


HOW A VIRTUAL GROUP FOR JOURNALISTS BECOME A DISINFORMATION DISSEMINATOR IN PARAÍBA: A case study about the group on WhatsApp “Imprensa PB 2018”

COMO UM GRUPO VIRTUAL PARA JORNALISTAS TRANSFORMOU-SE EM UM DIVULGADOR DE
DESINFORMAÇÃO NA PARAÍBA: Um estudo de caso sobre o grupo no WhatsApp “Imprensa PB 2018”

CÓMO UN GRUPO VIRTUAL PARA PERIODISTAS SE CONVIRTIÓ EN UN DIFUSOR DE
DESINFORMACIÓN EN PARAÍBA: Un estudio de caso sobre el grupo de WhatsApp “Imprensa PB 2018”

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ABSTRACT:

This article intends to make a case study about the group on WhatsApp called “Imprensa PB 2018” (fictitious name), composed of journalists and communicators, and which spread misinformation during the electoral campaign period in Brazil in 2018, mainly related to the positions of President of the Republic. The group had been created with the aim of disseminating links and news related to the political milieu in Paraíba, but it became a channel for the spread of fake news and disinformation, which had supporters of the right and extreme right wing in Brazil. WhatsApp is a messaging application used by more than 120 million Brazilians and has become a means of disseminating information and news, quickly and directly, but it is also through it that misinformation has been circulating in Paraíba.

KEYWORDS: Disinformation; WhatsApp; Elections.

Introduction

Communicators and journalists from Paraíba created, in the WhatsApp instant messaging application, the group “Imprensa PB 2018” (fictitious name), whose objective was to disseminate links with reports produced by communicators from the city of João Pessoa and Paraíba or subjects related to Journalism. There were no inclusion criteria for the participants. Just having a website or blog and publishing content considered journalistic. “Imprensa PB 2018” also did not have an administrator, responsible person in the WhatsApp groups to filter what is posted in the group. At the same time, several people were given this function, which caused confusion and the

insertion of people who were not journalists or who were not committed to the profession's ethical principles and not spreading misinformation.

That same year, elections were held for president in Brazil, with the extreme right candidate, Jair Bolsonaro, the winner of the election. In the group “Imprensa PB 2018” on the WhatsApp application, voters of the then presidential candidate published videos, memes and even websites that brought information about the opposition candidate to Bolsonaro, from the Workers' Party, Fernando Haddad, his deputy, Manuela Dávila, from the Party Communist of Brazil, in addition to messages against the Brazilian Supreme Court. Subsequently, this information was verified by Brazilian checking agencies and considered to be untrue.

As the elections approached, there was an intensification among political forces in Brazil, which began in the demonstrations against the increase in bus tickets in São Paulo, in 2013, intensifying during the impeachment of ex-president Dilma Rouseff. Pablo Ortellado, responsible for the Political Debate Monitor in the Digital Environment, says that there was a political polarization in the country, with the public debate being structured around a single axis: a field formed by conservatives and another from the left, where social movements participate, Allied base NGOs and parties. “The polarization of the political debate is, thus, the reduction of the diversity of the political debate to just two poles, with a process of alignment of discourse” (2018).

WhatsApp is a messaging application, which enables interpersonal communication, and was the most used channel in Brazil to disseminate information related to the candidate of the extreme right party. The app was also used to publicize misinformation about the Workers' Party, Jair Bolsonaro's main opponent in the Brazilian elections in 2018.

Some studies carried out in this period show an intensive use of WhatsApp in the campaign. On the other hand, the relevance and centrality that the tool acquired in the public debate during the elections was also highlighted by analysts and academics. Another issue that was analyzed was the intensive use of the tool in the dissemination of false news and disinformation strategies. The investigation conducted by IDEIA Big Data, commissioned by Avaaz, presented some of the false news shared by WhatsApp and found that 98% of Bolsonaro's voters were exposed to one or more false news and 90% believed that the stories they were based on truth (Solano et al., 2019, online).

One of the checking agencies that verified this content was **Aos Fatos**. According to a survey conducted by the agency, Jornal da Cidade OnLine was the most popular website among WhatsApp groups identified with right-wing ideas and

politicians. On July 4th, **Aos Fatos** showed that this portal used fake profiles in publications with attacks and misinformation about politicians, judges and even ministers of the Supreme Court. Another false information that circulated in WhatsApp groups with people connected to the right and that was checked by Aos Fatos, happened in September 2018 and said that the Superior Electoral Court had delivered electronic ballot security codes to a Venezuelan company through bidding¹.

