Fact-checking in Iberoamerica. A sex/gender analysis

Iniciativas de verificación de datos en el ámbito iberoamericano. Un análisis sexo/género

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Abstract:

The massive implementation of Relationship, Information and Communications Technologies, especially social networks, as well as changes in habits of information consumption in a hybrid media system have triggered the exponential proliferation of fake news. To combat this, dedicated fact-checking agencies have been set up, their mission being to debunk untrue content in political or media discourse. The objective of this paper is to analyse fact-checking agencies in Latin America, Spain, and Portugal to learn their characteristics, paying special attention to the role that women play in this new profession, through the case study of all the projects included in the annual report of the Reporters' Lab census (n=54). The data shows that the majority of projects were established in 2018-2019 and remain active, are linked to civil society and have created networks to foster cooperation against the established powers. Women represent over half of the workforce in these agencies. This study quantifies, in a non-equal employment and journalistic context, the percentage of female fact-checkers, and concludes that they are a majority, even in management positions. It reflects on how this business model offers opportunities for equality despite the dangerous Ibero-American scenario for journalism and women.

Keywords:

Fact-checking; disinformation; fake news; sex-gender analysis.

Resumen:

La implantación masiva de las Tecnologías de la Relación, la Información y las Comunicaciones, especialmente las redes sociales y la modificación de hábitos de consumo informativo en un sistema híbrido de medios han desencadenado la proliferación exponencial de noticias falsas. Ante esta situación, se desarrollan iniciativas dedicadas a la verificación de datos, cuya misión es desmontar los contenidos inveraces del discurso político o mediático. El objetivo de este artículo es analizar estas iniciativas en Iberoamérica para conocer sus características atendiendo especialmente al papel que desempeñan las mujeres en esta nueva profesión, mediante el estudio de caso de los proyectos recogidos en el informe anual del censo del Reporters' Lab (n=54). Los datos muestran que la mayoría se iniciaron en 2018-2019 y siguen activos, están vinculados a la sociedad civil y han creado redes para favorecer la cooperación frente a los poderes establecidos. Las mujeres representan más de la mitad de la fuerza laboral. Esta investigación cuantifica, en un contexto laboral y periodístico no paritario, el porcentaje de mujeres verificadoras, y concluye que es mayoritario, incluso en los puestos directivos. Se reflexiona sobre cómo este modelo de negocio ofrece oportunidades para la igualdad a pesar del peligroso escenario iberoamericano para el periodismo y las mujeres.

Palabras clave:

Fact-checking; verificación de la información; desinformación; fake news; análisis sexo-género.

1. Introduction

In today's world, what is colloquially known as fake news, has gained in importance and taken on special characteristics that have made it a major object of study in academia in general and Communication Sciences in particular. Multiple factors have brought this about; among them, the crisis of intermediation in journalism following the emergence of digital information environments (Segura, 2014) and the formation of the hybrid media system, in which the agents and environments involved in information processes have become more diverse (Chadwick, 2017). New forms of digital consumption, together with the economic crisis that has crucially affected the media since 2007 (Mayoral, Parratt & Morata, 2019), have led to a loss of journalistic credibility (Newman & al., 2022) that has left citizens more exposed to the misinformation that flows through Relationship, Information and Communication Technologies and social networks in particular.

Concern about this phenomenon has also been growing among the general population. In the European context, the study "Fake News and Disinformation Online" (European Commission; 2018), shows that 85% of citizens consider fake news to be a real problem in their country. Furthermore, 83% believe that hoaxes have a direct impact on the development of democracy

in general and declare that they are especially concerned about deliberate misinformation aimed at influencing elections and immigration policies. 88% of the population surveyed in Spain believe that fake news is a danger to democracy in general and to the country itself. Among those surveyed in Portugal, 82% think that it poses a danger to democracy in general, rising to 84% where the danger refers to democracy in their country.

Although use of the term *fake news* is discouraged, it being considered an "oxymoron for the simple reason that what is false and spurious is not news but a fictional narrative" (Rodríguez Pérez, 2019; 67), the truth is that it has become widely used when referring to the phenomenon being studied. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2023) *fake news* is "false stories that appear to be news, spread through the internet or other media, usually created for political influence or as a joke", the dictionary adds that "there is concern about the power of fake news to affect electoral results." The Collins Dictionary (2023) includes a nuance in the definition of the concept, speaking of "false and often sensational information disseminated under the guise of news."

