


PRODUCTION model of alternative media as democratic solutions to disinformation

MODELO de produção de mídias alternativas como soluções democráticas para a desinformação
MODELO de producción de medios alternativos como soluciones democráticas a la desinformación

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Received: 06.17.2020.
Accepted: 08.26.2020.
Published: 10.01.2020.

RESUMO:

Alternative digital media can be examples of ethical journalistic production, insofar as they subsist through the collective funding model and, therefore, must maintain their image before the public. This article analyzes the strategies of alternative media that make them possible ways out of disinformation and fake news. The methodological design includes an analysis of the speeches of interviews carried out with alternative media about strategies for verifying information and models of production and distribution; and observation of social media sites and networks. The study focuses on alternative media from different contexts: Brazil and Portugal, and with different profiles (investigative journalism and factual media), therefore, it is a comparative research. The article concludes that alternative media can be counterpoints to disinformation about fake news, if they manage to articulate the digital distribution model with ethical and self-sustainable journalism.

KEYWORDS: Fake news; Disinformation; Alternative media; Sustainability.

Introduction

Disinformation and fake news have become threats to democracy and quality journalism. Internet and social media are proving to be a particularly fertile ground for this type of news (DER LIDEN; PANAGOPOULOS; ROOZENBEEK, 2020). However, ethical digital alternative media can serve as examples for all media to start working with the truth and with proving the facts, through the transparency and verification of their journalistic products. The journalistic model adopted by the alternative media does not promote the dissemination of disinformation and fake news, since the maintenance of their activities depends on public credibility, as they need solidarity signatures.

The phenomenon of fake news gained strength after the 2016 election in the United States, in which fake news circulated on social networks in a massive way, creating concern

in societies (ALLCOTT; GENTZKOW, 2017). The 2018 Brazilian elections were also stage for the spread of disinformation. Disinformation is the process by which fake news, partially fake news, distorted concepts or facts out of context are systematically disseminated by public figures and the press, generating the perception that they are reliable information among consumers. It is the use of communication and information techniques to distort reality, by suppressing or hiding facts, minimizing importance or changing meaning. Fake news, on the other hand, are publications that go viral, especially on social networks, usually with a political content to defame someone, an organ or institution. Fake news can also be defined "as news articles that are intentionally and proven to be false and can mislead readers" (ALLCOTT; GENTZKOW, 2017, p. 213).

Against fake news, a new format of participative, independent media emerges, following the current molds of journalistic production, with reduced teams, content suitable for the virtual environment, collaborative production of content and use of new technologies for distribution and dissemination; these are the alternative media. In terms of financing, these are non-profit and independent media, whose source of income is, above all, donations from the public, through collective financing and subscriptions. In other words, these are means of communication that go against the model that has used disinformation as a defense of political and economic interests.

Thus, the present article studies how the model of independent and alternative journalism can combat fake news and disinformation using digital platforms. Specifically, it is intended to answer whether and how the digital production format can enable in-depth journalism; and, on the other hand, whether the media that produce factual news can contribute to quality communication. Therefore, we carried out a comparative study in the universe of alternative media, between *Fumaça* (Portugal), which adopts an editorial line of investigative journalism, and *Brasil 247* (Brazil), which uses the factual media format. The article aims to point out solutions to the state of communication disorder, in the context of disinformation and fake news. The study focuses on alternative media with different profiles and from different countries and, therefore, different contexts: from Portugal and Brazil. The methodological design includes a speech analysis of the interviews with the media regarding their actions against disinformation and fake news, as well as the observation of websites and social media networks. The article provides definitions of disinformation and fake news, and then goes on to review the literature on disinformation in networks, alternative media and its independent format, especially the relationship between journalism and fake news and disinformation and, in the opposite direction, ethics and democratization of information as mechanisms to combat

communication disorder. In the end, we concluded by pointing out fact verification initiatives and projects.

Fake news x Disinformation

Fake news is not a new phenomenon. There are reports of information manipulation throughout history, long before modern journalism established standards that define news as a genre based on specific rules of integrity (IRETON; POSETTI, 2018). Defamatory campaigns were common in ancient Rome. In the 16th century, pasquins were used to spread false news about public figures (DARNTON, 2017).

However, the proliferation of fake news has increased, due to the opening of social networks to the news media. The viralization inherent in the internet makes it possible for more people to learn and share fake news. The 21st century has seen the transformation of information on an unprecedented scale, due to the emergence of new technologies that simplify the manipulation and manufacture of content, and "social networks dramatically expand the falsehoods sold by states, populist politicians and dishonest corporate entities, since they are shared by non-critical audiences" (IRETON; POSETTI, 2018, p. 15). Thus, platforms have become a breeding ground for computational propaganda, trolling and troll¹; sock-puppet² networks and spoofers³.