A study by NorthWestern University, in the United States, found that websites known to spread misinformation are among those that circulated the most in the 2018 elections in WhatsApp groups, both linked to the right and left.

According to the study, users on the right appear more connected to each other and share more multimedia content (photos, videos and audio messages) than those on the left. Also notable is the trend among these groups - also seen in the United States - of information consumption through YouTube channels: 56.3% of the links shared by the right-wing groups were videos from the platform. In the left groups, YouTube content represented 44.2% of the links in the analyzed period (Ribeiro, 2019, online).

The journalist Patrícia Campos Mello, of the Folha de São Paulo newspaper, made a report with a few days left to end the second round of the elections in which she pointed to a mass shooting of messages by WhatsApp against the Workers Party (PT), configuring herself as box 2, which is prohibited by Brazilian electoral legislation. According to the report, the contract with the agencies responsible for this type of service reached R \$ 12 million reais and among the companies that bought these packages is Havan, by businessman Luciano Hang, one of the main supporters and financiers of the Bolsonaro campaign². Companies that supported the Brazilian extreme right candidate bought a service known as “mass shooting” using the candidate's own user base or bases sold by digital strategy agencies, which is considered illegal in Brazil and did not declare this money to the public. Electoral justice. Given this information, it is possible to make the relationship between the report by Patricia Campos Mello, and the research by Aos Fatos and NorthWestern University, in which groups linked to the Jair Bolsonaro campaign, through mass shootings, disclosed misinformation about the candidate of the Workers' Party, which shows the strategic bias used by Bolsonaro's campaign, and which may have helped him in his victory in the Brazilian electoral process.

¹ <https://www.aosfatos.org/noticias/sites-de-fake-news-foram-os-mais-populares-em-grupos-de-whatsapp-nas-eleicoes/>

² <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/10/empresarios-bancam-campanha-contra-o-pt-pelo-whatsapp.shtml>

Mass media in Brazil set up checking agencies during the elections to check this content that circulated on social networks and help Brazilians to identify possible fake content, and thus not to share it. Among these agencies is **Comprova**. The objective of the Comprova project was to detect and weaken techniques for manipulating and disseminating deceptive content that circulates on social networks, websites and messaging applications. The project consisted of twenty-four Brazilian media outlets, including Band News, Futura, Folha, Estadão, GaúchaZH and Exame and is an initiative of **First Draft**. In 2018, Comprova “disclosed having received more than 20 thousand reports of false information during its operation” (2019). The large volume of disinformation that circulated in this period caused exhaustive work to checkers, and because of the large amount of disinformation that circulated, not all content sent to the agencies could be checked. Therefore, a lot of fake news circulated on social networks, was shared and considered by people to be true.

The phenomenon of disinformation is not something new, but in 2018, it took on worrying proportions in Brazil and was used as a weapon of war in the elections. What happened on Brazilian soil is very similar to what happened for the election of president in the United States in 2016.

This article aims to highlight the disclosure of disinformation in a WhatsApp group composed of communicators and journalists, in the city of João Pessoa, state of Paraíba, Brazil, during 2018, by supporters of the current President of the Republic, who may have influenced the choice of the extreme right candidate. We also intend to emphasize how disinformation can harm democracy and the electoral process in the country. For this, we carried out a bibliographic and descriptive search on checking sites, journalistic sites and scientific articles that deal with this topic and we used the methodology of the case study about the WhatsApp group “Imprensa PB 2018.”

Even with all the evidence brought to the time by the report by the journalist Patrícia Campos Mello, from Folha de São Paulo, and by the checking agencies about the mass shootings and the use of disinformation in WhatsApp groups by the Brazilian extreme right, Jair Bolsonaro was elected President of the Republic and the messaging app was considered one of its main allies in this achievement.

Before the electoral period, the Superior Electoral Court created an advisory council on the internet and elections “with powers to develop research and studies on electoral rules and the influence of the internet on elections” (2018). Among the preventive measures was the adoption of a policy of transparency by Facebook on the published content. “In this sense, we had an exhibition of information on paid content.

Most of the suggestions, however, were not implemented by the TSE and the platforms" (2019).

The WhatsApp group “Imprensa PB 2018”

There is no information about who was the creator or creator of the group in the WhatsApp messaging application "Imprensa PB 2018". Its initial intention was to circulate content from journalistic sites and blogs among the participants, mainly in the political field. Political advisers were also present in the group in question and released press releases with information from their advisers. There were some interactions between its participants, which identified themselves with political tendencies from both the right, extreme right and left, the first two being more present.