The European Commission includes fake news within the global term disinformation which it defines as "verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for profit or to deliberately mislead the population, and which may cause public detriment." (European Commission; 2018;3) and has clearly positioned itself against it in the economic, social, political, and military spheres.

In any case, this is content that has been intentionally created from falsehoods and is designed to confuse readers (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017) for two fundamental motives: firstly, ideological, since the confusion created may be detrimental to political opponents or be beneficial to its creator or disseminator, and secondly, economic, because misinformation or the transmission of incorrect data may prove beneficial to the economic activities of its promoter or be directly profitable for them.

The classification of reference on the subject is that of Wardle & Derakhshan (2017). These authors argued that the use of simplistic terms such as fake news hides critical distinctions about incorrect and malicious information, the true-false dichotomy camouflages nuances, and they therefore establish a framework that provides a working model for different perspectives: misinformation or false information caused by inadvertent errors, disinformation or intentionally fabricated false content, and malinformation or fact-based information that has been manipulated and then used and spread to inflict damage. "Misinformation is often not easy to identify, as it mixes truths, usually decontextualized, with falsehoods" (Wardle & Derakhshan (2017). Other authors (Rubin, et al., 2015; Salaverría et al., 2020) have later expanded the classification identifying more subtle characteristics of information disorders or contemplating the importance of digital applications in creating new manifestations such as deepfakes (Mridha et al., 2021; Gómez et al., 2021).

There is no doubt that the publication of content through social media has brought with it a qualitative change and a quantitative increase in information disorders (Journell, 2017). Thus, the *Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation: The Global Disinformation Order* opened its 2019 report by stating that "computational propaganda – the use of algorithms, automatisms and big data to shape public life – has become a ubiquitous and permeating part of our daily lives" (Oxford Internet Institute, 2021)

Much remains to be learnt about the vulnerabilities of people, institutions and society when faced with sophisticated manipulation. Amorós (2018: 65-66) states that "for fake news to go viral, emotion must prevail over reflection" and points to

three key elements present in false content that make us fall into the misinformation trap as intended by those who create it: an eye-catching headline, a revelation that reaffirms or outrages us, and a legitimate and reliable appearance.

Vosoughi and colleagues (2018) found that fake news spread significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more widely than true news across all information categories. The reason is thought to be that it is more novel, and inspires fear, disgust and surprise, that is, it appeals to emotions. Another interesting finding was that robots accelerate the spread of true and fake news at the same rate, implying that fake news spreads more than the truth because humans, not robots, are more likely to spread it. Calvo and Aruguete (2021) argue that hoaxes go viral to create feelings of community among those who distribute them.

As a consequence of the greater circulation of fake news and the ease with which it spreads across digital platforms, fact-checking has become an activity that has gained considerable importance over recent years, especially among journalists. In the words of Jane Elizabeth of the *American Press Institute* (Elizabeth, J., 2014) "The goal of fact-checking should be to provide clear, rigorously vetted information to consumers so they may use the facts to make fully cognizant choices in voting and other essential decisions". Walter and others (2020) define it as the systematised practice of verifying statements made by public figures and institutions and publishing the results of said process. Therefore, their objectives are to ensure the veracity of the information disseminated, especially on social networks and platforms, to scrutinize power, and turn information into knowledge that can be taken on board by citizens. Nyhan and Reifler (2015) see fact-checking contributing effectively to demands for accountability from public figures and to providing better information for citizens, something key to reinforcing democracy.

Although the organisation of these agencies as companies is recent, fact-checking as a task has existed in newsrooms for a long time.

Internal or a priori fact-checking emerged as a sign of quality in American news magazines in the 1920s and 30s, and broadly refers to routines of fact-checking and accuracy to ensure that published information reflects reality. It has become an essential part of the professional routine of specialised journalists when they work, basically, with data or statements. External or ex post fact-checking consists of publishing an evidence-based analysis of the truthfulness of a political statement, report, or any other type of news information (Graves & Amazeen, 2019).

It is interesting, to say the least, that the first professionals clearly assigned to carry out journalistic fact-checking in the 1930s were women at the New York magazine TIME (New York Times, 2017). TIME's first fact-checker was Nancy Ford. In the decades that followed, becoming what was then called a "verifier" was a relatively well-regarded step for young female graduates. The job of fact-checking was later opened to men, by 1973 TIME had four men in the role.