The motivations behind the production of fake news are mainly two: financial and ideological. On one hand, fake stories that address controversial topics and therefore go viral are produced because they provide content producers with clicks that can be converted into advertising revenue. On the other hand, fake news can also be used to promote ideas or people (ALLCOTT; GENTZKOW, 2017).

Disinformation is related to the way that news are conveyed to the public. The aim is to influence public opinion to protect private interests. But disinformation also refers to the "inadvertent sharing of false information", and the "deliberate creation and sharing of information known to be false" (WARDLE, 2017, p. 1).

Disinformation is a by-product of the business model established by digital platforms, a model that is based on the concentration and improper exploitation of users' personal data.

¹ It designates a person whose behavior systematically tends to destabilize an argument and provoke and enrage the people involved in it. The term came up in Usenet derived from the expression trolling for suckers ("casting bait at dumb one").

² It is a derogatory term for a false identity used for fraudulent purposes within an Internet community.

³ It is a disruptive algorithmic trading activity to manipulate the markets.

Fake news sometimes appears as real news and can hide under a veneer of legitimacy, as it takes on some form of credibility when trying to look like real news. In addition, there are fake news networks that support the ubiquity of news by building a network of fake sites, appropriating the credibility of the news. In this way, the standardization of fake news can undermine the legitimacy of journalism, especially in a social media environment (KANG et al., 2011).

Fake news is supported by the public, as there is acceptance and sharing, particularly on social networks. Thus, "the sociability of social networks adds a layer to the construction of fake news, in which the power of fake news lies in how well it can penetrate the social spheres" (TANDOC; LIM; LING, 2017, p. 12-13). The social spheres are strengthened by the exchange of information and, due to personal relationships, the quality of information can become secondary (TANDOC; LIM; LING, 2017). The role of the public can be evidenced not only as those who share and believe in fake news, but as legitimizer of this information to be qualified as fake news. Another dimension is that fake news needs to be fed, in order to be widely disseminated. "Social turmoil and divisions facilitate our willingness to believe news that confirms our enmity towards another group" (TANDOC; LIM; LING, 2017, p. 12-13).

Network disinformation

Social media networks opened space for the dissemination of news, whether produced by journalists or by non-journalistic citizens, such as the production of stories, videos and photographs in real time. In this way, citizen journalism, which was restricted to blogs, gained strength in social media networks and YouTube channels to show the facts by the protagonists themselves. Eventually, social media offered a broader platform for non-journalists to engage in journalism (WALL, 2015). Journalists have increased their presence on social media, approaching the public. Initially, they treated it as just another platform to promote their news stories (LASORSA; LEWIS; HOLTON, 2011), but started using it to spread stories and interact with the public (TANDOC; VOS, 2016). Twitter is the main social network used by journalists to interact with the public, to publish political opinions, above all, and to publicize a last-minute event (HERMIDA, 2010). "Social media has not only changed the distribution of news, but has also challenged traditional beliefs of how news should be" (TANDOC; LIM; LING, 2017, p.3).

Social networks' structure and ease of information dissemination allow the proliferation of fake news and disinformation (TANDOC; LIM; LING, 2017) and in fact, social networks have made it possible for these news to go viral because they have

visibility. On the other hand, there is an ongoing decline in "trust and security" in the mass media "when it comes to reporting the news in a complete, accurate and fair manner" (ALLCOTT; GENTZKOW. P. 214-217). "The decline in confidence in the mainstream media can be a cause and a consequence of fake news gaining more traction" (ALLCOTT; GENTZKOW. P. 214-217).

The distribution of incorrect news is facilitated by popularity ratings (SUNDAR, 2008). These ratings are obtained through likes, shares or comments on the posts. The news that receive most likes, shares and comments are the most popular, therefore, they are the ones that can receive more attention from other people (THORSON, 2008). The news *bots*⁴, which are mechanisms for triggering news, automate this cycle of self-completion and allow, in addition to the rapid and mass distribution of information, legitimation, because the sending of these messages is done by close contacts on an efficient transmission network (LOKOT; DIAKOPOULOS, 2016).

Social media platforms can be especially prone to fake news due to the low cost of production and distribution. Thus, the producers of fake news profit from short-term and small-scale strategies.

In addition, the format of social media - thin slices of information viewed on phones or news feed windows - can make it difficult to judge the truth of an article. Furthermore, social media friend networks are ideologically segregated and polarized. As such, people are considerably more likely to read and share news articles in line with their ideological positions (BAKSHY; MESSING; ADAMIC, 2015) and believe in this information because they aim to legitimize their political orientation.