In 2017, when I was part of the group, it was possible to do a participatory survey and observe the content posted by its members. I noticed that there were many administrators and even if there was a publication of content that was considered false and that it harmed some institution or person, the administrators did nothing about it. Not even the messaging application where the group was installed, triggered any device to warn about the fake content disclosed. Each day, new members joined the virtual group. Before, however, starting to present the group's development on WhatsApp, Press PB 2018, it is important to show the Brazilian political panorama in this period.

In 2018, the electoral year in Brazil, the name of the then federal deputy, Jair Bolsonaro, was ranked second in the voting intention polls. From then on, journalists, broadcasters and other communication professionals in Paraíba, who identified themselves with Bolsonaro's stance, began to disclose his name in the group as the name of the right field for the Presidency of the Republic. The Federal Police, the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office and the then federal judge, Sérgio Moro, conducted Operation Lava Jato - which started in 2014, and which had extensive press coverage of their actions, aimed at "fighting corruption and organized crime in the Brazil." With this motto, Bolsonaro began to work in his pre-campaign for the presidency of the Republic by the Social Liberal party (PSL).

The then candidate of the extreme right followed the movements of Operation Lava Jato, as well as his supporters, who began to relate his name to the fight against corruption and organized crime even more intensely after the arrest of former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, in 2017, ordered by Sérgio Moro. The extreme right started to

organize itself in Brazil, and with the arrest of one of the main leaders of the Brazilian left, it found the opportunity to put itself as an ideal alternative to the presidential campaign. For Solano et al, what happened on WhatsApp and which explains Bolsonaro's growth in the polls until his arrival as President of the Republic are several issues.

The process of building right-wing networks (and specifically supporting Bolsonaro) dates back to 2014 and 2015, in the struggle of this space to achieve the process of impeding President Dilma Roussef. (...) This period witnessed the construction of a true "network propaganda infrastructure", produced from the coupling of different communication and dissimulation channels, especially through WhatsApp. As reports and surveys show, this process fought between what was militant and what had been planned for years, based on: i) construction of groups to support the candidate; ii) occupation, connection and connection between militants and professionals, with groups with a conservative profile (political right, military, neo-Pentecostal evangelicals); and iii) insertion of Bolsonarista militants in groups with issues outside of politics. This structure allowed the candidate to consolidate, since 2017, as the second candidate with the most intention to vote (Solano et al., 2019, online).

The campaign started in August 2018 and Lula, a candidate who was first in the voting intentions for president that year, according to surveys by Brazilian institutes, such as IBGE and DataFolha³, could not compete, according to the Clean Record Law, because it was stuck. The Brazilian press, newspapers, TVs, radios, websites, have given wide repercussions to the arrest of the former President of the Republic and to the cases of corruption that, according to complaints made by the Federal Public Ministry, were directly linked to the Workers' Party. Jair Bolsonaro was in second place in the polls and his name began to resonate as a future presidential candidate in Brazil. For Lula's place, the Workers' Party appointed the professor and former Minister of Education in the PT government, Fernando Haddad. The PT formed a slate with the Communist Party of Brazil, which appointed former federal deputy, Manuela Dávila as a candidate for vice. From there, the work of the extreme right to get to power began.

When the campaign started, the misinformation in WhatsApp groups and social networks was intense. The group "Imprensa PB 2018" published, almost daily, videos, memes, websites and photos that brought untrue or distorted information about Fernando Haddad, Manuela Dávila and other people on the left connected to them.

³ <https://g1.globo.com/politica/eleicoes/2018/eleicao-em-numeros/noticia/2018/08/22/pesquisa-datafolha-lula-39-bolsonaro-19-marina-8-alckmin-6-ciro-5.ghtml>

Former President Lula and ex-President Dilma Roussef, Lula's successor in the presidency of the Republic, also became the target of this narrative.