Since then, many have been the media outlets and civic platforms which have launched sections, work groups or spaces aimed at checking information published by other media, disseminated through social networks, or declared by leading political figures.

The first sites specialised in fact-checking data were *Snopes* founded in 1995 (snopes.com) originally focused on urban legends, and *The Smoking Gun* (thesmokinggun.com), in 1997, which reviews legal documents, records of arrests and mugshots. The year 2003 saw the launch of political fact-checking site FactCheck.org by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania together with Brooks Jackson of the Associated Press in 2003, the Wall Street Journal and CNN. It has been

followed by, among others, PolitiFact in 2007 as a project of The Tampa Bay Times, Les Décodeurs in France in 2009, linked to Le Monde, BILDblog in Germany in 2004, BBC Reality Check in the United Kingdom, Pagella Politics in Italy or Maldito Bulo in Spain. In Latin America, the pioneering agency has been the Argentinian *Chequeado*, active since 2010.

The Trust Project agency (thetrustproject.org) was launched in 2017, with the participation of large technology companies such as Google, Facebook, Twitter or the Bing search engine, as well as media and civic foundations, with the aim of increasing transparency and trust in the media, showing their sources and procedures to act as an indicator of the veracity of news that expands contextual information.

In order to analyse global fact-checking activity, the Duke Reporters' Lab, a journalism research centre, was set up at Sanford School of Public Policy, a part of Duke University (Duke University Reporters' Lab, 2023). Their main projects focus on fact-checking, but they also occasionally look at trust in the media and related topics. It is funded primarily by the Knight Chair, as well as the Knight Foundation, the Google News Initiative, the Facebook Journalism Project, and Craig Newmark. Its contributors include The Washington Post, PolitiFact, FactCheck.org and other fact-checkers; Google, Facebook, YouTube, Schema.org, Jigsaw and other technology organisations; the software development collective Bad Idea Factory; researchers and computer scientists at Duke University, the University of Texas at Arlington, and Digital Democracy, an initiative of Cal Poly's Institute for Advanced Technology and Public Policy; the International Fact Checking Network and others.

A product of particular interest for this study was introduced in 2014: the global database of fact-checking sites, maintained by the DeWitt Wallace Center for Media & Democracy at Duke University, which offers textual and map-based information. It can be accessed freely and is widely used in academic research. (Vizoso, A. & Vázquez-Herrero, J. 2019, Rodríguez Pérez, C; 2020).

This database and its associated map are kept regularly updated and a summary report is issued annually on the performance of global fact-checking sites, both active and inactive, the latter being reviewed separately. A special case is those projects that primarily perform data-checking during elections, but which remain active if they have a check that crosses multiple election cycles.

The International Fact-Checking Network, IFCN, (International Fact-Checking Network. IFCN, 2016) was created in 2015. It is a unit of the Poynter Institute whose objective is to bring together journalists dedicated to fact-checking at an international level promoting best practices and the exchange of information in the field. By September 2023, the list of signatories of the IFCN Code had reached 109 fact-checking agencies that were either active or in the process of being updated, 25 of these were initiatives from Latin American countries, Spain, and Portugal (International Fact-Checking Network. IFCN, 2023). The figure is increasing in general terms but (from 91 registrations) has fallen slightly in the Ibero-American region (down from 27 the previous year). It should be noted that AFP's generic membership applies to each of its entities.

The criteria underpinning IFCN's Code of Principles are similar to those of the Duke Reporters' Lab, but with a different mission. The verified signatories of the IFCN code are typically the organisations behind fact-checking agencies, even when they are involved in several projects for different audiences. The IFCN also deploys independent advisors to confirm that each signatory rigorously adheres to the principles and to help identify organisations that meet the highest editorial and ethical standards. The Duke Reporters' Lab has a broader goal. It seeks to identify individual fact-checking providers, websites, and

programs, places the public can turn to for reliable fact-checking reports, even when these reports have distinctive brand names, names or URLs.

The European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN, 2022), made up of more than 40 European fact-checking organisations, presented its European Code of Standards for Independent Data-Checking Organisations in November 2022. The project is backed by the European Commission and has established principles of professional conduct and transparency for fact-checking agencies operating within the European Union. The European Fact-Checking Standards Network opened its first round of applications in January 2023 for organisations wishing to join up.

