



## Call for papers

### Special Issue: Fake news: challenges and risks for contemporary journalism

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To reflect on fake news is, in some way, to reflect on journalism. However, it is necessary first to address the complex processes of mediation and contemporary mediatization, through which the interconnected and globalized society circulates contentious arguments, intolerance and hatred, and intentional distortion. But what exactly are fake news? How false news impact on and interfere in journalism? In the absence of a stabilized conceptualization of the term and, therefore, the notion that it represents, some questions could be raised: could we consider as fake news a news story in which a respondent lies, and the false information is incorporated by the reporter in the text? Is lack of checking, and the consequent wrong information, fake news? Can the improper use of old footage, overestimation of statistics and data be considered fake news? The use of the term in the circumstances above, among others, has been recurrent – which suggests that the concept of fake news still lacks consensus, even within the framework of journalism research.

The term fake news itself, also referred as junk news, has been questioned because it no longer could handle the sophisticated and growing production and distribution of videos and fake audios with great potential to impact and spread. Sensationalist and partialized, the practice of producing and circulating false news seems to acquire new nuances. The distribution of fake video and audio files (such as what happened during the strike of truckers in Brazil, in May 2018), does not just circulate textualities that would simulate news originated by legitimate journalistic institutions, but they would appear now even more "real".

However, aside from notional doubts, there are many controversies to the theme. On the one hand, the large press business groups and their respective vehicles (both online and off line) have seen in the offer of services of fact-checking opportunity and strategy to regain credibility that have gravely escaped them in recent years. Such initiatives would prove to be a counter-

attack tool of the traditional media, which allows it to guarantee a seal of truth for all content published by the vehicles involved in this fact-checking process - despite the criticisms and questions that these journalistic vehicles themselves has received in relation to the news they publish and the journalistic coverage they perform, which also points for out flaws, mistakes and editorial frames of privilege or persecution of the personalities involved.

It seems undeniable that fake news has direct and effective impact on journalism, considering that journalism, as a referential field of knowledge of everyday life, has been affected by waves of false news that often arise in online social networks, such as Facebook and Instagram, and are quickly shared both on the Internet and in closed networks as WhatsApp. In this sense, the role of fact-checkers nowadays is very important. Fact-checking seeks to be a safe haven, a step to certify the veracity of information circulating, especially on the web. In most countries, there are already some kind of fact-checking services being offered and, in the United States and Europe, there are hundreds of websites dedicated to unravelling fake news or news with flaws in the gathering of information. In Brazil, in addition to websites exclusively dedicated to fact-checking, electronic portals of traditional newspapers and magazines have fact-checking services as well, corroborating that the circulation of fake news is a nuisance to the news media, which understand the false news as risks and challenges to be faced.

Historically, false news followed the trajectory of the press. There are many cases in which rumors, oversights in verification and checking of information and, of course, intentional lies were published as legitimate news, impacting society. Mouillaud (1989) reminds us of occasionnels, the first printed reports in circulation in Paris, in the 17th century. They preceded the first Parisian newspapers<sup>1</sup>. Overall, they were single-sheet publications, which reported specific cases and generated curiosity by mixing narratives based on crimes and extremely violent murders that occurred in Paris and simply invented narratives - without distinguishing between them. In other words, many of them were false. Fake news or *fausses nouvelles*.

Although this path preceded the emergence of journalism and the press, the circulation of false news nowadays has intensified and has gained enormous visibility, calling the attention of the press itself and of researchers and scholars of journalism and communication processes. Fake news became much more than a mere media discourse occurrence. They were formed in the political sphere and are object of electoral strategy. This is the case, for instance, of the 2016 presidential elections in the United States. As it seems clear now, by then the candidate Donald Trump disseminated fake news to create misinformation and conflicting reactions to his opponents, including the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. However, when he was approached by the press with allegations involving his name or his aides, Trump replied shouting "Fake news" and even said to "annoying" reporters: "You are fake news!".