Among the materials that circulated in this group were a video that said that the PT would distribute baby bottles with a nipple in the shape of a penis in municipal daycare centers; another said that if the PT returned to power books that encouraged homosexuality would be distributed in public elementary and high schools. It was called the "gay kit". An image of a shirt of the candidate for vice in the left wing, Manuela Dávila, circulated with the words "Jesus is transvestite". In the groups of the extreme right and the right there were countless contents used to confuse the population, mainly with content related to sexuality. The group "Imprensa PB 2018" is just one of those who shared these 'fake news' during the 2018 election. The campaign run by the extreme right didn't present public policy proposals for the country, but knew how to act in the popular imagination. "The most successful problematic content is that which acts on people's emotions, stimulating feelings of superiority, anger or fear. This is because these factors promote sharing between people who want to connect with their communities and digital tribes" (2017). And in the 2018 Brazilian elections, it is possible to identify people's fear and anger towards the PT, causing what became known as antipetism, and where the Brazilian extreme right campaign has laid its groundwork.

As is evident in cases such as those related to the news of the distribution of "gay kit", "dick bottle" and the like, LGBT people have often been the direct or indirect target of disinformation campaigns. LGBTphobia is, therefore, instrumentalized to spread a real panic in the population. Non-submission to heteronormativity has been linked by campaigns of disinformation to the ruin of the ideal model of the bourgeois, patriarchal, white and Christian nuclear family (Marinoni, 2019, p. 11).

Figure 1 - One of the manipulated images released on WhatsApp against the vice-



Imagem de Manuela D'Ávila com a camisa e a frase "Jesus é Travesti" é falsa

presidential candidate, Manuela Dávila, from Pcdob, in 2018

Source: Agência Comprova.

This can be considered as post-truth. Oxford Dictionaries chose "post-truth" as their word of the year in 2016, defining it as "circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (2018). That is, people, even though they know that certain content is not true, believe in it, as it goes against their personal beliefs. This was the case of the "gay kit"⁴ and the "piroca bottle", as it became known two of the main fake news used by the far-right campaign to attack the candidacy of the left field, which circulated in WhatsApp groups, among them, o "Imprensa PB 2018", reaching wide repercussions. One of the videos about the fake "gay kit" reached 500 thousand views on the internet. The Superior Electoral Court, following the request of the coalition "The happy people again", determined the Facebook and Google platforms to remove social networks from links related to the so-called "gay kit". The representation targeted two sons of the then right-wing presidential candidate, Carlos and Flávio Bolsonaro, for having reproduced content that claimed that the book "Aparelho sexual e CIA", had been distributed in public schools by the Ministry of Education when Haddad he was a minister. Even with

⁴ <https://congressoemfoco.uol.com.br/eleicoes/tse-diz-que-kit-gay-nao-existiu-e-proibe-bolsonaro-de-disseminar-noticia-falsa/>

the determination of the TSE, the then presidential candidate, Jair Bolsonaro, and his supporters continued to disclose this disinformation in their social networks.

Figure 2 - Candidate Jair Bolsonaro with the book “Aparelho Sexual e CIA” which



was used by his campaign as a “gay kit”
Source: Veja Magazine.

Instituto Tecnologia e Sociedade (ITSRio) analyzed WhatsApp groups in this period. The researchers concluded that there are strong suspicions about the use of automated instruments to distribute these contents, through bots (total automation) and cyborgs (automation complemented by human actions). “In addition, he pointed out the formation of real networks of coordinated action between different members of discussion groups in that application, through disinformation. The most active users of the groups were identified with a message sending 25 times higher than the average of the others” (2019).

Giuliano Da Empoli calls “Engineers of Chaos”, the political articulators responsible for bringing populist leaders to power, linked to extreme right parties. Among these chaos engineers is Steve Bannon, who managed to elect Donald Trump as President of the Republic in the United States, in the 2016 elections. Bannon came to Brazil and served in Bolsonaro's election campaign, using the strategy of social networks and his algorithms.

Together, these chaos engineers are in the process of reinventing advertising adapted to the era of selfies and social networks, and, as a consequence, transforming the very nature of the democratic game. Its action is the political translation of Facebook and Google. It is naturally populist, because like social networks, it does not support any type of intermediation and places everyone on the same plane, with a single parameter of evaluation: likes, or likes. (...) For the new Fantastic Doctors of politics, the game is no longer to unite people around a common denominator, but, on the contrary, to inflame the passions of as many groups as possible. (...) To win a majority, they will not converge towards the center, but join the extremes (Empoli, 2020, pp. 20-21).

The strength of the WhatsApp application and the “digital militias”

WhatsApp is one of the most popular messaging apps in the world. In Brazil, he is responsible for transmitting information to 120 million people (2019). And it was in this app and on social media that political campaigns in Brazil saw the opportunity to attract voters. With little space in the electoral schedule, broadcast on TV and radio, Bolsonaro's campaign saw on social media the way to leverage his candidacy (put article on) Even if they used devices considered illegal under Brazilian electoral legislation, such as the shooting of messages en masse on WhatsApp.