Although fact-checking has become an essential task within the global information and communication system and as such an object of research, such research fundamentally focuses on the hoaxes themselves, on fact-checking methodologies, on the attitude of the media and citizenship towards the task itself or even on its organisational structure (International Fact-Checking Network. IFCN. 2023). However, there are few analyses of the professionals dedicated to the task and even fewer that consider whether they are women or men (Funke, 2019), (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2021), (Zippia, 2023).

The main objective of this study is to analyse fact-checking agencies in the Ibero-American context: Spain, Portugal and Central and South America, studying international projects located in the corresponding countries, which have Spanish or Portuguese as the main language for their fact-checking tasks.

The study strives to understand as specific objectives, firstly, where these organisations carry out their activities, since when, and how they are organised internally. Thus, this work highlights the fact-checking agencies operating in Latin America, Spain and Portugal and systematises the study of their typology and size. We consider the typology and trajectory of these agencies as well as their geographical distribution.

The second specific objective is to analyse the presence of women in their work teams, the tasks they perform and the degree of responsibility they hold, to thus further research on equality in this new area of journalistic activity. Studies of the profession of journalism have primarily addressed labour structures in conventional media and this approach is novel being as it is a recent phenomenon that has manifested itself through new business models. We ask, as a research question, whether women form a majority in the labour force of these companies and what positions they hold.

And finally, the study compares the gender gap detected in active fact-checking agencies with that in the labour market in the countries studied. We are interested in knowing if the gender gap presents the same patterns in the field of fact-checking.

2. Methodology

The Census of fact-checking agencies prepared by Duke University's Reporters' Lab (Duke University Reporters' Lab, 2023) and the International Labor Organization's public labour statistics database (ILOSTATS, 2023) have both been utilised for this study. The Reporters' Lab has an updated web space which, by means of a map, geographically locates the existing fact-checking agencies around the world. An original statistical approach has been taken from these sources, complementing this secondary data with the primary information obtained directly by researchers from the websites of the agencies themselves, which give added value to this research.

The selection criterion utilised to delimit the sample has been the country where the fact-checking media or projects are located. 15 countries in America and Europe have been covered: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Spain, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The information compiled and analysed refers to the date on which their activity began and whether they are currently active, have remained continuously active, what type of organisations they are associated with, whether they are journalistic organisations, academic institutions or civic or independent projects, the data concerning the make-up of their work teams was generated by the authors of this study, both concerning the number of people and the tasks they perform.

Once the media outlets that meet the selection criteria were located, an analysis sheet was applied to all of them, the following variables being collected (Table 1):

Table 1. Variables considered

Name of agency
Country
City
Format (URL)
General link to the main promoter
Specific promoter
Year established
Size of work team
Women and men in it
Activity carried out by each of the members
Signatory of the IFCN Code

Source: created by the author

To systematise the tasks carried out by the people working in fact-checking agencies, three categories have been established: production/administration, writing/editing, and technical support, with one complementary task, training. In terms of responsibility, management and non-management positions are differentiated.

The methodological technique utilised is the case study, an analysis of the characteristics of each of the fact-checking agencies studied, with their corresponding contingency tables and relationships between variables.

Finally, the proportionality of the sexes employed in fact-checking agencies has been contrasted with that of the general labour market using statistics from the International Labor Organization (International Labor Organization. ILOSTATS; 2023-1, 2023-2, 2023-3).

3. Results

### 3.1. Fact-checking sites in the world

Duke Reporters' Lab (Duke University Reporters' Lab, 2023) published their tenth report on the Global Fact-checkers Census in June 2023. According to this report, as of that date, there were 417 operational sites in over one hundred countries around the world. This number has grown by 47% since 2018 (Table 2, Figure 1) although growth has slowed in recent years (Stencel, M. et al., 2023).

