Fact-checking
Broadening the research horizon with Latin American perspectives on the fight against misinformation

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Introduction

The emergence of fact-checking organizations in the early 2000s in the USA marked a journalistic reformist initiative. These agencies were considered a democratic-building tool (Amazeen, 2020; Graves, 2018), challenging traditional concepts of objectivity, known as the "he said/she said" style of journalism (Graves, 2016; Lawrence & Schafer, 2012). Subsequently, a second wave of fact-checking organizations emerged in response to post-truth politics marked by disinformation and disrupted public spheres (Bennett & Livingston, 2018), triggered by events like the 2016 Brexit referendum and the election of far-right populists. This global disinformation phenomenon led to a significant increase in fact-checking organizations, from 44 in 2014 (Adair, 2014) to 417 in 2023 across 100 countries (Stencel et al., 2023).

These indicators are unequivocal evidence of the rise of a global movement (Graves, 2018, 2022; Lauer & Graves, 2024). Despite their reform-oriented, less radical nature and structural diversity, independent fact-checkers, following Diani's (1992) definition, can be considered "networks of informal interactions among various individuals, groups, or organizations engaged in political or cultural conflicts [such as disinformation and post-truth politics], based on shared collective identities" (p. 1).

As communication becomes increasingly globalized, Western-originated forms of journalism, such as the fact-checking movement, are disseminating to various regions worldwide (Mutsvairo et al., 2019). However, while fact-checking as a research topic holds relevance across borders and is inherently comparative, there is a notable absence of systematic and comprehensive comparative projects, with only a few exceptions (see e.g., Graves & Cherubini, 2016; Humprecht, 2019, 2020). The absence of crucial academic geopolitical diversity across several analytical levels has long been a topic of discussion within communication studies (Demeter et al., 2022). Scholars actively strive to internationalize the field and overcome geographic disparities in knowledge production, deemed a form of "epistemic violence" (Ekdale et al., 2022, p. 1944). Deep international-

ization entails adopting more inclusive approaches to foster comprehensive knowledge that reflects global perspectives (Badr & Ganter, 2021). This cosmopolitan perspective involves moving beyond Anglo-American and Eurocentric viewpoints in both knowledge production and analytical tools.

Latin American countries, despite internal diversity, share a relatively homogeneous historical, cultural, and linguistic background (Amazeen, 2020; Graves, 2018; Lawrence & Schafer, 2012). Considered a noncore region in media and communication studies, scholars have emphasized the peripheral status of Latin America in research designs, underscoring its practical indivisibility from European media and communication studies (Ganter & Ortega, 2019). Thus, this chapter aims to broaden the scope of analysis in fact-checking research by exploring Latin American perspectives. The objective is to observe the influence of the Latin American context on the fact-checking subfield, contributing to alternative knowledge in this area. Latin America presents a compelling case for studying the work of fact-checkers due to a unique combination of factors (Cazzamatta et al., 2024): extremely low resilience to disinformation, high Internet penetration, a preference for social media over television as a primary news source (Newman et al., 2023), and widespread use of WhatsApp (Mello, 2023).

Regarding fact-checking practices, organizations positioned beyond Western regions have encountered enduring challenges, such as insufficient or inappropriate resources, coupled with political opposition that jeopardizes the continuity of their operations (Palau-Sampio, 2018; Vinhas & Bastos, 2025). Furthermore, fact-checkers are confronted with varying levels of national disinformation resilience (Humprecht et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Pérez & García-Vargas, 2021). Building upon the argument presented by Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2022) regarding disinformation as a context-dependent concept, the fact-checking movement is similarly influenced by local specificities. It must navigate challenges inherent in power dynamics within national information ecosystems. Nonetheless, a recent study by Nieminen and Rapeli (2019) highlighted that the fact-checking literature had primarily focused on actors in the USA. Their article revealed that 77% of the analyzed studies centered on the US-American context. In recent times, a handful of studies have broadened their scope by examining fact-checking projects in Latin America (Cazzamatta & Santos, 2024; Damasceno, 2022; Lelo, 2022; Moreno-Gil et al., 2021; Palau-Sampio, 2018; Recuero et al., 2022; Rodríguez-Pérez & Seibt, 2022). However, it is worth noting that most studies on fact-checking and the epistemologies of digital journalism (see Ekström et al., 2020; Steensen et al., 2024) still remain heavily concentrated on the Global North.