Journalism and disinformation

Quality journalism that follows ethical standards is the way out of disinformation and fake news. "It is evident that strong ethical journalism is necessary as an alternative and antidote to the contamination of the information environment and the overflowing effect of tarnishing the news more widely" (IRETON; POSETTI, 2018, p. 8-9). However, journalists as communicators who work in the service of the truth can become the target of lies and rumors designed to intimidate and discredit them.

Traditional media has been the target of criticism and disbelief in the context of disinformation, as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, they need to prove their ethical work through transparency in their digital platforms for publishing journalistic production.

⁴ Diminutive of robot, also known as Internet bot or web robot, is a software application designed to simulate repeated human actions.

According to Ireton and Posetti (2018), the threats caused by fake news are an opportunity to double the demonstration of the value of the news media. It is a “chance to underline in professional practice the distinction of providing verifiable information and comments informed in the public interest” (IRETON; POSETTI, 2018, p. 10).

The impact of disinformation and fake news on the public is of particular concern for the democratic rule of law. This type of misrepresented information has been used to distort content on social networks in order to elect candidates, which was what happened in the election of Donald Trump, in 2016, in the United States, and of Jair Bolsonaro, in 2018, in Brazil. “What disinformation seeks, especially during a vote, is not necessarily to convince the public to believe that its content is true, but to impact the definition of the agenda (in what people think is important) and muddy the information waters to weaken the factors of rationality in people’s voting choices” (IRETON; POSETTI, 2018, p. 10). Likewise, issues of migration, climate change, health and other crucial issues can be impacted by the uncertainty resulting from disinformation.

It is necessary that the media, especially the traditional ones, regain public confidence. Therefore, responsible, truthful and quality content is essential to win over audiences and enable a common public debate based on the truth.

Thus, some newsrooms and media organizations adopt and adapt codes of conduct and create mechanisms for public control, such press councils, editorial policies and the figure of the *ombudsman*⁵. Such measures incorporate and enforce essential values in an ever-changing media environment. These structures allow errors to be identified and can facilitate public recognition.

The spread of fake news is why facing the increase in incorrect information is an imperative for journalism and education in journalism. “This emerging phenomenon can be hailed by the news media as reinforcing society’s interest in verifiable information” (IRETON; POSETTI, 2018, p. 10). To the authors, the media must take care that external post-publication corrections do not replace internal quality control processes.

In short, serious journalism must have control over the incoming information, verifying facts presented by sources, the so-called fact checking. Journalism also needs to proactively detect and discover new cases and forms of disinformation, such as proposing fake news check boxes on their own websites.

⁵ Professional position hired by an agency, institution or company with the function of receiving criticisms, suggestions and complaints from users and consumers and mediating conflicts. In Journalism, it is the person who has the role of criticizing the production of the media, pointing out errors, based on the complaints of readers.

The answer against fake news in the medium term is to implement media and information literacy in schools, which enables the public to distinguish what is disinformation (IRETON; POSETTI, 2018).

Alternative news media

Alternative media are independent means of communication, therefore, "they challenge the dominant capitalist forms of production, media structures, content, distribution and reception" (FUCHS, 2010, p. 178).

The intention of alternative media is to pluralize the voices of the public debate, to discuss, question and make accessible themes, angles and facts that are obscured, silenced and even distorted by the hegemonic and commercially-committed vehicles of communication.

The liberation of network spaces for information production (at low cost) and the weakening of communication monopolies, as economic models, committed to commercial logic, gave rise to alternative media to propose critical and participatory content, open to popular voices. Therefore, the objective of independent media "is to strengthen cooperation and participation" (FUCHS, 2010, p.180).

Alternative digital media are usually activists of social causes, thus dealing with issues such as human rights, citizenship, democracy, identity and minority causes. They are means that intend to open community voices, with the aim of promoting challenges about social injustices.

Regarding the structure, alternatives media function on a smaller scale, more accessible and less constrained by bureaucracy or commercial interests, that is, in an independent way (COVER; DOWMUNT; FOUNTAIN, 2007). Thus, they elaborate radical contents in the political or cultural aspect, have a strong aesthetic form (use of data journalism, graphics, videos, well-produced photographs, memes, posters, etc.), employ reproductive innovations / adaptations, making the most of available technology and they generally work in collective organizations that transform communication processes into horizontal links (ATTON, 2002).

Alternative means, as Atton (2002) argues, are crucial in offering information to the excluded, thus providing democratization because they address topics that are not addressed by traditional media, as well as opening their content to the entire range of audiences.

Journalistic Ethics

Journalistic ethics works as a means of moral self-control for the media in their production activities, according to Trappel (2019). The author considers ethics as a preponderant and essential factor in the performance of the media. Regarding the importance of following the deontological code, ethics aims to improve the impartiality of the media and ensure the political choices of citizens, leveling the inequality of access to the mass communication channels and ensuring the pluralism of information. The deontology of the media therefore warns journalists to “not abuse their communicative power and designates the legitimate limits of freedom of expression for them” (TRAPPEL, 2019, p. 116).

