instruments of accountability and credibility associated with routines, values, processes, and products resulting from journalistic work. Thus, credibility requires practical and concrete efforts outside of journalistic discourse or just dictating rules. This would allow for credibility to effectively consolidate itself as a hallmark of organizational culture and governance (Becker, 2021; Craft, 2019; Karlsson, 2010; Koliska, 2015).

Over the last two decades (at the minimum) there has been a growing discourse that credibility is associated with transparency. The idea is that the more we know about the surroundings or nature of something, the more we can trust it. This is probably why some restaurants provide kitchen tours to their customers or have a glass window through which customers can watch the chefs as they prepare and cook the meals. Manufacturers use attractive, eye-catching labels to explain how their products are environmentally friendly or that they comply with international quality standards. Holders of public office are accountable to voters for their actions. In all of these situations, drawing attention to something means making one aware of it, and making one aware brings us closer to people, things, organizations, or institutions. The closer and more familiar these things appear, the more trustworthy they appear. Generally speaking, transparency is a condition of visibility that strengthens our belief systems.

Transparency in journalism can come about by sharing how certain information was obtained, how the news is produced, and who the sources are that provided the raw data. Transparency can also reveal the mannerisms of journalists and the political and economic interests of news organizations. In journalism, as in other professions, we need to evaluate which levels of transparency are recommended or acceptable on a case-by-case basis. For instance, some sources of information cannot be named as this kind of transparency could pose a risk to the lives or the integrity of those sources. There are even other situations where it would not be appropriate for reporters to provide details of an investigation for fear of threats of retaliation or persecution.

Despite these limitations, we understand transparency as

one of the more important guiding principles for building journalism credibility. Although its effectiveness is not universal or direct (Craft & Heim, 2009), promoting the importance of transparency in professional and academic discussions, as well as prioritizing it in journalism, is one way to reduce public uncertainty about news content, the way said content was produced, and the intentions of its messengers.

Some authors question the direct association between transparency and credibility in journalism (Bock & Lazard, 2021; Tandoc & Thomas, 2017) by arguing that there is little evidence for it. Although the effects of transparency on journalism credibility are not yet fully quantifiable, its implementation as a value and practice reveals the commitment and responsibility of news organizations towards their audiences, investors, advertisers, and the professionals themselves. Being transparent also shows a level of public openness, a willingness to engage in dialogue, and a less arrogant viewpoint on the part of those who produce informative content.

There is somewhat of a paradox to having transparency and credibility linked, but also a refusal by professionals and journalistic media to be more transparent. If transparency is met with some resistance in the corporate field, its professional ethical value is indisputably useful. Even if transparency does not solve the challenges of credibility and trust in journalism – whether at the local, national, organizational, or individual level – credibility motivated by transparency strategies can promote trust in the news (Becker, 2021) and also serve as a mechanism to monitor and regulate media ownership (Figueira & Costa, 2023).

That said, the importance of research on credibility and trust extends beyond the public and market perceptions of news organizations, their brands, and professionals. Understanding the trust/credibility binomial involves seeing the overall problems that affect journalism through the perspective of those who produce the news. This generates four main types of considerations:

a) A journalist's perception of credibility can play a decisive role in identifying and reversing situations of distrust, skepticism, and veracity between objective facts and misinformation (Radcliffe et al., 2023).

b) A journalist's understanding of credibility can increase or decrease inequalities, prejudices, biases, racism, and

sexism (Robinson, 2023).

c) A journalist's concern over credibility is an important ethical interest in outlining journalistic values and boundaries of the work to be carried out (Radcliffe et al., 2023; Robinson, 2023).

d) A journalist's concern over credibility can lend more humanity to the news, and this awareness is relevant at practically every stage of the news process (Robinson, 2023).

For Schiffrin, attacks on media credibility are seen as “a threat to the physical and financial survival of journalists and journalism” (2019, p. 4). These considerations become even more relevant if journalists are aware of their responsibility as agents who must report in a transparent, reliable, and credible manner (Koliska, 2015; Köring & Matthes, 2007).