Ganter and Ortega (2019) emphasized that discussing Latin American contexts, as proposed here, is more prevalent than integrating scholarly work from within the region into intellectual discourses. Latin American scholars have a history of exploring imported ideas by interpreting them through local lenses, adapting arguments generated elsewhere to fit local realities, and scrutinizing the relevance of Western theories to address local issues (Waisbord, 2022; see also Averbeck-Lietz et al. in this book). Nonetheless, fact-checking research is also an emerging field in Latin America. By looking at Scielo—a bibliographic database of open-access journals with a high focus on Latin American production (although Spain, Portugal, and South Africa are also included)—only 29 studies containing the word "fact-checking" are available. Most are related to disinforma-

tion or online political communication (de Albuquerque et al., 2023), not necessarily to fact-checking practices. Considering that "[d]e-westernization interrogates the provenance and the positionality of academic knowledge" (Waisbord, 2022, p. 26), it is crucial to acknowledge here that the Latin American voices and authors included in this chapter are primarily based in the Global North or published in major Western academic journals.

That said, this chapter will present the work and difficulties faced by fact-checkers operating within the Latin American context in an attempt to build a more comprehensive and global network of analysis. First, I will provide a general introduction, offering an overview of the main issues within fact-checking studies. Before delving into the Latin American fact-checking movement and its challenges, I will discuss the idiosyncrasies of Latin American media systems these organizations must navigate and other digital indicators that make the region a disinformation laboratory.

Establishing the context: The emergence of fact-checking practices and their diversity worldwide

Fact-checking comes into play when information, whether in the form of public statements or content on digital platforms, has already made a significant social impact, reverberated in public debates, or gained substantial traction in the online environment (Rodríguez-Pérez & Seibt, 2022).[1] Fact-checking organizations endeavor to identify, verify, correct, and diminish the visibility of misinformation, occasionally collaborating with governmental entities and platform companies (Bélair-Gagnon et al., 2022). However, since 2016, there has been a notable reorientation of fact-checking organizations worldwide. The shift has moved from verifying statements made by politicians and public figures to actively monitoring and addressing the spread of viral misinformation on social networks (Bélair-Gagnon et al., 2023; Cazzamatta, 2024; Cazzamatta & Santos, 2024; Graves et al., 2023).

Organizations are classified into newsroom (in-house) and independent non-governmental organization (NGO) models (Graves & Cherubini, 2016). The former is associated with conventional media, prevalent in Northwestern Europe and the USA. Despite having more significant resources, these fact-checking efforts are constrained by the editorial dependence of their outlets. The latter, those that are non-profit and independent, predominant in Eastern Europe and Latin America, often collaborate with traditional news outlets to increase their reach (Palau-Sampio, 2018; Vinhas & Bastos, 2025). They are free from corporate constraints and typically receive support from foundations and organizations dedicated to advancing democratic institutions. The fact-checking literature generally does not distinguish the types of media ties of the agencies. In the case of

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1   In addition to their verification work, fact-checking organizations can also engage in various other activities, including media literacy projects (e.g., Chequeado, Correctiv), research, such as the development of AI tools (Chequeado, Full Fact, and Africa Check), and even participation in policy-making (Full Fact).

Latin America however, it is crucial to observe if these units are linked to corporate, established media or one of several independent digital-native media sites that have multiplied in the region, such as Animal Politico from Mexico (with the fact-checking unit El Sabueso) or La Silla Vacía (Detector de Mentiras) from Colombia. They are not nonprofit NGOs but still maintain an independent character.

Scholars have noted the diversity of actors involved in the fact-checking movement. Global fact-checking has emerged as a hybrid institution, encompassing not only news organizations but also academic, political, and civil society groups. This diverse assembly of individuals and organizations, which does not conform to a uniform structure according to the new institutionalist perspective focusing on balance, alignment, stability, and consistency (Reese, 2022), advocates for enhanced journalism and accountability reporting. It surpasses traditional professional jurisdictional conflicts, simultaneously broadening institutional boundaries (Reese, 2022).