Table 2. Change in active fact-checking agencies

	2018	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
Total	289	351	401	419	424	417
Entrants	68	83	67	34	20	3
Leavers	21	17	16	15	9	2
Annual variation	47	66	51	19	11	1

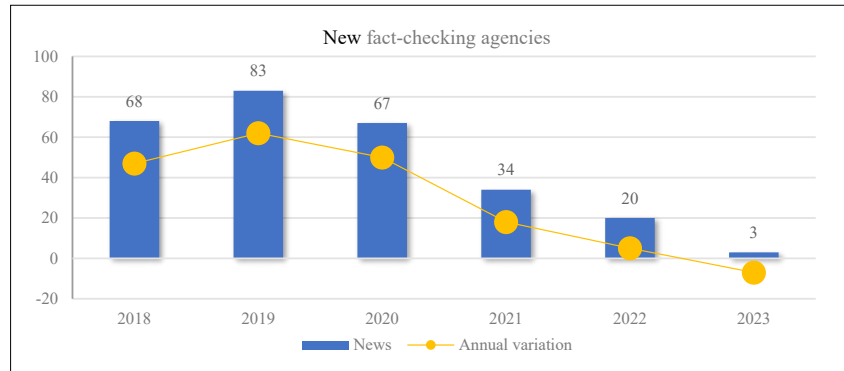**Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Created by the authors**

Figure 1. Active fact-checking agencies by year
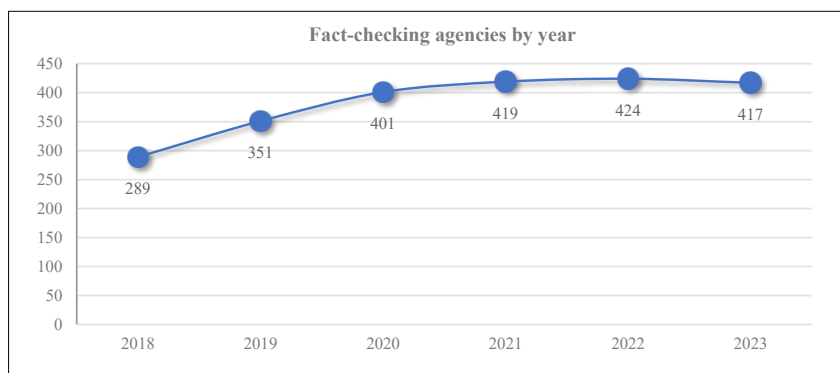
Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Created by the authors

The greatest growth was recorded in 2019, when 83 new fact-checking sites and organisations were recorded (Figure 2). These numbers mark a recessive trend that can be interpreted as a loss of interest or may mean that the growth of recent years has saturated the market or halted as a consequence of the global pandemic. More than a third of the growth since 2019 came from existing fact-checking sites that added new outlets to expand their reach to other places and different audiences, such as France Press, the French international news service.

Figure 2. Changes in fact-checking agencies by year

Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Created by the authors

Fact-checkers, like their audiences, are a multilingual community, and many of them publish their findings in several languages, either on the same website or, in some cases, on alternative sites. English is the commonest language, followed by Spanish, French, Arabic, Portuguese, Korean, German, and Hindi, according to the 2022 census (Stencel, M. et al., 2022).

According to the same census, almost two-thirds of fact-checkers are associated with media organisations. But there are also other ties and business models, including links to academic institutions and non-governmental or nonprofit organisations. Some of these fact-checkers have agreements with various organisations. More than a fifth of the community operates independently (Stencel, M. et al., 2022).

3.2. Fact-checking sites in Latin America

Table 3 and Figure 3 show the relationship by country of location of the 54 active fact-checking agencies working in Spanish or Portuguese from the Duke Reporters' Lab census in 2023 that have been utilised in this study, from among the 417 in the global census, practically 13% of the total (Duke University Reporters' Lab; 2023). *Fato ou Fake* from the Globo Group, Brazil has not been considered, since its most recent fact-checking is from April 2023, neither has *BioBioChile Notas Fakenews* since its current activity consists, fundamentally, of the dissemination of information about fake news and not fact-checking itself, nor have Fake News Report, of Chile, whose last fact-checking is from 2020, Ecuador Verifica, because it reports to Ecuador Chequea, or El Observador, from the TV channel La Sexta, Spain, because its fact-checking is handled by Newtral.