The great novelty of the election was the centrality that social networks acquired in the political campaign (...) Unlike the last electoral processes, the traditional campaign mechanisms, such as free propaganda on television and radio and the support of Mayors and local traditional leaders seem to have had less relevance compared to the impact of social networks. However, unlike what happened in recent electoral processes in other countries, the center of the debate was not on Facebook, but on WhatsApp (Solano et al., 2019, p. 2).

A national survey carried out by the Senate and Federal Chamber ombudsmen in Brazil in October 2019 showed that WhatsApp is the most used application by the population to get information. In all, 2,400 people from all Brazilian states were interviewed. "The results indicate that Brazilians believe that content on social networks has a great influence on people's opinions, and 45% of respondents indicated that information seen on social networks influenced the voting decision in the elections." (2019).

The strength of WhatsApp in the 2018 campaign was seen by the Datafolha Institute, on the eve of the first round of majority elections. 60% of those who declared preference for Bolsonaro were informed by the application. 40% shared information

through WhatsApp. Regarding Haddad, 38% were informed by this means and only 22% shared content through him (2019).

In 2017, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression and the Organization of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression released the “Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and False News, Misinformation and Advertising”. The document outlined a series of measures that should be taken to prevent the spread of false news in the Brazilian election, as it predicted a flood of disinformation that would hit Brazil in 2018.

The risks of misinformation, therefore, were already known. For this reason, Brazilian civil society and international observers have turned their attention to the country, in the expectation, later confirmed, that there would be a huge amount of uninformative content in the 2018 elections (Marinoni, 2019, p. 8).

Disinformation was therefore used as a political strategy to win elections. The president of the OAS observer mission, Laura Chinchilla, followed the 2018 elections in Brazil and was amazed at the amount of disinformation that circulated, mainly related to the position of President of the Republic. Laura classified the situation as “unprecedented”. On this use of disinformation as a political weapon, Martins points out:

In this sense, it is necessary to make evident the fact that the misinformation is connected to the objective of causing dissonances and informational and institutional disagreements, which is essentially political. Thus, it becomes the weapon of certain groups, especially right-wing extremists, who, in the midst of the deep crisis in which we find ourselves, use the stratagem to frighten, confuse or deceive the population (Martins et al., 2020, p. 11).

IBOPE Inteligência conducted a survey in October 2018 and found that 90% of the people interviewed said they had received some type of false news (2019).

Instituto Tecnologia e Sociedade (ITS Rio) conducted a survey analyzing WhatsApp groups and revealed that “there were strong indications of the use of automated content distribution instruments: the so-called “bots”- total automation - and the “cyborgs”- complemented automation by human actions. In addition, he pointed out the formation of true networks of coordinated action between different members of discussion groups in that application, through which a large volume of disinformation was disseminated” (2019).

In this profile defined by ITS, the group “Imprensa PB 2018” fits. However, in this specific group, it was not possible to identify the spread by disinformation robots about

the candidate of the Workers' Party, Fernando Haddad and his deputy, Manuela Dávila. The amount of untrue information released was considerable, and the false news about the distribution of a “gay kit” to high schools and elementary schools was one of the most widely disseminated across the country by these groups, who formed these disinformation networks, coordinated and that each occupied their role in the Brazilian states. Every day, supporters of the far-right candidate, Jair Bolsonaro, participants in the group “Imprensa PB 2018” were on hand to spread content that attacked their opponents. The social network Facebook was also used by the Brazilian extreme right campaign to publicize misinformation.

On the eve of the first round, on October 6, 2018, the TSE ordered the removal of 35,000 false information circulating on websites and on Facebook about candidate Fernando Haddad and his deputy, Manuela Dávila. But there were more than 100 complaints referred to the Electoral Court (Marinoni, 2019, p. 32).

“Digital militias” was how these networks became known. This title was given to these disinformation groups, usually linked to the extreme right, by journalists and researchers who study the movements of supporters of the President of the Republic on social networks. Among these researchers is the professor of Computer Science, Fabrício Benevenuto, from the Federal University of Minas Gerais and David Nemer, professor of the Department of Media Study at the University of Virginia, in the United States. The untrue information released by Bolsonaro supporters contained hate speech against social movements - such as the Landless Movement, feminists and the LGBTQIA + Movement - politicians linked to the left field and also to journalists, who published content that displeased the Bolsonaro clan.