Over the past decade, the USA-based Poynter Institute has organized an annual event known as the Global Fact Summit, bringing together professional actors from around the world. Additionally, the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) at Poynter has developed a code of principles to guide best practices in fact-checking globally. It is reasonable to assert that the IFCN has significantly contributed to institutionalizing and professionalizing the fact-checking movement (Graves & Lauer, 2020). Certainly, this process inevitably involves layering imported journalism values onto existing institutional arrangements within countries and regions.

Fact-checkers strive to establish trust in their roles and uphold their authority by being members of the IFCN and disclosing their methodologies. The IFCN guidelines establish boundaries defining organizations committed to truth-seeking and transparency. This certification is particularly crucial in contexts where state-operated fact-checkers align with domestic false narratives to pave the way for enacting restrictive legislation, as Schuldt (2021) identified in the cases of Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia. Some countries, including those in Latin America, have also faced challenges from "fake" fact-checkers—pseudo-initiatives that adopt the strategy, aesthetics, and style of legitimate verified fact-checkers, leading their audience to perceive them as credible sources of serious journalism, even though they are disseminating misinformation (Montaña-Niño et al., 2024; Moshirnia, 2020).

The generally rapid proliferation of fact-checking practices can be attributed to their alignment with the fundamental principles of professional journalism. Within the US-American context, it has also been perceived as an "interpretative turn" (Graves, 2016), challenging the traditional and orthodox understanding of objectivity. In contrast to other journalistic practices, fact-checking provides verdicts involving interpretative evaluation and deviating from the conventional comprehension and operationalization of objectivity rituals (Maras, 2013; Tuchman, 1972). While this interpretation is plausible and relevant in the US-American context, Latin American countries have long been dominated by powerful elites and oligarchs (Harlow, 2023; Waisbord, 2000), and the region had been challenging the traditional notion of objectivity long before the establishment of their first fact-checking agency. Latin American journalists have consistently regarded "objectivity" as a myth, replacing this norm with "an obligation to inform honestly, without consideration of secondary interests and in obedience to

the public interest" (Restrepo, 1999, p. 230), demonstrating how universal values can be adapted to local realities. By analyzing previous Latin American codes of ethics, Restrepo observed that "neutrality is [was] read as a subtle but effective commitment to those who have the power" (p. 229) since only transmitting claims is not enough to make sense of the world events—a criticism regarding the operationalization of objectivity which the US-American fact-checkers engaged much later.

Latin American media systems, their extremely low resilience to disinformation, and its impact on fact-checking

The increasing adoption of fact-checking initiatives by traditional media outlets, along with collaborative efforts between independent organizations and established media entities, underscores the importance of examining the media system in which these organizations operate. While sharing some traits with the Mediterranean model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), Latin America is broadly classified as "liberal captured," characterized by deregulation, dominance of conglomerates, high market concentration, regulatory inefficiencies, limited professionalization, discretionary allocation of public funds for advertising, and political influence (Echeverria et al., 2024; Guerrero, 2014). Media outlets, especially in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, have thrived with minimal regulatory frameworks driven by tightly managed, family-run enterprises (Becerra & Mastrini, 2017; Fuchs, 2021). Despite the efforts of scholars to classify Latin American media systems, typologize Latin American media systems is challenging due to diverse journalistic professionalism within the same country, intranational differences resembling liberal and polarized pluralist models, and greater instability with frequent changes between media and political systems compared with Europe or the USA (Echeverria et al., 2024; Hallin, 2020).

Furthermore, in the current digital media landscape, tech companies have taken a central role in shaping media structures by overseeing the platforms in which digital content is curated (Hallin, 2020). Thus, several studies have reflected on the necessity of adaptation, reconceptualization, and inclusion of new indicators (Hallin, 2020; Humprecht et al., 2020; Mancini, 2020; Mattoni & Ceccobelli, 2018). A helpful framework for cross-national comparative research to assess disinformation resilience, intrinsically associated with challenges faced by fact-checkers, was proposed by Humprecht and colleagues (2020) based on seven macro-level indicators: polarization of society, populist communication, weak public service broadcasting, fragmented audiences, size of the digital advertisement market, and high social media use. These variables were initially tested across 18 Western democracies and subsequently replicated for Latin American countries (Rodríguez-Pérez & García-Vargas, 2021), thus enhancing and enriching this framework (Wang, 2011). The operationalization of these variables within Latin America has demonstrated that the continent is much less resilient to disinformation compared with Europe or the USA, significantly impacting the daily activities of fact-checkers.