Issues of trust and credibility in journalism are relevant to the functioning of society and democracy. Yet, year after year surveys have shown that more than half of audiences in various parts of the Western world feel like the news is not entirely relevant to them, and even feel it is depressing and biased (Toff et al., 2023). Even so, as these authors note, journalism continues with its goal of “being for everyone” (p. 161). News organizations, and the media in general, claim to be independent of political agendas and commercial interests. This whole context represents a profound social and cultural problem which is just one strand in a web of trust and credibility; an unavoidable scenario for a profession that depends on public trust in order to be regarded, valued, and consumed.

Could these downward trends indicate a decline in the public's trust in the media and a crisis in journalism credibility? They could, but journalism is not the only institution suffering from this problem. These same aforementioned public opinion surveys which show a decline in this important journalistic value, also reveal that other institutions are experiencing a decline in public trust. This is true for governments and companies, but also for formal education and science in schools, universities, and research institutes. From all accounts, this decline in trust is widespread and manifests in the form of rejecting socially-established institutions, doing away with mediators, and a constant skepticism of structural truths. It is an epistemic crisis that affects societies by destabilizing their belief systems, and then eroding the foundations that help maintain social

ties. In an epistemic crisis, knowledge and information are constantly being questioned, and while this is a healthy, necessary, and expected form for verifying validity, this other form of questioning we speak of borders on denial as it produces and feeds on ever-increasing levels of distrust. For systems such as journalism and science, this attitude jeopardizes their existence and permanence in social spaces, yet one more reason for continuing to research trust and credibility.

3 Methodology

In this article, our objective is to further our knowledge of the perceptions and concerns Brazilian journalists have about trust and credibility in their professional lives. To obtain this data, we applied an online survey to journalists working in news outlets. This survey consisted of 25 multiple-choice questions and adopted a Likert scale. We used the Google Forms platform to collect our data. All responses were anonymous and we checked the platform daily during the application period. This same platform contained a link that directed participants to the survey. The survey consisted of four sections: the first section collected census data (length of time in the profession, current positions, place of work, gender, and region); the second explored general perceptions about credibility and trust in journalism; the third focused on environmental aspects of the organizations the participants work for; and the last section asked about specific views on the topic, the idea here was to better understand how credibility and trust are conceived in journalism.

Before collecting the data we asked eight journalists to participate in a few pre-tests of the survey. This gave us a chance to go over their statements, perform instrument calibration, and estimate participant response time. The 25 questions (Q1-Q25) were answered in an average of 5 to 8 minutes, which we found acceptable given the testing conditions, as detailed below. All pre-test responses were discarded once the instrument had been calibrated. The following ethical precautions were adopted in addition to guaranteeing anonymity to all participants: the platform did not collect participant emails (increasing the level of anonymity) and all participants were given the option to

consent to the research by clicking a button at the beginning of the survey.

The survey was aimed at professional journalists working predominantly in news organizations. To ensure that the respondents were journalists, the survey was distributed through networks, groups, and channels that these professionals use. Additionally, the survey contained a few questions that individuals with specific knowledge of the field and an understanding of journalism would be able to answer. This did not prevent other individuals from responding to the survey, but it did provide us with more accurate data.

A non-probabilistic sampling method was used based on responses we received over 25 days: from June 20 to July 14, 2024. The survey was applied in two stages: for the first 21 days, it was exclusively online (the link to the survey was distributed on social networks, email lists, and instant messaging groups with the target audience). To encourage participation, all participants who completed the survey were provided with a link to download an e-book. The participants were recruited in person during the 19th Congress of the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Abraji), which was held in São Paulo (SP) from July 11 to 14, 2024.

The timeframe for data collection included this event, which is important for the sector and was attended by thousands of professionals, giving us the chance to successfully contact potential research subjects. We invited individuals to participate in the survey by putting posters up at the event, inserting pamphlets into congress kits (both of these options contained a QR code to access the survey), and consulting event participants in person.

We received a total of 454 responses over the 25-day collection period. The database was checked and cleaned by applying the following two filters: a) only those participants who clicked on the button “Do you feel well informed about the research? Yes, and I consent”, and b) only those participants who filled out the questionnaire completely. After applying these filters we were left with 446 responses that met the criteria, a research sample that could be analyzed ($n = 446$).