However, codes of ethics are often not respected by the media, which has allowed the production of fake news and misrepresentations of facts. A body of “ethical theory” relevant to the media must cover several different perspectives and ideas, but all must have in common some value commitment that takes precedence over description, analysis and explanation (BRACCI, 2003).

On the other hand, professional standards for ethical and responsible journalism are an important defense against disinformation. “Norms and values that guide people who do journalism have evolved over the years to give journalism its distinctive mission and modus operandi” (IRETON; POSETTIN, 2018, p. 21).

Pluralism is one of the necessary points for the media, in the sense of producing diverse contents that can reach all types of public. However, in Bracci's (2003) view, there is no total agreement on what can be allowed, prohibited or encouraged. Nevertheless, ethical and regulatory issues cannot be avoided, but then how can ethical standards be followed in cyberspace? Some countries have codes of laws designed to guide the use of the internet. In Brazil, there is Marco Civil da Internet (Internet's Civil Framework), Law No. 12,965 / 2014, which regulates the use of the internet through the provision of principles, guarantees, rights and duties for those who use the web and determines guidelines for the performance of the State. The project was sanctioned in April 2014 (SEGURADO, 2015).

In August 2010, Chile became the first country in the world to pass an internet regulation law based on the principle of net neutrality (SEGURADO, 2015). Spain's internet regulation law, Lei Sinde-Wert (Sinde-Wert Act), which is linked to the country's sustainable economic policy project, came into force in March 2012. France has the Creation and Internet Law or Hadopi Law, enacted in June 2009 to control the spread of

illegal content on the network. This law is internationally recognized as one of the strictest laws in this area, according to Segurado (2015).

Since the 1990s, the United States has started to discuss ways to regulate the internet. However, there is no single regulation that establishes a set of rules on the web, but fragmented legislation to control internet access (SEGURADO, 2015).

In Brazil, Bill 2630/2020, nicknamed "PL das Fake News" (Fake News Bill), is in process and which aims to investigate and punish producers and disseminators of fake news.

Although there are some laws regulating the internet, inspections and forms of punishment are still difficult to enforce. In this way, ethical debates are also in the sphere of the internet today. "Increasingly, ethical analyzes involve power and privilege as key variables in technologically oriented media structures" (BRACCI, 2003, p. 115-116).

Methods

This article investigates the combating of disinformation and fake news, through the model of in-depth or factual independent alternative journalism. The questions we seek to answer are: what are the strategies to combat disinformation and fake news used by alternative media? Does the independent media model that requires public collaboration foster the practice of quality and ethical journalism? What do digital alternative media do to ensure the production of true information? What do alternative digital media do to enable the democratization of information? The central question is: can alternative digital and independent media work as a way out of disinformation and fake news?

The questions focus on media objects that are alternative digital media in different contexts: *Brasil 247*, from Brazil, and *Fumaça*, from Portugal. Such countries have historical ties of colonial connection, but the political, economic, digital and communicational contexts are different. Therefore, it is a comparative analysis. The choice of media with different profiles and with different production and distribution formats and editorial lines enriches the research. The comparative study allows us to understand the action of different media in combating fake news and disinformation and how these phenomena proliferate in different scenarios.

The media chosen as objects of this study are: *Brasil 247* and *Fumaça*. *Brasil 247*, created in 2011 (the website), is a means of communication that practices factual journalism and defends full democracy, progressive ideals, humanist values, the development of the national economy, multilateralism in foreign policy and information

as a right of all citizens. *Fumaça* is a Portuguese independent, progressive and dissident journalism project, which was created in 2018 by journalists working in traditional media.

The research questions were developed from a non-participant observation by the author of the article on alternative media since 2015. The methodological design includes a speech analysis of interviews with the media (one producer from each media organization) regarding their actions against disinformation and fake news, as well as the observation of electronic media and social networks of these alternative media. The searches were made on the websites, Facebook and Instagram pages, through the search for keywords, such as "errata", "fake news", "false news", "disinformation"; as well as in the sections of the websites: "About", "Editorial status", "Mission" and "Transparency".

The analysis sought to answer the research questions listed above. The article proposed, in the beginning, the presentation of definitions of disinformation and fake news. Then, the study dealt with the proliferation of disinformation in social networks and the conceptualization of independent alternative media, to show, theoretically, what these media are and how they work. Next, we discuss the democratization of information and journalistic ethics as necessary methods against disinformation and fake news and describe what strategies the media use to guarantee true information and public credibility. Furthermore, we conclude about the patterns and differences between media from different countries, and discuss solutions to disinformation and fake news.