As an example, fact-checking practices are unquestionably influenced by polarization. Several analyses have shown that individuals tend to prefer fact-checks that align with their preexisting beliefs and are more likely to avoid those that contradict their po-

litical views, indicating a confirmation bias in the selection of corrective messages (see e.g., Hameleers & van der Meer, 2020; Shin & Thorson, 2017). Furthermore, other studies have observed that partisans often distrust fact-checkers and question their impartiality (see e.g., Young et al., 2018). Although polarization is a global phenomenon, data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project[2] have revealed a significant increase in polarization over the past two decades in Latin America, making it one of the world's most polarized regions, ranking only behind Eastern Europe and Central Asia (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2023).

Studies have additionally associated the escalation of disinformation with the emergence of far-right populism[3] (see e.g., Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Hallin, 2019; Hameleers, 2020; Hameleers & Minihold, 2022; Marwick & Lewis, 2017). This trend is also evident in Brazil (Recuero et al., 2022; Santini et al., 2021) and across Latin America (Lupu et al., 2020). Right-wing politicians employ discourses deviating from established institutional norms, neglecting the importance of facts (Frankfurt, 2005) and impeding information and data accessibility. Given that fact-checkers can only verify factual statements and not opinions, the core of their epistemic work is significantly impacted in the face of heightened levels of populism and the corresponding lack of public accountability.

High social media use for news also has consequences for fact-checking practices, influencing decisions on which platforms to closely monitor and how disinformation spreads and goes viral. Widespread reliance on social media, with its potential to amplify online falsehoods, heightens the likelihood of populist disinformation agents building networks of followers who share their partisan perspectives, further reinforcing fragmentation. When measuring the daily time spent on social media per country, Latin American nations occupy prominent positions on the global list. Brazil ranks second, followed by Colombia (6th), Chile (7th), Mexico (9th), and Argentina (11th). Social media use for news in Latin America, in contrast to Europe, has outpaced TV as a source of news (Newman et al., 2023), leading to the uncontrolled dissemination of disinformation.

The lack of media trust is also concerning, as it often prompts individuals to resort to alternative, often partisan news sources, fostering distrust in fact-checking messages and reinforcing social media use. Illustratively, during Chile's *estallido social* (social outbreak) in 2019, television faced unprecedented criticism, despite increased viewership. Widespread distrust of traditional journalism led many Chileans to shift their attention to social media and messaging apps (Bachmann et al., 2022). In 2020, Chile emerged as one of the few countries globally where individuals generally placed more trust in information from social media (34%) than traditional media outlets (30%) (Newman et al., 2020).

This intricate landscape marked by partisan media ownership and extremely low disinformation resilience underscores Latin America as a fertile ground for disinformation,

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2   The V-Dem Project, organized by the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, is a research initiative that offers a comprehensive dataset on democracy worldwide, focusing on the diversity of democratic practices and experiences across various countries.

3   For a comprehensive definition of populism in several contexts, see Kaltwasser et al. (2017).

which fact-checkers strive to counteract. Thus, we will delve into the difficulties faced by Latin American fact-checkers in navigating the described informational ecosystems.

The Latin American fact-checking movement and its challenges

Landscape structure: Digital native start-ups x corporate media

Different from the USA or Western Europe, the significant majority of Latin American fact-checkers are associated with independent fact-checking projects or digital native media sites (Graves & Cherubini, 2016), except in Brazil and Chile, where traditional established media are increasingly embracing this evolving journalistic genre. Considering the region's media landscape, this structural pattern makes sense, as established media tend to be financially dependent on the state or economic elites (Hallin, 2020).

The pioneering platform in Latin America since 2010 has been Argentina's Chequeado, serving as a model for similar flagship projects in other countries. For instance, Brazil's Agência Lupa was founded in 2015, followed by Ecuador's Chequea and ColombiaCheck in 2016. Chile experienced a surge in fact-checking platforms in 2019, driven by massive demonstrations and increasing political polarization. In the same year, Agence France-Presse expanded its multilingual fact-checking service to include Uruguay, adding to its existing presence in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. More recent projects include DeFacto from the Cuban news portal elTOQUE and Ecuador Verifica, both established in 2021. Latin America is now home to 48 fact-checking units across 13 countries, making up approximately 12.6% of the total number of such organizations worldwide (Stencel et al., 2023).