Text published on **The Intercept Brazil** website, in February 2020, written by professor David Nemer, researcher of “digital militias”, reveals that two of the president's sons, Flávio and Eduardo Bolsonaro, would be administrators of various groups on WhatsApp, spreading pro content Bolsonaro and disinformation. The groups on WhatsApp would have reached their peak during the 2018 election and would remain active until today. Nemer analyzed 70 WhatsApp groups and found that Eduardo managed 11 and Flávio 9. There were a group of people with specific roles: content curators, sharing disinformation and the inclusion and removal of groups⁵. “That electoral election was known for the widespread misinformation that took over social media, especially in the zap - and it mainly favored the then extreme right

⁵ <https://theintercept.com/2020/02/14/eduardo-flavio-bolsonaro-criadores-whatsapp-mentiras-jornalista/>

candidate Jair Bolsonaro. We saw closely how pro-Bolsonaro groups became a sophisticated ecosystem that gave users specific functions: producing, sharing and consuming wrong information, as well as recruiting new members of the group” (2020).

The group “Imprensa PB 2018”, object of this article, occupied the function of sharing and consuming disinformation, as well as the insertion of new scholarship holders in the group, even if they were not from the area of Journalism. The objective of these new members was to intensify the dissemination of uninformative content related to institutions or people who were considered enemies by Bolsonarism.

Despite the significant amount of misinformation circulating on WhatsApp, the app was slow to contain it. Among some measures announced by those responsible for the application, were reducing the amount of content shared from one user to another, identifying for users the messages that are forwarded and installing a button to report false content. However, this did not work.

The illegalities that happened in the 2018 elections in Brazil through the most popular messaging app in the world were acknowledged by Ben Supple, executive of the company, in October 2019 in a statement⁶. Lefevre questioned WhatsApp's negligent stance in containing false news during the Brazilian elections.

“And in the face of so many facts that make it mandatory to conclude that the elections took place based on many illegalities in violation of the provisions of the Consumer Protection Code, the Civil Framework of the Internet and especially Law 9.503 / 1997, I have always questioned the posture of WhatsApp , as it understands that a company that lends itself to play the role of communicating and transmitting messages for election campaigns, is obliged to guarantee us safety as consumers and contribute to the fulfillment of electoral rules” (Lefevre, 2020, online).

This lack of effective action, both by the platforms and by the institutions, and especially by the Superior Electoral Court, created the perfect environment for the extreme right to come to power in Brazil, using the disinformation expedient. In addition to WhatsApp, Lefevre points out the lack of effectiveness of the actions announced by the Superior Electoral Court during the 2018 elections in terms of disinformation.

“Legal proceedings in the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) have been opened, with no effective result so far; that is, the TSE failed during the electoral process, and continues to fail, because, by omission, it colluded with the weakening of democratic institutions, which should have been applied in the face of so many illegalities” (2020).

⁶ <https://www.techtudo.com.br/noticias/2019/10/whatsapp-admite-envio-ilegal-de-mensagens-nas-eleicoes-2018.ghtml>

However, this practice, even if the institutions act effectively, can become a constant. Empoli says that the tendency of political campaigns is to hire physicists, not communicators or political consultants. This was what happened during the Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom. Brexit campaign director Dominic Cummings enlisted the help of scientists from California's top universities and a Cambridge Analytica Big Data firm, AggregatIQ. Cambridge Analytica was the company responsible for collecting data from 50 million Facebook users that were used to target political messages in several countries, including Brazil.

Thanks to the internet and social networks, our habits, preferences, opinions and even emotions have become measurable. Today, each of us moves voluntarily with his "pocket cage", an instrument that makes us traceable and mobilizable at all times. In the future, with the "internet of things", each gesture will generate a flow of data that is no longer exclusively linked to acts of communication and consumption, but also to facts such as brushing your teeth or falling asleep on the living room sofa. (...) (Empoli, 2020, p. 145).

The Bolsonaro supporters who were present in the group "Imprensa PB 2018", had at least four people responsible for news sites, and identified themselves as a journalist. During the election campaign in 2018, several groups were created on WhatsApp to disseminate content related to Jair Bolsonaro. Press PB 2018 was not officially created for this purpose, however, the group lost its initial purpose when the electoral year of 2018 arrives, becoming a channel for sharing uninformative content against politicians and personalities from the progressive field. Such a position taken by people who put themselves as being in the journalistic field can be considered dangerous.