Network verification and usage strategies

Alternative media distribute their content on websites and social networks. In these spaces, the media publish, in addition to their productions (reports, articles, articles, interviews, cartoons, podcasts), errata and edited fake news (pointing out that such a statement conveyed by other means is not true). Another mechanism for verifying fake news is fact checking, that is, verifying where the information comes from and whether it is reliable with the help of the news agencies responsible for verifying the facts. In addition, some media publish on their websites and social networks the true version of other media's news.

Brasil 247, a media of factual news and opinion journalism, uses all social networks and has a website that centralizes all information, such as production and distribution models. Contents are the same on all pages. The means of communication is independent and self-sustainable because of subscriptions and advertisements on the website.

According to Gisele Fredericce, editor of *Brasil 247* website and *TV Brasil 247* programming, in an interview held on September 24, 2020, one of the main roles since

the birth of *Brasil 247* is to counterpoint the narrative of the corporate media - vehicles which are funded by large companies and the government. The counterpoint is to verify the information and the way the facts are being treated. This “requires an experienced, clinical look and a different political view from the one that was published”, points out Gisele. *Brasil 247* has a group of experienced journalists, who are commentators, responsible for analyzing these contents and detecting if there is false information or misrepresentations. In practice, fake news receives a counterpoint that is published on the website and on the networks. In the case of disinformation, *Brasil 247* promotes debates on *TV Brasil 247*, which is where there is more time to carry out in-depth analyzes of the misrepresentation of messages by traditional media. This is done frequently.

Brasil 247 published on its website and on social media that the information that 237 million reais were seized in the bank account of Cristiano Zanin, lawyer of the former president of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was actually fake news (BRASIL 247, 2020).

Another news item edited and published by *Brasil 247* on its Facebook page was the false information on Twitter profiles that people had been cured of Covid-19 with chloroquine, a drug used to treat malaria. The media showed that this did not happen (BRASIL 247, 2020).

In yet another case of issuing fake news to show the correct fact, *Brasil 247* published the information that products in clothing stores in Brazil created mold because they were closed during mandatory confinement, due to the pandemic of the new coronavirus. In fact, the photographs used in the text were from a store in Malaysia. The profiles that released the fake information used the case as evidence that the isolation would be causing damage to traders (BRASIL 247, 2020).

In addition, *Brasil 247* uses the errata publication system to maintain transparency and public confidence.

One example of errata was the one published on March 28, 2020 and said that 247 had reproduced a decree from the Bolsonaro government, dated February 8, 2019, stating that it diverted more than 600 billion reais from Social Security to cover charges and authorize transfers to states and municipalities. However, the decree exists, but deals with the readjustment of the 2018 budget to the new government structure (BRASIL 247, 2019).

The media issued another errata on March 6, 2020 about articles published on its website and social networks, in recent years, without the identification of the images of photographer Giuliano Gomes Roman (BRASIL 247, 2020).

In yet another errata, *Brasil 247* redeemed itself regarding a published article incorrectly attributed to Senator Pedro Simon, on February 27, 2020 (BRASIL 247, 2020).

Brasil 247 also erroneously published, on May 17, 2019, an article based on a video that circulated on social networks, from an interview granted by the President of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, to the CQC program, in 2012, in which he would have said that he would join a Nazi army if he had the chance. The errata reported that the story was deleted (BRASIL 247, 2019).

Errata are always accompanied by an apology to the public.

Regarding transparency, alternative media usually have all or almost all the information on their websites. *Brasil 247* keeps on its website the mission and purpose of *Editora 247*, which is responsible for publishing *Brasil 247* website and *TV 247* channel, which says that its mission is "to empower the public through information and knowledge and to promote the uncompromising defense of a full democracy"⁶.

Another mechanism used by *Brasil 247* against fake news is the existence of an editorial board composed of some of the main Brazilian journalists and intellectuals. The Council's mission is to discuss the strategy, the editorial paths and to guarantee the editorial integrity of the *Brasil 247* website and *TV 247*.

Fumaça is an alternative means of communication that produces podcasts (It's Only Smoke) with interviews and series of reports, which are stories, published on its website and on social networks. The media format is a more in-depth journalism through the production of large reports that last, on average, six months to be produced. The media, which is independent and therefore supports itself with the support of the public (crowdfunding and subscriptions) and journalism grants, uses digital platforms as a model of production and distribution.

Fumaça usually publishes errata on its Facebook page to take responsibility on the mistakes made. On September 4, 2020, the media published two incorrect information in the supplement it usually writes in the print edition of the *Jornal de Negócios* (Business Journal). The first was corrected on August 12, 2020, the second refers to the incorrect note that the father of the current Secretary of State for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities, Ana Sofia Antunes, had held the position of treasurer in the Parish Council from Chão de Couce, Portugal. Ana Sofia Antunes' father, in fact, was not mayor at the aforementioned Junta de Freguesia (FUMAÇA, 2020). *Fumaça* removed the text from the page dedicated to the series, as well as deleted a set of graphics with information on family links and others.