Chile boasts 12 fact-checking projects, while Brazil has nine, making them the countries with the most significant number of such initiatives (Stencel et al., 2023). The involvement of major press organizations in fact-checking efforts in these two nations has raised concerns. However, it is important to note some distinctions. In Brazil, certain media-affiliated fact-checking projects are still signatories of the IFCN. Only the two associated with the major media conglomerates in the country, Globo and Record, are not part of the IFCN. In an interview with the author, an IFCN external assessor noted:

> Concerning Brazil, yes, they are associated with the IFCN, but it is still difficult because it took a while. I am telling you about the transparency issue; it took a while for the outlets to manage to have some level of transparency suitable for the IFCN. Historically, the media in Brazil has not been very transparent. So, when it comes to them talking about revenue, staff, everything else . . . Some may even reach a minimum threshold there, but it is still a historical problem. (M. Crispim, personal communication, August 28, 2023)

In Chile, however, at the time of writing, no organization with media ties has reached the minimum standard of transparency required to become an IFCN signatory. Only independent fact-checking initiatives such as FastCheckCl and Mala Espina Check have done so. This lack of transparency can be attributed, in part, to the unique press duopoly

in Chile where two journalistic consortiums hold the most influence (Mellado et al., 2018; Sapiezynska & Lagos, 2016). Additionally, most fact-checking projects in the country are relatively new and gained momentum during the 2019 social unrest. It is possible that they need more time to adapt, similar to their counterparts in Brazil. Some scholars from Latin America have also observed that fact-checking has become a new business within journalism. Traditional newsrooms in the region have mobilized toward this new genre as an alternative means to combat disinformation campaigns (Lelo, 2022; Rodríguez-Pérez & Seibt, 2022). A fact-checker involved in a university project in Chile remarked:

> So, they [corporate media] are dealing with survival problems because they have many problems in the economic model here in Chile, and they are trying to prove something, que "les dé el éxito" [that will give them success]. Okay, today is fact-checking. Tomorrow is data journalism. Next week will be another special and pyrotechnic thing they must try to survive. Nevertheless, maybe they are not reflecting on this kind of exercise, discipline [transparency of fact-checking methods]. (C. R. F. Alarcon, personal communication, July 15, 2023)

However, Brazil and Chile are exceptions on the continent. In general, as I stated somewhere else, independent organizations—even in these two states—are more actively engaged in the general fact-checking discourse. Fact-checkers affiliated with media partners tend to adopt a more cautious and moderate approach when articulating their primary goals (e.g., combat the spread of falsehoods). In contrast, independent or NGO-associated agencies focus more on advancing specific causes and driving reforms. They expect to increase the consequences of spreading falsehoods, enhance the quality of public discourse, safeguard freedom of expression, empower citizens through information, bolster democratic participation and human rights, fortify democracy, scrutinize those in power, demand transparency from governments, contribute to investigative journalism, and amplify marginalized voices. Nonetheless, they face considerable problems in promoting such goals. Research evaluating the values and operations of fact-checking platforms in Latin America and Spain has identified three significant challenges: access to public data (due to availability and reliability), resource constraints, and limitations in reaching a broader audience (Lelo, 2022; Moreno-Gil et al., 2021).

Lack of information availability and factual accountability

As described earlier, fragmented media ecosystems with limited effective gatekeepers contribute to the proliferation of misperceptions driven by populist rhetoric. This trend is not limited to prominent examples like Bolsonaro's administration in Brazil, but is also evident in other countries, including Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, and Uruguay. In these nations, there has been a rise in right-wing populist rhetoric characterized by conspiracy theories, rumors, science denialism, partisanship, and anti-media attitudes (Sanahuja et al., 2023; Siles et al., 2021). Given this context, it becomes crucial to assess the extent to which Latin American politicians and institutions still adhere to the norms of truth-telling.