We used Google Forms to create graphs and spreadsheets of the raw data and used content analysis (Bardin, 2011) to interpret the data, which is described below.

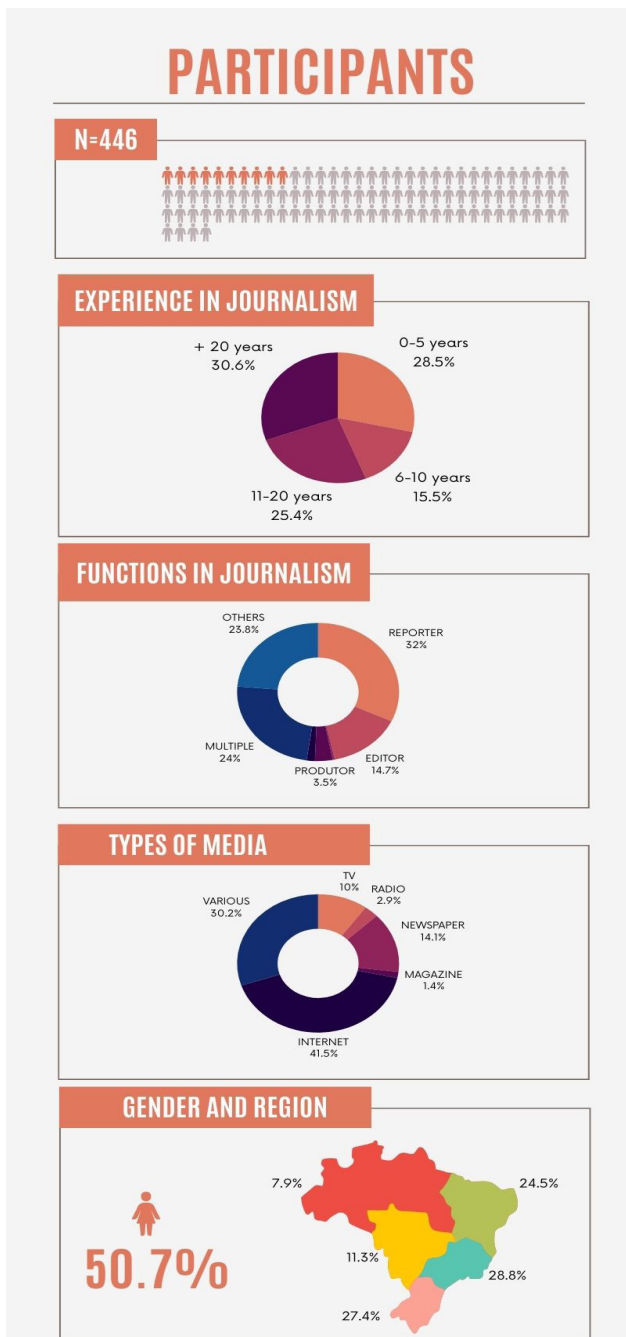
4 Results

For this article, we considered 446 respondents with the following lengths of experience in journalism: 30.6% with more than 20 years of experience, 28.5% were much younger and had up to five years of experience, 25.4% had between 11 and 20 years of experience, and 15.5% had between 6 and 10 years of experience. Although the survey is not a census, the responses to Q1 (How long have you been a journalist?) were widely represented by the working class, mixing responses from more and less experienced subjects.

Almost one-third of respondents were reporters (30.8%), 14.2% were editors, 4% were writers, 3.4% were producers and 1.6% were camera people and photographers. Almost half of the sample (46%) holds more than one of the aforementioned positions or work as columnists, commentators, presenters, newscasters, content creators, scriptwriters, managers of specific areas, consultancies, entrepreneurs, freelancers, press officers, and even journalism professors (Q2). Most of our research subjects work online (41.5%), 14.1% for newspapers, 10% for television, 2.9% for radio, and 1.4% for magazines. Almost one-third (30.2%) hold more than one of the previous positions (Q3).