⁶ <https://www.brasil247.com/equipe/missao>

⁷ <https://www.brasil247.com/equipe/editorial>

Another errata was published on August 14, 2020, on *Fumaça's* Facebook. The supplement written by *Fumaça* in the print edition of the *Jornal de Negócios*, of August 7, 2020, showed the wrong information that the father of the current Secretary of State for Internationalization, Eurico Brilhante Dias, had been president of the Socialist Party in Santarém district (PS). The father of Eurico Brilhante Dias, whose name is José de Jesus Brilhante Dias was never president of the PS in Santarém (FUMAÇA, 2020).

Regarding transparency, *Fumaça* keeps all the information on its website: expenses, revenue and financial projection and who supports it. In addition, the media publishes, on its website, the editorial statute that deals with the editorial line, in general. According to the statute, *Fumaça* "complies with the Journalist's Code of Ethics and strives for its effective practice". Regarding transparency, more specifically, *Fumaça* declares that it defends the clarity of the entire process that involves journalistic practice.

Transcripts of the interviews and stories are also on *Fumaça's* website. The public image of *Fumaça* is important for the media, since much of its subsistence comes from monthly and annual subscriptions. "It's not just for people to trust us editorially, but for them to trust us in general, since what we want to create is a journalism project fully funded by people, it's good for people to understand where the money they give us is going to. I think that is one of the reasons why people give us money and we have been growing exponentially this year. People clearly give importance to this", says Ricardo Ribeiro, co-founder and journalist of *Fumaça*, in an interview held on September 4, 2020.

In Ricardo's view, the digitization of journalism has led to disinformation and loss of people's confidence in media.

It all started because [media] wanted to use the same way to make revenue in digital journalism as it did in daily paper journalism, that appeared twice a day on newsstands; as it wanted to use the same way to make money, which is through advertising, we had to change the production model, which is doing more and more things and faster, to have more clicks and more revenue and, therefore, to eventually be able to make a profit and be sustainable (Ricardo Ribeiro, interview on September 4, 2020).

The advertising financing model has as consequence the need to produce a great amount of digital content to earn revenue. "Therefore, what I think is that the model based on advertising and mass production of content and not on the production of journalism with depth is one of the reasons for the proliferation of fake news", says Ricardo.

Information processing

One of the ways to do ethical and quality journalism, avoiding fake news, is by checking the facts. The process of verifying information before publishing it is fundamental. Often, the immediacy of journalism does not allow this verification, which compromises the image and credibility of media. Media formats that work with more in-depth and analytical content, of course, run less risk of publishing fake information, but this is not a guaranteed formula. The digital alternative media studied in this article have adopted measures to verify the information, however, *Fumaça* has more time to verify the facts because it carries out investigative journalism. *Brasil 247*, on the other hand, does not have enough time or professionals to have the information pass through several hands before it is published.

According to Gisele, *Brasil 247* does not have a set of processes and mechanisms for ascertaining information. "A smaller structure and less hierarchy, so the article does not pass through two people before being published, as it does in a large newsroom. So it makes this fact checking process a little more difficult", she stresses. The lack of a structure for verifying information can make the media susceptible to traps, according to Gisele. However, the editor says that there are already improvements in the investigation processes, but they are still individual and are conducted from the journalistic perspective of professionals.

Brasil 247 has little exclusive research material of its own production. Production is done more frequently by *TV 247*, which are the most in-depth interviews and debates. On the website, there is basically official information, information that comes from statements by politicians, personalities, tweets, and a lot from corporate media. "So *Brasil 247* has a counter-majority political line, which is an alternative to corporate media, therefore, it has another interpretation of the facts, but it has little exclusive information", defines Gisele. The exclusive information on the website is mainly the analytical texts of the opinion columns. What is characteristic of *Brasil 247* is the "vision that shows the other side of the news through information, interviews, the support of specialists and people in the area to show that there is a possibility to interpret that same theme in other ways", comments the editor.

The news published on the website comes, sometimes, from other sites and traditional media. A very common process held by *Brasil 247* before publishing is to check if other sites have already reported that information. However, if it is a politic issue, the media can confirm it because it has contacts in the area. Therefore, there are some

checking mechanisms, but the medium recognizes that there are improvements to be made.

Regarding its structure, *Brasil 247* is a vehicle formed by experienced professionals who have gone through different media and by professionals who identify themselves, show themselves in videos, which, therefore, gives credibility to the media. "So our counterpoint, our difference from non-journalistic channels is very clear and obvious. It is a speech that we make constantly. What we do is journalism, what they do is not journalism", argues the editor.