Graves and Wells (2019) delved into the consequences of political discourse that has become disconnected from established institutional standards and practices within a media landscape driven by the attention economy. They drew a clear distinction between information accessibility (the ability to access facts and public records) and the responsibility for "factual accountability," which relates to the importance of facts and truth in society. They defined accountability as "a quality of public discourse grounded in a range of norms and institutional mechanisms" (p. 45). In an era characterized by post-truth dynamics, marked by populist communication and hostility toward the press, politicians and democratic institutions may no longer consistently adhere to truth-telling standards. Latin America is significantly affected by both dimensions of this problem. Natália Leal,[4] the content director at Agência Lupa, has shed light on this issue:

> We have some difficulties here in Brazil and Latin America. . . . We have a lack of transparency. A good part of the governments is hiding data. They are trying in some way to prevent access to the data that is necessary for our work and the work of all journalists. There is an attitude of these governments, which is very common here in Brazil. A position of creating their own facts, distorting reality to tell another story, and making a different narrative. . . .

Because these professionals aim to verify the accuracy of political statements by relying on independent and generally trusted qualified sources (Graves, 2016), this erosion of factual accountability has significant implications for the work of fact-checkers. While the erosion of factual accountability is also a concern in the USA and other Western nations, these countries still maintain their high levels of "rational legal authority" (Mancini, 2013, p. 35). For instance, in the UK, there is a Statistic Authority that fact-checkers can use to compel politicians and members of parliament to correct their statements (Graves & Cherubini, 2016). In contrast, in Latin America, it appears that politicians may be learning in their media training how to circumvent fact-checkers rather than prioritizing accuracy and adherence to facts, an external IFCN assessor suspects (M. Crispim, personal communication, August 28, 2023). Additionally, the levels of investigation and research required to collect public information in Latin America differ significantly from those of countries with stable and well-established rules for overseeing public information and records.

Fact-checking, akin to data journalism, constitutes an intervention reliant on the transparency of public institutions in data provision. This prerequisite is not consistently met, even in nations with a longstanding tradition of legislation supporting freedom of information, such as Spain or Sweden (see e.g., Appelgren & Salaverría, 2018). Fact-checkers encounter a demanding and time-consuming process of requesting access from authorities and acquiring data in non-machine-readable formats in the most adverse situations.

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4   She made this statement during an online fact-checking course organized by the IFCN in 2021.

Online harassment

Another significant challenge, in addition to the lack of data and the erosion of factual accountability, is the prevalence of massive social media violence. Studies indicate that online harassment extends across news production (see e.g., Harlow et al., 2023). New actors, such as social media agent provocateurs, often acting on behalf of governments and political parties, engage in coordinated harassment campaigns to influence the narrative on social media (Harlow et al., 2023). A fact-checker from Columbiacheck highlighted, during an online fact-checking course organized by the IFCN in 2021, the challenges they face: "We have seen a series of coordinated attacks, especially from far-right groups that seek to discredit our work by spreading lies about our funding, purposes, and interests." Furthermore, an external IFCN assessor stressed the need for localized assessments in the face of these difficulties. For example, in evaluating the Brazilian agency Aos Fatos, it was noted that they omitted employee biographies due to harassment concerns, despite it being an IFCN requirement: "I justified it in the assessment" (M. Crispim, personal communication, August 28, 2023).

The issue of social media attacks extends beyond individual readers expressing dissatisfaction. In fact, journalists perceive these threats as part of systematic and organized campaigns orchestrated by governments and supported by their partisan followers. This phenomenon has been particularly prevalent in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Brazil—countries with a history of journalistic harassment (Harlow et al., 2023). This problem also extends to the fact-checking community. In 2018, when several organizations in Brazil began collaborating with Facebook, a PDF file containing comprehensive details about 40 Brazilian journalists, including screenshots from their profiles, circulated as "evidence" of their supposed left-leaning orientations. This PDF file went viral among right-wing circles on WhatsApp, which has 120 million users in Brazil. The entire fact-checking teams of the Lupa and Aos Fatos agencies were featured in the document, leading to trolling and threats (Funke, 2018).

Resources and reach through platform partnerships?