Table 3. Active fact-checking agencies by country (2023)

Country	Fact-checking agencies
Argentina	3
Bolivia	2
Brazil	8
Chile	9
Colombia	4
Costa Rica	2
Cuba	1
Ecuador	1
Spain	7
Guatemala	1
Mexico	4
Peru	4
Portugal	4
Uruguay	1
Venezuela	3
Total	54

Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Created by the authors

Figure 3. Active fact-checking agencies by country (2023)
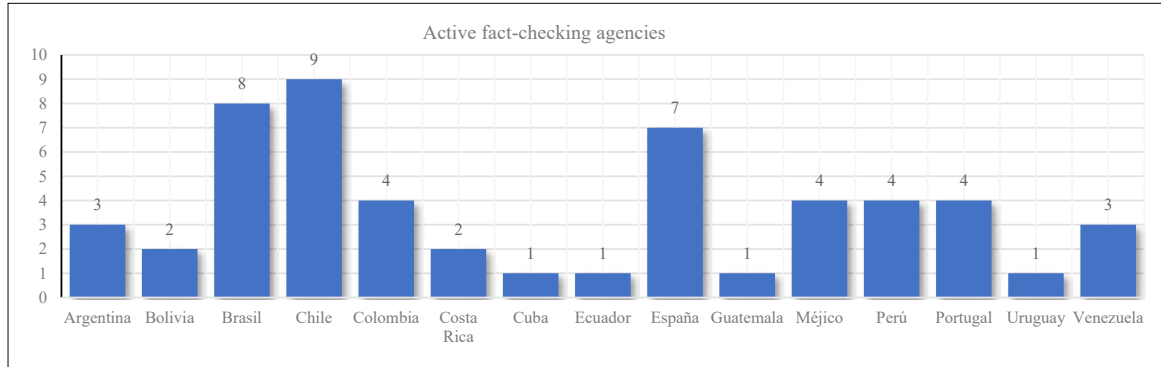
Source: Duke Reporters' Lab. Created by the authors

Table 4. Characteristics of active fact-checking agencies (2023)

Country	Name	url	City	Type	Association	Year of creation	IFCN (Sept 2022)
Argentina	AFP Factual (Argentina)	https://factual.afp.com/afp-argentina	Buenos Aires	Media	France Press	2018	ifcn
Argentina	Chequeado	https://www.chequeado.com	Buenos Aires	NGO	Fundación de la Voz Pública	2010	ifcn
Argentina	Reverso	http://www.reversoar.com/	Buenos Aires	Media	Chequeado	2021	
Bolivia	Bolivia Verifica	https://boliviaverifica.bo/	La Paz	NGO	Fundación para el Periodismo	2019	
Bolivia	Chequea Bolivia	https://chequeabolivia.bo/	Cochabamba	Independent	Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Económica y Social (CERES)	2019	
Brazil	AFP Checamos (Brazil)	https://checamos.afp.com/afp-brasil	Rio de Janeiro	Media	France Press	2018	ifcn
Brazil	Agencia Lupa	https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/lupa/	Rio de Janeiro	Media	UOL Group	2019	ifcn
Brazil	Aos Fatos	https://www.aosfatos.org	Rio de Janeiro	Independent		2015	ifcn
Brazil	Boatos ("Rumores")	Boatos.org	Brasilia	Independent		2013	

Brazil	Comprova	https://projetocomprova.com.br/	Sao Paulo	Media	Associação Brasileira de Jornalismo Investigativo	2018	
Brazil	Estadão Verifica	https://politica.estadao.com.br/blogs/estadao-verifica/	Sao Paulo	Media	Estadao Group	2018	ifcn
Brazil	E-farsas	http://www.e-farsas.com	Sao Paulo	Independent		2012	
Brazil	UOL-Confere	https://noticias.uol.com.br/confere	Sao Paulo	Media	UOL Group	2017	ifcn
Chile	AFP Factual (Chile)	https://factual.afp.com/afp-chile	Santiago	Media	France Press	2018	ifcn
Chile	Cazadores de Fake News	https://cazadoresdefakenews.info/	Santiago	Independent		2019	
Chile	El Polígrafo	https://digital.elmercurio.com/	Santiago	Media	El Mercurio	2013	
Chile	FastCheckCL	https://fastcheck.cl/	Santiago	Independent		2019	ifcn
Chile	FactCheking CL	https://factchecking.cl/	Santiago	Academic institution	Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile	2018	
Chile	La Tercera	https://www.latercera.com/etiqueta/fact-checking/	Santiago	Media	La Tercera	2019	
Chile	Mala Espina Check	https://www.malaespinacheck.cl	Santiago	Independent		2019	ifcn
Chile	Meganoticias' Noticias Falsas	https://www.meganoticias.cl/temas/Noticias-falsas/	Santiago	Media	Canal Mega TV	2019	
Chile	Observatorio de Datos del Periodismo y la Comunicación	https://observatoriodedatos.com/category/fact-checking/	Santiago	Academic institution	Adolfo Ibáñez University	2019	
Colombia	AFP Factual (Colombia)	https://factual.afp.com/afp-Colombia	Bogota	Media	France Press	2018	ifcn
Colombia	Colombia Check	https://colombiacheck.com/	Bogota	Independent	Several	2016	ifcn
Colombia	Detector de mentiras	https://lasillavacia.com/detector-mentiras	Bogota	Media	La Silla Vacía	2014	ifcn
Colombia	RedCheck	https://redcheq.com.co/	Bogota	Media	The Editorial Board	2019	
Costa Rica	Doble Check	http://doblecheck.cr	San José	Academic institution	Radioemisoras UCR	2018	