Getting closer to the public encourages the practice of ethical journalism. *Brasil 247* is concerned with information to remain credible with the public. One of the practices is to listen to criticism. Then, the financing format of *Brasil 247* is through solidarity subscriptions, which are investments by the public not to have access to content, that is open to all, but to maintain the activities of the media. *Brasil 247* is close to the public that supports its activities – currently, 55% of the expenses are financed by readers and viewers – and the intention is to reach the goal of 100% public financing. The public finds it important to support the independent media, according to Gisele. "This is essential today for our business and it is essential for the alternative media to remain alternative and independent. This is the crucial point for the independence of journalism. It is not to have ties, it has no links to private investments, or even to public ones that cause an editorial dependency", she ponders.

In addition to aiming a rapprochement with the public, the concern with fake news in *Brasil 247* is also due to the media's image on Google. The company created a fact-checking group, Fact Check Explorer, which detects fake news-reproducing sites. So it was with *Brasil 247*, which was considered a fake news player by Google. "So we have a constant and very attentive eye so that this does not happen again. And it has improved a lot. There is no comparison with the carelessness that we had in the past, today we are alert because we cannot lose this credibility with Google and the reader", comments the editor.

Gisele believes that alternative media are already a solution against disinformation. They are alternatives to the current discourse of traditional media, that defend the most favored, the wealthy, and that were the only way to obtain information a few years ago. "We brought another vision with other specialists who are curiously not invited to participate in these television programs or to be interviewed in print media", she reveals. *Brasil 247* turns to the least favored, with a look at violence against social movements and landless workers. The themes addressed by *Brasil 247* are those related to human rights,

such as women, black women, LGBTQI + population, indigenous people, etc., which make up minorities. "So, bringing these minorities and voices that are not heard in the mainstream is the role of the alternative media and it is the role of *Brasil 247*", she concludes.

Fumaça develops a script for conducting the interviews, containing all the necessary information, mainly about the sources used. In addition, there are different journalists involved in the production of the interviews: one to ask the questions, another to edit the script before the interview and another to edit the content of the interviews. "Then there is an editing process where, side by side, they go over the questions and add or remove things", as described by Ricardo Ribeiro. When the interview is finished, an error may be identified. In this case, "we put a note saying that you are going to listen to this interview and in the x-minute we made a mistake", reveals Ricardo.

The series process is much more complex. There are three editing steps that basically start with the investigation, then a journalist is responsible for writing episode by episode with narration and audios. "We do a next step, which is group edit, in which everyone listens to the first version of the draft recorded on the computer just to understand the structure of the thing and everyone can give feedback on what should change, on the structure", narrates the journalist of *Fumaça*. The final edition allows you to see sentence by sentence and where you need to change. The last step is fact checking, which was adopted this year, in which another person who did not follow the series will review it to detect errors. Then the audio is done.

The mechanism used by *Fumaça* to contribute to the fight against fake news is to do in-depth and timely journalism. When the journalist can spend a lot of time doing an investigation, "the probability of doing it well is better. You start to be able to publish pieces that don't look like fake news because the structure of a content made with the aim of producing fake news is the structure of most of the content that exists in the media", concludes Ricardo. The journalist reveals that the podcast format makes it difficult to produce disinformation because they are long episodes, each one hour long, with a soundtrack and careful preparation of the audio. "Therefore, we are making an editorial and even political decision against the fake news, which is our role", he concludes.

Regarding the democratization of information, *Fumaça* thought of a model of journalism open to the public and financed by it, considering that information is an essential asset.

The role of alternative media is to do serious and reliable journalism to combat fake news. Work with depth, editing space and time is the journalistic and editorial response

to fake news, according to Ricardo. "But I don't think it must be just independent journalism, I think that the media should do this, they should also reformulate themselves and remodel to also do this type of journalism. Now independent media have a very large role to play in this. The independent media must show that it is possible to do journalism and still be sustainable, continue to do journalism with decent work and the role of the independent media must be this", he says. But it can't be just them.

Conclusion

This article concludes that the proliferation of fake news and disinformation, mainly due to the use of social networks as spaces for the distribution of information, strengthens the importance of fact checking. In this way, the production and distribution model of alternative digital media (use of digital platforms and financing through subscriptions and donations from the public) drives the use of strategies to combat disinformation and fake news by these media.

Alternative digital media adopt measures, such as the publication of errata and the disclosure of fake news that have been published by other media with the necessary correction, to promote the maintenance of journalistic credibility with the public. In addition, these media use transparency as a way of keeping readers informed about their steps and the statute that guides journalistic activity, thus seeking to maintain ethics and seriousness. Therefore, they are media that seek to follow the code of ethics and democratize access to information, considered it a right.