In addition to the erosion of factual accountability, unreliable data, and online harassment, Latin American fact-checkers also have to secure financial resources and a broader readership: "I think the problem in Latin America . . . is how to get fact-checks to people who are not looking for them."[5] Some platform partnerships partially target these two main problems: financial sources and audience reach. However, various scholars are critical of these partnerships. Lelo (2022) observed, for instance, in the Brazilian context, that, due to a restricted number of staff and the growing financial dependence on tech companies, fact-checking organizations are modulating their verification to different platforms and prioritizing online debunking and neglecting political fact-checking. Although this type of collaboration between tech platforms and fact-checkers needs to be critically investigated (Bélair-Gagnon et al., 2023; Cazzamatta & Santos, 2024 Full Fact,

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5   P. Uribe made this statement during an online fact-checking course organized by the IFCN in 2021.

2020; Graves et al., 2023), attributing the "debunking turn" (social media policing) solely to these collaborations seems too simplistic (Cazzamatta, 2024).

First, there is a monthly cap on revenue generated from paid debunking articles. Consequently, organizations cannot endlessly profit from debunking misinformation on Facebook (Bélair-Gagnon et al., 2023). Second, the observed "debunking turn" is a global trend that cuts across various types of organizations and countries. While it is plausible to hypothesize that Latin America (as well as other Global South countries) may produce fewer fact-checks (verification of public figures' statements), it is essential to recognize that the reasons should not be solely attributed to the platforms' partnerships. As demonstrated earlier, Latin America faces challenges such as weaker press development (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002) and extremely low resilience to disinformation (Rodríguez-Pérez & García-Vargas, 2021). The region experiences high social media usage, with some countries ranking among the world's top users. Social media has even surpassed television as a news source in several countries. Additionally, systematic online disinformation campaigns orchestrated by far-right movements and populist politicians are typically anonymous and challenging to detect (Lupu et al., 2020). Considering this dysfunctional online media environment underscores the importance of focusing on debunking to promote a healthier and more truthful online information environment in a broader sense (Palau-Sampio, 2018). Mark Zuckerberg's decision to replace Facebook's fact-checking partnerships with a community-based verification model, similar to Musk's approach with X, necessitates urgent scholarly analysis. Given the structural constraints discussed in this chapter, Latin American organizations are likely to be more affected than their European counterparts.

More problematic than supporting fact-checking organizations is the attempt of platforms to hinder Internet regulation laws in the region. Latin American states have less leverage to hold big tech companies accountable: "The European Union has the capacity to impose regulations on the platform that countries in Latin America or Africa do not" (Hallin, 2020, p. 5782). The most striking example is the platforms' reaction against the Brazilian bill PL2630, inspired by the German NetzDG and the European Digital Service Act (DSA). In the report titled "The Platforms' War against PL2630,"—produced by the independent think tank InternetLab, focused on digital technologies,—it is described how platforms attempted to influence public opinion days before the parliamentary vote, employing every possible resource to prevent the bill's approval (NetLab, 2023). At the core of this issue is the massive capital generated through digital advertising (huge in the region) in an industry currently lacking regulations and transparency (NetLab, 2023). Regardless of their partnerships, independent fact-checkers were actively involved in the discussions around the draft bill. They suggested improving the regulatory proposal (Aos Fatos & Lupa, 2023), taking a different stance from that of the platforms. In their manifesto on the matter, they made it clear that it is urgent to limit financial incentives for the dissemination of hatred and disinformation (Aos Fatos & Lupa, 2023). In the same way that collaborations with platforms seem problematic, the same can be said about partnerships with established media. It is more challenging to establish media alliances when prominent news organizations have ties with political affiliations and oligarchs (Graves & Wells, 2019).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have underscored the challenges that Latin American fact-checkers encounter within the context of their media systems and various aspects of their online information environments. My aim is to contribute to global knowledge production by addressing geographic disparities in the field and to demonstrate that research on the fact-checking done in the Global South is equally relevant to that which occurs in the USA or Europe and necessitates no further specific justification. Although fact-checking practices originated in the USA, they have since spread globally, with fact-checkers emerging in diverse contexts and facing varying challenges that require academic attention. At the research level, discussing a more cosmopolitan approach to fact-checking practices in Latin America poses a significant challenge.