The consequence of all this is that misinformation, with this digital fuel, in polarization contexts, risks overshadowing the role of journalism. Furthermore, journalism that is based on verifiable information shared in the public interest - a recent historic achievement that is by no means guaranteed - can become discredited when precautions are not taken to prevent its contents from being manipulated (Ireton & Posseti, 2019, online).

Disinformation creates problems for democracy and journalism

The phenomenon of disinformation affects journalistic activity in a worrying way. This is because the post-truth imposes itself on the news scene, especially in digital media, and is now accepted and disclosed as an absolute truth. When a group on WhatsApp, in this case "Imprensa PB 2018", formed mostly by journalists and aims to

disseminate news about the political scenario in Paraíba, through websites and blogs, begins to use the disinformation expedient to confuse people, sharing information known to be untrue, the credibility of this professional's work is put in check. Just like the content he shares. And the post-truth celebrates.

Journalism faces a credibility crisis in Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States and France, according to a survey by the Edelman Trust Barometer⁷. This public disbelief in information from the press, be it news, analysis and opinions, would be caused by the following causes: **fragmentation and disintermediation of news in digital media; the fabrication of “false news”; political polarization in Brazilian society; confirmation bias; “Bubble filters” on social networks and the precariousness of the journalists' profession**⁸.

The transformation in the form of news production, circulation and consumption, migrating from analogue to digital media, caused changes in the way of doing journalism, and allied to an economic crisis that also affected the media in Brazil and in the world, many companies they did not adapt to this new model, closing the doors; others remained active, but dismissed several professionals, and those who stayed, either do not have a qualification in Journalism or Social Communication or overload themselves in the countless agendas they receive daily, impairing the investigation of information and production of content. All of these factors, together, caused a drop in the quality of journalism in Brazil.

The emergence of information checking agencies is also related to the credibility crisis of the journalism model practiced by groups that oligopolize the sector. The economic interests of the owners of the media, the over-concentrated market and the overexploitation of the work of journalists prevent the necessary care to ascertain and disseminate information committed to social interests. Thus, it favors sensationalism, conservatism, the reproduction of official speeches and superficiality in the interpretation of the facts. A full plate to increase misinformation (Marinoni, 2019, p. 40).

The polarization of the public debate and the confirmation bias can be indicated as the main reasons for this fall in the credibility of the press in Brazil. The first concerns the discrediting of truthful information, which harms certain politicians, by a substantial part of the electorate and which is in a field antagonistic to the other part of voters. The second is a concept coined by psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos

⁷ <https://www.manualdacidadade.com.br/introducao>

⁸ <https://www.manualdacidadade.com.br/introducao>

Tversky, in the 70s, and points to the natural tendency of people to believe in information that confirms their beliefs and opinions. These two factors are the ones that can explain the wide reach and sharing in groups of WhatsApp, for example, the so-called “gay kit”⁹.

(...) in combination with the financial difficulties of print media in the digital age - has endangered public confidence in journalism itself, which is needed more than ever. The task of populism is to simplify at all costs, to compress inconvenient facts in a preordained way or to exclude them entirely. Journalism is tasked with revealing the complexity, nuance and paradox of public life, unmasking transgression and - most important of all - watering the roots of democracy with the constant supply of reliable news (D’ancona, 2018, p. 45).

In this way, D’ancona reinforces that we live in an era of institutional fragility and misinformation grows in this context. And the press, as one of these institutions that mediate democracy, came to be questioned and discredited. “If institutional failure eroded the primacy of truth, the multibillion-dollar disinformation industry also contributed to this” (2018). The political and economic crisis helped the emergence of populist leaders linked to the extreme right, and these guided by their chaos engineers, as Empoli says, made them see in social networks the ideal way to maintain direct communication with the population, dispensing and discrediting traditional forms of communication. These populist leaders also knew how to use the impact that fake news can have on society, even being able to help them win elections.

And this manipulation that disinformation can provide in an electoral environment, whether by any political group, is a risk against the democratic system. For Martins, “disinfection must be understood as a practice that violates the right to communication, as it impacts the circulation of ideas, interaction, dialogue and public debate” (2018).

Journalism has been masterfully facing this crisis, markedly present in the 2018 elections in Brazil, seeking to recover its institutional role in a democracy, which is the construction of public opinion based on facts, based on journalistic ethics, and the rules of value - news for the construction of its guidelines. The creation of checking agencies is even redundant so that the press can reaffirm itself in the content it disseminates. The “alternative facts” or the post-truth, as D’ancona says, are still present and the challenges continue to be posed daily.