Some alternative digital media, such as *Fumaça*, adopt an investigative journalism format that makes it difficult to create fake news, but they also check the facts and implement transparency. The media that produce factual news, on the other hand, make use of the daily investigation of the facts and the publication of examples of fake news disseminated by other pages.

Furthermore, alternative media must constantly work to demonstrate the relevance of the type of journalism they practice and their social, cultural and political contribution on the social networks. This is because, for the most part, they depend on public funding, through solidarity subscriptions, which is the main source of income to maintain the alternative means of communication because they are independent and, therefore, are not editorially linked to companies, large corporations and governments.

When comparing the alternative media in Brazil and Portugal, we found that there is more concern about fake news and disinformation by the Brazilian media because *Brasil 247* has already been a victim of defamation sometimes and *Fumaça* has not. However,

the proportions of audience and production - *Brasil 247* is a medium of factual content that reaches more people, due to the number of inhabitants in its country of origin - cannot be the target of comparison. The approaches of the media are diverse. *Brasil 247* adopts a more direct language, with a clear partisan political position and with a firm critical content. *Fumaça* produces more in-depth content with long stories. This also explains *Brasil 247's* greatest concern with fake news as it needs to deal with this content on a daily basis. Therefore, the similarities are limited to the strategies adopted against disinformation and fake news, the use of social networks as a mechanism of approximation with the public and the independent financing model.

In addition to Google, that keeps the *Fact Check Explorer* to verify facts, there is also Twitter's Sleeping Giants initiative, which notifies companies that advertise on fake news sites to stop doing so. And there are verification agencies both in Brazil and in Portugal, such as *Polígrafo*, which is an online journalistic project of SIC (Portuguese TV), whose main goal is to ascertain the truth and not the lie in the public space; *Chequedo*, fact checking service for Latin America; *Agência Lupa*, linked to *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper, Brazil; *Fato ou Fake*, created by *Grupo Globo*; *Agência Pública – Truça, E- Farsas*, and *Fake Check*, linked to Brazilian universities;

The ways to control disinformation and incorrect content can be closing fake accounts and removing automatic social network accounts to reduce the spread. Other possible actions are the existence of more mechanisms to block sponsored content from accounts that regularly publish fake news and greater investment in investigative journalism based on data to offer reliable journalism narratives (IRETON; POSETTI, 2018).

The consequence of all this is that digitally fed disinformation, in polarized contexts, is in danger of eclipsing the role of journalism (IRETON; POSETTI, 2018). In addition, journalism based on truth and interest can become discredited if precautions are not taken to avoid its manipulation (IRETON; POSETTI, 2018). The bombardment of information from many media that emerged in the virtual space allowed the opening of many types of journalism with different narratives. When journalism becomes a vector of disinformation it further reduces trust in the media and promotes the standardization of journalism as not credible.

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RESUMO:

Meios alternativos digitais podem ser exemplos de produção jornalística ética, na medida em que subsistem por meio do modelo de financiamento coletivo e, portanto, devem manter sua imagem perante o público. O presente artigo analisa as estratégias das mídias alternativas que as tornam possíveis saídas para a desinformação e para as notícias falsas. O desenho metodológico inclui uma análise dos discursos de entrevistas realizadas com as mídias alternativas relativamente às estratégias de verificação da informação e aos modelos de produção e distribuição; e observação dos sites e das redes sociais dos meios de comunicação. O estudo incide sobre mídias alternativas de contextos diferentes: Brasil e Portugal, e com perfis díspares (jornalismo investigativo e mídia factual), portanto, trata-se de uma pesquisa comparativa. O artigo conclui que os meios de comunicação alternativos podem ser contrapontos à desinformação às notícias falsas, se conseguirem articular o modelo de distribuição digital com o jornalismo ético e autossustentável.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: Notícias falsas; Desinformação; Mídias alternativas; Sustentabilidade.

RESUMEN:

Los medios digitales alternativos pueden ser ejemplos de producción periodística ética, en la medida en que subsistan a través del modelo de financiación colectiva y, por tanto, deben mantener su imagen ante el público. Este artículo analiza las estrategias de los medios alternativos que les hacen posibles salidas a la desinformación y las noticias falsas. El diseño metodológico incluye un análisis de los discursos de entrevistas realizadas con medios alternativos en relación a estrategias de verificación de información y modelos de producción y distribución; y observación de sitios y redes sociales. El estudio se centra en medios alternativos de diferentes contextos: Brasil y Portugal, y con diferentes perfiles (periodismo de investigación y medios fácticos), por lo que es una investigación comparada. El artículo concluye que los medios alternativos pueden ser contrapuntos a la desinformación sobre fake news, si logran articular el modelo de distribución digital con el periodismo ético y autosostenible.

PALABRAS-CLAVES: Noticias falsas; Desinformación; Medios alternativos; Sustentabilidad.