Costa Rica	No coma cuento	https://www.nacion.com/no-coma-cuento/	San José	Media	La Nación	2018	
Cuba	El toque de facto	https://eltoque.com/proyectos/eltoque-defacto-verificacion-datos	Havana	Media	El Toque	2020	
Ecuador	Ecuador Chequea	https://www.ecuadorchequea.com/	Quito	NGO	FUNDAMEDIOS	2019	ifcn
Spain	AFP Comprovem (Fact Check)	https://comprovem.afp.com/list	Barcelona	Media	France Press	2023	ifcn
Spain	AFP Factual (Spain)	https://factual.afp.com/afp-espana	Madrid	Media	France Press	2018	ifcn
Spain	EFE Verifica	https://verifica.efe.com/	Madrid	Media	EFE Agency	2019	ifcn
Spain	Maldita.es	https://maldita.es/	Madrid	Independent		2014	
Spain	Newtral	https://www.newtral.es/	Madrid	Independent		2018	ifcn
Spain	Verificat	https://www.verificat.cat/	Barcelona	Independent		2019	ifcn
Spain	Infoveritas	https://info-veritas.com/		Independent	AGRANDA, SL	2022	
Guatemala	Fáctica	https://www.agenciaocote.com/proyectos/factica/	Guatemala city	Independent	Ocote Agency	2022	
Mexico	AFP Factual (Mexico)	https://factual.afp.com/afp-mexico	Mexico City	Media	France Press	2018	ifcn
Mexico	El sabueso (Animal político)	https://www.animalpolitico.com/sabueso/	Mexico City	Media	AnimalPolítico	2015	ifcn
Mexico	Ficciones Informativas	https://escenariotlx.com/ficcionesinformativas/	Tlaxcala	Media	Escenario Tlaxcala	2021	
Mexico	Verificado	https://verificado.com.mx/	Monterey	Independent		2018	
Peru	#ConvocaVerifica	https://convoca.pe/verifica/reportaje	Lime	Media	Convoca	2020	
Peru	Ojo Biónico	https://ojo-publico.com/ojobionico	Lime	Independent	Ojo Público	2018	
Peru	Salud con Lupa's Comprueba	https://saludconlupa.com/comproba/	Lime	Media	Salud con Lupa	2019	
Peru	Verificador	https://larepublica.pe/verificador/	Lime	Media	Grupo La República Publicaciones SA	2019	ifcn

Portugal	Fact Checks do Observador	http://observador.pt/seccao/observador/fact-check/	Lisbon	Media	El Observador	2015	
Portugal	Polígrafo	https://poligrafo.sapo.pt/	Lisbon	Independent		2019	ifcn
Portugal	Público's Prova dos Factos	https://www.publico.pt/prova-dos-factos	Lisbon	Media	Público	2016	
Portugal	Viral Check	https://reporterslab.org/fact-checking/#	Lisbon	Independent		2021	ifcn
Uruguay	AFP Factual (Uruguay)	https://factual.afp.com/afp-uruguay	Montevideo	Media	France Press	2018	ifcn
Venezuela	Cocuyo Chequea	https://efectococuyo.com/category/cocuyo-chequea/	Caracas	Media	Efecto Cocuyo	2018	
Venezuela	Cotejo	https://cotejo.info/	Barquisimeto	NGO	Asociación Civil Medianálisis	2016	
Venezuela	Es paja	https://espaja.com/	Caracas	Independent	Transparencia Venezuela	2019	

Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Created by the authors

A majority of them, 40, that is, 74%, practically three quarters, are located in the national capital (Table 4).