⁹ <https://www.manualdacredibilidade.com.br/introducao>

Conclusion

Disinformation is not easy to combat, as it involves multiple factors that make it up. However, it is already possible to identify where it comes from, how it can be manufactured and what it can cause to a democracy. It was not only in Brazil that this phenomenon was recorded. The United States, England, Colombia, Hungary and Italy are countries in which the use of disinformation has been detected as a political strategy to elect candidates, these linked to extreme right parties. We can observe, therefore, new strategies used by political parties to disseminate their ideas, and the use of social networks and messaging applications as an ideal mechanism, which provides a direct dialogue with the population, to reach power. But not only that explains this paradigm shift in people's preference for political choices. The institutional and economic crisis, pointed out by D'ancona, is the main fuel used by these politicians, called populists, which fuels people's disbelief in relation to what the field on the left proposes to them.

In the 2018 Brazilian elections, which led to the main office of the Republic, a politician who held a position in the low clergy of the Brazilian parliament and was inexpressible in proposing public policies, social networks, especially WhatsApp, were the main asset used by his supporters to guarantee their victory. According to the professor of Journalism at the University of Santa Catarina, Rogério Christofolletti, there is a profitable market involving a complex ecosystem with small, medium and large information-making industries, mainly to guide political party interests and to guide economic and financial interests. The then president of the Superior Electoral Court, Luiz Fux, stated at the pre-election time of 2018 that, if the use of fake news in this election were found, it could be annulled. A Joint Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry was installed within the scope of the National Congress, which has among its powers, to investigate cyber attacks and which undermine public debate, the use of false profiles to influence the results of the 2018 elections, among other actions. It may be that she, in the face of so much evidence obtained, and after, recently, the dropping of pages and profiles for Bolsonaro, who posted on the Facebook platform, uninformative content, and with hate speech, is able to help the Superior Electoral Court and offer a response to society about what happened in 2018 and whether Brazilian democracy survives until 2022, the year in which the next majoritarian elections are scheduled. Currently, the Supreme Court has launched an investigation to investigate the circulation of disinformation and points to the existence of a criminal organization at the head of this process. We will wait for the investigations to proceed.

As stated earlier, misinformation is a complex phenomenon and there are no simple answers to solve it. However, some measures can be adopted to curb its diffusion, as pointed out by Coletivo Intervozes. Among them, changes in the rules for sharing online content, transparency and greater control of users over platforms, speed in the performance of the Brazilian judiciary to judge actions related to disinformation, training of educators and law operators, education for the media and the development of mechanisms for regulating the digital environment.

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RESUMO:

O presente artigo pretende fazer um estudo de caso sobre o grupo no WhatsApp denominado "Imprensa PB 2018" (nome fictício), composto por jornalistas e comunicadores, e que difundiu desinformação durante o período da campanha eleitoral no Brasil em 2018, principalmente, relacionado aos cargos de presidente da República. O grupo havia sido criado com o objetivo de divulgar links e notícias relacionadas ao meio político na Paraíba, mas tornou-se um canal de propagação de fake news e desinformação, que tinha a frente partidários do campo da direita e da extrema-direita brasileira. O WhatsApp é um aplicativo de mensagens usado por mais de 120 milhões de brasileiros e transformou-se em um meio de divulgação de informações e notícias, de maneira rápida e direta, mas também é através dele que a desinformação tem circulado na Paraíba.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Desinformação; WhatsApp; Eleições.

RESUMEN:

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo realizar un estudio de caso sobre el grupo de WhatsApp llamado "Imprensa PB 2018" (nombre ficticio), compuesto por periodistas y comunicadores, que difundió desinformación durante la campaña electoral de 2018 en Brasil, principalmente relacionada con los cargos de Presidente de la República. El grupo había sido creado con el objetivo de difundir enlaces y noticias relacionadas con el ámbito político en Paraíba, pero se convirtió en un canal de propagación de noticias falsas y desinformación, liderado por simpatizantes del espectro político de la derecha y la extrema derecha brasileña. WhatsApp es una aplicación de mensajería utilizada por más de 120 millones de brasileños y se ha convertido en un medio de difusión de información y noticias de forma rápida y directa, pero también es a través de WhatsApp que la desinformación ha estado circulando en Paraíba.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Desinformación, WhatsApp, Elecciones.