Women represent 50.7% of our sample, followed by men (48.9%) and others (0.4%) (Q4). The geographic distribution of participants is similar to the population concentration and the size of the newspaper markets in the country: 28.8% of respondents are in the Southeast, 27.4% in the South, 24.5% in the Northeast, 11.3% in the Midwest, and 7.9% in the North (Q5).

FIGURE 1
Characterization of the research sample



4.1 General Perceptions

Now that we have characterized our sample, we look at a set of eight questions that address general perceptions about credibility and trust.

Question 6 asks journalists about the importance of credibility for journalism. Using a 5-degree Likert scale ranging from “Not Important At All” to “Very Important”, 98% of participants responded with Very Important, a clear sign of how much credibility means to them in their profession. This noticeable certainty then led us to ask the following question: “Do journalists care about being trustworthy in their audiences’ eyes?” Although 60.7% answered “yes”, more than one-third (35.5%) said “sometimes”, and 2.5% said “no”. 1.3% of respondents did not know how to answer this question. The eighth question went a little further into the respondents’ perception by asking: “Are journalists concerned about their sources being trustworthy?” More than two-thirds (71%) responded “yes”, while 26.1% said “sometimes” and 1.1% responded “no”. A slightly higher percentage (1.8%) did not know how to answer this question. The respondents’ answers to this question were similar to their responses to Q7: 61.7% responded “yes”, a little over one-third responded “no” (34.5%), and identical ranges of 1.8% for “no” and “I don’t know”.

Looking at the respondents’ answers to Q7, Q8, and Q9, we can see that Brazilian journalists are much more concerned about being trustworthy to their sources than to their audiences and that they are less concerned with the credentials of their sources, perhaps because they believe in their own logic or selection criteria which somewhat strengthens professional autonomy. Or perhaps this behavior is evidence of a residual historical ignorance on the part of journalists.

Q10 asked the participants to consider the other side of the coin: public perceptions. We observed moderate optimism in the participants’ responses to the question “Do you think people trust journalism?”: 48.3% said “overall, they do” and 0.4% “yes, they always do”. Another 47.4% marked “they sometimes do” and 3.8% responded “they do not trust”. Q11 went a little more in-depth into the respondents’ general perceptions: “In your opinion, who do people generally trust the most?”: 37.5% said “people on their social networks”, 27.4% responded “the media”, 19.3% responded “the news itself, regardless of media form”, 11.2% responded “journalists”, and 4.5% responded “sources consulted in the news”.

These results show a shift in the level of trust from conventional information ecosystems to the social networks of close or familiar individuals. There is a ten-percent variance between the responses “people on their social networks” and “media”, which represents more than one-third of the total trust in traditional media. This variance suggests a clear shift in trust. Thus, the traditional specialized system in journalism (its procedures, instruments, values, and practices) gives way to non-formalized systems, affected by other criteria such as familiarity, proximity, informality, and spontaneity, all of which are ubiquitous in communication on social media platforms. Another piece of data supports this conclusion: journalists – those responsible for producing and disseminating content – come in fourth on the list of who the public trusts the most, which means they are trusted less than the news itself, regardless of the medium.

In Q12, respondents were asked to compare, based on their experiences and interactions with the public, whether people nowadays trust journalism more or less than they did a decade ago. The answers are striking and a far cry from the moderate optimism given in the answers to Q10: 92.4% said that people nowadays trust less than they did 10 years ago, and only 2% said that they trust more. Another 2.9% said that the level of trust is the same, and 2.7% said they did not have an answer.

Responses to Q13 add to apparent increasing mistrust in journalism: 42% believe that journalism “is not as reliable today as it was 10 years ago”, one-third consider that current journalism is just as reliable as past journalism (33.3%), and less than one-fifth (18.2%) think that current journalism is more reliable than before. There was also a small percentage (6.5%) of participants who did not have an answer, the highest percentage registered in the survey, which illustrates some of the uncertainty that respondents have about this topic.