Even considering the prevalent influence of the US average on the Brazilian press, the fact is that the fake news phenomenon has long since gained global proportions. And it seems to get worse more recently. Earlier this year, the false news that South African President Jacob Zuma had resigned not only

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<sup>1</sup> Mouillaud, M., Tétu, J-F. (1989). *Le journal quotidien*. Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon.

scared the public opinion in the country, but also shocked the financial market the markets fell sharply. In September 2017, a series of fake images posted on the internet intensified the crisis of the Rohingya, the Muslim people - who represented 5% of Myanmar's population of 60 million - who would have been victims of ethnic cleansing. But the images that circulated as being recent were of old conflicts that would have happened in other countries. The goal was to show how rohingias would be violent. In Latin America, the presidential elections in Chile in December 2017, won by the center-right coalition, were also marked by an avalanche of fake-news involving the main candidates. According to the Investigation Unit of the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio*, false videos and news were seen or shared more than 3.5 million times in the country during the electoral process. One of the most shared fake videos attacked the candidate Alejandro Guillier (defeated in the elections), having been seen by more than 516,000 people. According to the Chilean newspaper's investigation, the video was sent by WhatsApp from dozens of different numbers of phones registered in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian cities.

In Brazil, tensions between political groups and other sectors of civil society have also been fuelled by fake news since Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016. Rumors include the name of the former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The death of the city councilwoman Marielle Franco (PSOL), cruelly murdered in Rio de Janeiro, in 2018, was also crossed by false news waves, associating her image with organized crime and drug trafficking. Examples are numerous and cover the most diverse sectors of social life.

The serious and complex circumstances in which fake news are produced and circulated should not be ignored. Its character, in general, criminal, aggressive, instigating dissonances and conflicts demonstrates that the question transcends the technical character of the content production. Fake news is meant to misinform, seeking to confuse political-ideological and emotional processes already marked by dissent and controversy. It is an action made speech. It is a discourse that takes place as an event. It is not surprising that a significant part of the shared fake news is redistributed by the Internet users even without having been opened (read). Only the title, often absurd, a grotesquely manipulated photo or a statement that meets a political and ideological belief or disqualifies public figures are sufficient to make audiences share such content. Whether the content is trustworthy or not, it is another story.

Fake news, therefore, is not restricted to the partisan politics and social activism. False news become strongly present where there are conflicts of interest, opinions and ideological worsening. In general, they are lies that call into question the honesty, honor and dignity of the personalities they want to attain. They appeal to macro-privileges, marital betrayals, morally condemnable social and family acts. Sometimes, they are so bizarre that even those who oppose the public figure questioned, no longer believe what is disclosed. Anyway, audiences share absurd fake news. And this is a dimension of the phenomenon that must be studied very carefully. Regardless of their intentionality, whether for political-partisan motivations, for the pursuit of financial profits, or for ideological-cultural issues or even as misogyny, gender intolerance, racism or a joke (which never is, because in one way or another it always impacts the moral integrity of someone), the production of fake news

years to achieve success in another phase: circulation. And fake news disseminates exactly on social networks, where they can be endlessly shared. It is true that countries such as Brazil, with intense use of social networks, ostensible use of WhatsApp and a conjuncture of political hyperpolarization become a very conducive terrain to the misinformation generated by false information and news.

As a suggestion, this call for papers proposes three articulating axes:

a) Theoretical-conceptual perspectives: possibilities in terms of theoretical frameworks for understanding the phenomenon of fake news. It can be done either within the theories of journalism or in a broader way within the field of communication. What are the content types preferred by the fake news disseminators? Is it possible to think of news reporting criteria for fake news?

b) Fake news and its processes of mediation and mediatization: to reflect on false news from the perspective of reconfigured processes of mediation and mediatization, regarding the profound changes in the modes of production and circulation of content, new status of both producers, consumers, and prosumers in the digital environment, and also the altered diegetic circumstances observed in the fake news textualities.

c) The impact and reactions of journalism and society to fake news: how seriously can be the consequences of false content? Why are fake news so commonplace among those who spread discourses of hatred and intolerance? Can we talk about fake news and risks to democracy? As a response to the widespread circulation of false content, strong reactions and responses from institutional sources such as journalistic portals, public institutions and other sectors of civil society can be found worldwide. International organizations such as the United Nations, the Vatican, media associations and the mass media and professional associations of journalists have been systematically campaigning to raise awareness and warn against fake news.

**To be considered, articles must be submitted by February 28, 2019.**

The length of texts must be between 40 000 and 55 000 characters with spaces.

Research publishes two versions of each issue (in Portuguese/Spanish and in English); the authors of the articles accepted in Spanish or Portuguese should provide the English translation. In the same way, the authors of texts accepted in English should send a version in Portuguese or Spanish.

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**Deadlines**

**Submission of papers:** February 28, 2019.

**Notification of acceptance:** July 30, 2019.

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