First, there needs to be more comparative analyses within the continent, as most literature still focuses on Western nations. Additionally, existing studies on the topic are produced mainly by Latin American scholars affiliated with Global North institutions, including the author herself, with only a few exceptions. Thus, the scarcity of voices in and within the continent (Mutsvairo et al., 2021) is much more pronounced. In respect to their specific fact-checking practices, Latin American fact-checkers face similar challenges to their global counterparts, including financial constraints, unreliable data, and limited audience reach. However, they have not consistently had the same access to infrastructure, financial resources, information, or capacity-building opportunities as organizations in Europe or the USA (Mutsvairo et al., 2019).

Second, as demonstrated throughout the chapter, universalizing approaches to media systems provide limited insights into fact-checking practices (see also Radue et al. on media systems in this book). Despite shared characteristics such as media concentration, absence of public service broadcasting, persistent patronage, and instrumentalization of journalism, there is substantial diversity within the Latin American media systems. For example, the media systems in Uruguay and Chile are quite different from those in Venezuela and Cuba. Considerable diversity in journalistic culture (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) is also evident within a single country and journalistic genre, such as fact-checking initiatives. Furthermore, understanding the daily challenges of fact-checking solely in light of media system traits disregards digital developments, such as high social media use for news. In Latin America, unlike Europe, social media have surpassed television as a primary news source (Newman et al., 2023), contributing to the uncontrollable spread of disinformation.

Transparency, impartiality, and fairness, as critical concepts transferred to the fact-checking culture, can be influenced by different macro-media system contexts and meso/micro perspectives from diverse fact-checking cultures. The criticism regarding the operationalization of objectivity understood as an "interpretative turn" in journalism with the emergence of US-American fact-checkers in the early 2000s has long been a tradition in Latin American journalism. Despite Latin American journalists embracing traditional norms rooted in a more liberal journalistic tradition, they are simultaneously largely supportive of a more active role in social change (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). The same can be applied to the fact-checking movement. Studies have demonstrated that fact-checkers in Latin America characterize their work as aligned with journalism's societal

responsibility and in contrast to political polarization (Lelo, 2022; Moreno-Gil et al., 2021; Vinhas & Bastos, 2025).

Therefore, it is essential to recognize distinct fact-checking cultures that have emerged within traditional established media corporations, independent digital native media start-ups, or NGO-based organizations. As mentioned earlier, independent fact-checkers articulate their mission more engagingly, emphasizing goals such as improving democracy, media literacy, and the quality of public debate, in contrast to their counterparts in mainstream media, who adopt milder statements, focusing primarily on countering misinformation. This distinction may stem from issues such as media capture and the political instrumentalization of journalism. In Latin America, fact-checking is predominantly practiced by independent (media) organizations, with Chile and Brazil standing out as exceptions where corporate media have also embraced the genre.

Due to limited access to information and public data, which are fundamental requirements for fact-checking practices, political fact-checking in the region often takes on the character of investigative journalism. For instance, when data on unemployment, inflation, and other indicators are either unavailable or manipulated by governments, fact-checkers must develop their own indices or undertake independent investigations to gather accurate data. Without public data, fact-checkers must establish a database with relevant information gathered through bureaucratic mechanisms and investigative practices. Consequently, outside of Europe and North America, the fact-checking movement is primarily associated with independent media or investigative journalism initiatives. Organizations operating in countries with weaker rational-legal authority and data accountability must establish a professional relationship with the politicians they cover. They frequently encounter online threats (Harlow et al., 2023) and accusations of bias. Collaborations with established traditional media outlets also prove challenging given the close ties between prominent media and political elites. In this context, these fact-checkers lack a shared pool of public data for establishing institutionally recognized facts (Graves & Wells, 2019) and the media platforms to disseminate those facts effectively.

In summary, these organizations aim to establish a public service by prioritizing a civic agenda and holding political power accountable in a communication environment characterized by media concentration, commercial interests, patronage (Moreno-Gil et al., 2021), and extremely low resilience to disinformation (Rodríguez-Pérez & García-Vargas, 2021). Hence, research should adopt a more cosmopolitan approach, acknowledging the significance of macro contexts (media system traits influenced by digital indicators) and the high heterogeneity of fact-checking cultures across countries and organizations, especially by extending the research beyond the Western world. Despite the global nature of the fact-checking movement, one should critically consider global differences and seek contextual knowledge.

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