4.2 Aspects of the environment

A set of six questions were asked to assess how the organizations the respondents work for deal with trust and journalism credibility. The objective was to collect data from the environments in workplaces and corporate cultures in order to understand whether these two aspects are objects in need of particular attention. Q14 asked “Does your workplace care about credibility?” The majority

responded “yes” (95.6%), followed by “no” (2.6%), and “I don’t know” (1.8%). This majority decreased drastically when respondents were asked: “Does your workplace have any manuals, internal documents, or editorial policies that deal with journalism credibility?” A little less than two-thirds (65.3%) said “they have some material”, while 21% said “they don’t have any”, and 13.7% said “I don’t know”. The variance between responses to Q14/Q15 suggests a widespread perception that organizations are concerned about the issue, but concrete actions are not being taken. Even still, 78.4% of respondents believe that their workplaces offer guidance on how to be more trustworthy as journalists, while just over one-sixth (17.7%) reported no guidance. The remaining 3.9% did not have an answer (Q16). There was a greater variance in responses when participants were asked whether these guidelines were adequate: 59% answered yes, while 41% considered them insufficient, which once again draws attention to a gap between corporate discourse and perceptions of the practice (Q17).

The last two questions in the set asked about the reputation of the brands, media outlets, or organizations where the respondents work. Q18 asked: “Is the name and brand of the media outlet you work for important to the public’s trust in you?” The overwhelming majority (95.9%) said corporate credentials are important; 70.7% said very important and 25.2% somewhat important. Only 4.1% believe that the media outlet they work for is not an important factor in whether the public trusts their work or not. Q19 asked: “Does mentioning the name of your workplace help convince your sources to provide information?” Again, the vast majority (93.7%) believe that an organization’s reputation opens up doors: for 56.3% “it helps a lot” and for 37.4% “it helps a little”. Only 6.3% said “it doesn’t count” with the sources.

4.3 Specific perceptions of trust and credibility

We concluded the 25-question survey by asking a final set of five questions about the participants’ more specific perceptions of trust in journalism and journalism credibility. Here, the respondents were asked to either agree or disagree with the statements.

Q20 contained the statement: “Credibility in journalism has to do with the transparency of how we report”. The responses to this statement demonstrated a widespread perception among

participants that there is a correspondence or close relationship between being trustworthy and being transparent in journalism: 98.9% of participants agreed with the statement, with 53.5% fully agreeing and 45.4% partially agreeing. Only 1.1% of participants completely disagreed.

Q21 contained the statement: “Credibility has to do with accuracy”. Similar to Q20, the level of agreement was high (96%), the only difference being that the total level of agreement was much higher than Q20: 80.5%. This data suggests that, for the research participants, credibility has more to do with efficient information collecting than it does with journalists sharing or disclosing their practices and procedures. There were also a further 15.5% of participants who “partially agreed” and 4% who “totally disagreed”.

Q22 explores the participants’ individual perceptions of dealing with the public through the following statement: “Establishing a relationship with the public helps to increase or maintain credibility”. One-half of the participants (50.4%) fully agreed, 44.8% partially agreed, and 4.7% disagreed. These figures show a greater divide among the respondents and their understanding of how effective dialogue with information consumers may or may not increase credibility, indicating some uncertainty about the strategy.

4.4 Notoriety, localism and antiquity

Q23 addresses the perceptions about a journalist’s notoriety as a determining factor in gaining social trust through the following statement: “Being famous helps journalists be more trustworthy in the eyes of the public”. The total agreement rate dropped by 10 percentage points when compared to Q22 (95.2%/85%), constituting an important turning point in the study. For the first time, the amount of “total agreement” responses (21.5%) was lower than the “partial agreement” responses (63.5%). This represents only one-third of responses and suggests that the notoriety/celebrity value of journalists can be a factor in the formation of public trust, but not as decisive as those previously compared. The percentage for total disagreement was 15%; at least three times larger than those previously recorded.

Q24 and Q25 address factors such as the proximity and seniority of media outlets. For the statement “Local media outlets

tend to be more trustworthy in the public eye” (Q24), 68.4% of participants totally agreed, 12.3% partially agreed, and 19.3% totally disagreed. Two pieces of data stand out here: this was the highest disagreement rate in the survey – almost one-fifth of the responses – and it was the lowest complete agreement rate, indicators that, when combined, may cast doubt on the argument that local media outlets are more likely to be trusted by their audiences.

The last statement in the survey was “Older or more traditional media tend to be more trustworthy in the public eye” (Q25). The percentage for total agreement (23.3%) remained lower than for partial agreement (64.3%), while 12.3% of respondents completely disagreed with the statement. What can be inferred from the responses is that, for these specific participants, the age of a news brand may not be so important for retaining or gaining credibility with the public.

5 Final considerations

Being able to ask journalists for their perceptions of their work conditions allows us to understand a little more about how part of the collective imagination of journalism is constructed and how some standards crystallize over time and are always in constant tension, dispute, and revision. This also applies to trust and credibility; current and future values in journalism.

The survey we conducted (with gender equality) among 446 respondents from all regions of Brazil holding different professional roles allowed us to outline a current and somewhat representative picture of journalists in the country. Our collection tool involved taking the trust/credibility binomial and examining it in terms of the relationships journalists have with their values, their audiences and sources, and their workplaces.

The results are clear regarding the value these professionals give to these topics, although their responses do show they are more concerned about being reliable/credible to sources than to the public, and even less so when it comes to the reliability credentials of sources. There is also a distinct shared awareness of the decreasing centrality of journalism within the communication process, given that most of the respondents stated that the public tends to view social networks as more trustworthy than journalists and the media. This is very disturbing to those in journalism who are truly concerned

about the level of public trust placed on it.

This does not equate to skepticism about the direction the profession is going. The survey showed there is moderate optimism supported by the widely held belief that people still trust journalism. This optimism wanes slightly when comparing current trust rates with those from a decade ago.

The data we collected also leads us to believe that, for journalists, credibility is further obtained or better retained by focusing on transparency and accuracy rather than by maintaining relationships with the public and cultivating fame or notoriety. News organizations and their brands are still highly valued by our survey respondents and do increase the trust rates in their professionals, but these media outlets do not necessarily need to be local or traditional, they could be in settings outside the current norms.

The data we collected indirectly coincides with results from recent studies (such as Christofolletti, 2022 and Christofolletti et al., 2022) on technical manuals for Latin American journalism and scientific journals, which found credibility to be a valued quality but seldom conceptualized, which adds to a more mechanical idea of what it is and how it works. With no clear outline or consolidated understanding, credibility is a value in journalism that is difficult to grasp on a practical level and appropriate. For example, the respondents to our survey mostly believe that news organizations are concerned with being trustworthy, but that their concrete actions or instructions to professionals do not seem to be very effective. This discrepancy creates a certain ambiguity about what it means to be credible; it seems to give the idea that those who claim to be trustworthy, are trustworthy, but is this true?

In conclusion, we recognize this paper does have its limitations; it does not go in-depth into the concepts of credibility among news organizations and their policies for maintaining and increasing trust rates. These aspects need to be researched and studied, along with journalism credibility and how it is affected by current social phenomena such as omnipresent misinformation and the rejection of media due to intense political polarization. We suggest that any future comparative studies take into account new online reputation systems, such as those that govern the existence and prominence of digital influencers.

NOTES

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ROGÉRIO CHRISTOFOLETTI. Professor of the Department and Postgraduate Program in Journalism at the Santa Catarina Federal University (UFSC). Productivity researcher at CNPq. Journalist with a Master's degree in Linguistics and a PhD in Communication Sciences. Postdoctoral internship at the Universities of Seville (2018-2019) and Valencia (2024-2025). His collaboration to this article includes text layout, development of methodology, interpretation and discussion of the results, writing, review, and approval of the final version. E-mail: rogerio.christofoletti@ufsc.br

DENISE BECKER. Master's degree in Journalism and a PhD candidate in the Journalism Postgraduate Program at Santa Catarina Federal University (UFSC) where she is currently developing her thesis on local media and trust in the media. She is a researcher for the Journalism Ethics Observatory (objETHOS) and holds scholarships from both Capes and CNPq. Her collaboration to this article includes data collection, discussion of results, writing, formatting, review, and approval of the final version of the work. E-mail: denisebeckerjor@gmail.com