It should be noted that the agencies called AFP Factual, located in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Spain, Mexico, and Uruguay, are sub-agencies of the France Press agency which work together.

The degree of complementarity and shared work carried out by many of the agencies, both nationally and between countries is also worth highlighting. Thus, we find Reverso and Chequeado in Argentina, RedCheck in Colombia, which is supported by Colombia Check, Ecuador Verifica, supported by Ecuador Chequea or El Objective in Spain, whose fact-checking personnel are employees of Newtral, their sub-contractor. Among these agencies we must mention LatamChequea (https://chequeado.com/latamchequea/#/), a network of fact-checkers from Latin America, the United States, Spain, and Portugal created and led by Chequeado that was established in 2014 and currently brings together 38 media outlets in 18 countries. Its objective is to share experiences and tools to improve the quality of public debate and foster collaborative processes between media in the region to thus reinforce fact-checking and the struggle against disinformation.

Regarding their organisation and financing, different categories can be established depending on whether they are integrated into media groups and media outlets; are independent, based on private agencies or an associative network; are linked to non-governmental or non-profit organisations or are dependent on academic institutions.

Although Table 5 and Figure 4 show the classification of the Duke Reporters' Lab census that refers to what may be considered the most important association, many of them share a relationship with the media, civil society and non-governmental organisations and university departments, without forgetting international companies and institutions like the European Journalism Centre in the Netherlands, the National Endowment for Democracy, Facebook, Google, the International Center for

Journalists, the Thomson Foundation, the Poynter Institute's International Fact-Checking Network, Open Society Foundations, Oxfam or PolitiFact.

Table 5. Active fact-checking agencies by category (2023)

Category	Number	Percentage	Percentage of the global census (2022)
Media	29	53.70%	59%
Independent	18	33.33%	23%
NGO	4	7.41%	12%
Academic institution	3	5.56%	6%
Total	54	100%	100%

Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Created by the authors

Figure 4. Active fact-checking agencies by category (2023)
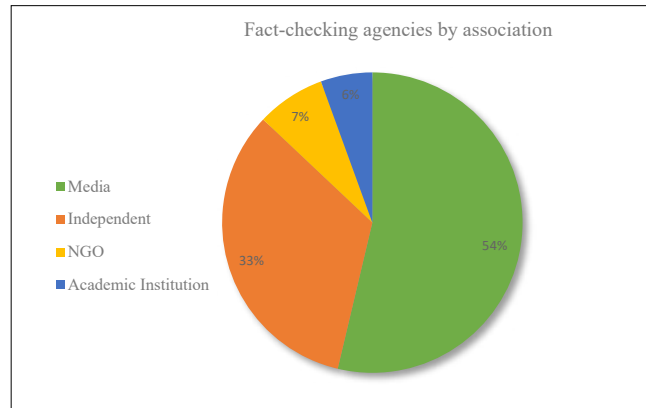
Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Created by the authors

29 of the 54 agencies studied, that is 54%, are associated with the media; 18, 33%, consider themselves independent or unaffiliated; 4 are associated with NGOs, 7%, and finally 3 with academic institutions, 6%. The percentages are similar to the total number of fact-checking agencies gathered in the database where, in the 2022 census, 59% were associated with the media, 23% were considered independent, 12% affiliated with NGOs and 6% with an academic institution. There seem to be fewer ties to the media in Latin America, agencies considered to be independent being favoured.

If we look at the year the agencies were set up, the oldest agency is Chequeado from Argentina, linked to the NGO Fundación de la Voz Pública, which has been active since 2010 and is one of the top ten fact-checkers in the world, whilst the newest fact-checkers are Fáctica from Guatemala. and Infoveritas from España, which began to operate in 2022, both of these being independent, and AFP Comprovem (Fact Check), a Catalan version of AFP Factual existing since 2023. If the Latin American data on the creation of fact-checking sites is compared with the development of new global agencies, it can be seen that activity in the southern cone in 2018-2019 was considerably greater than total activity in terms of the setting up of agencies.

Figure 5. Active fact-checking agencies by year of establishment
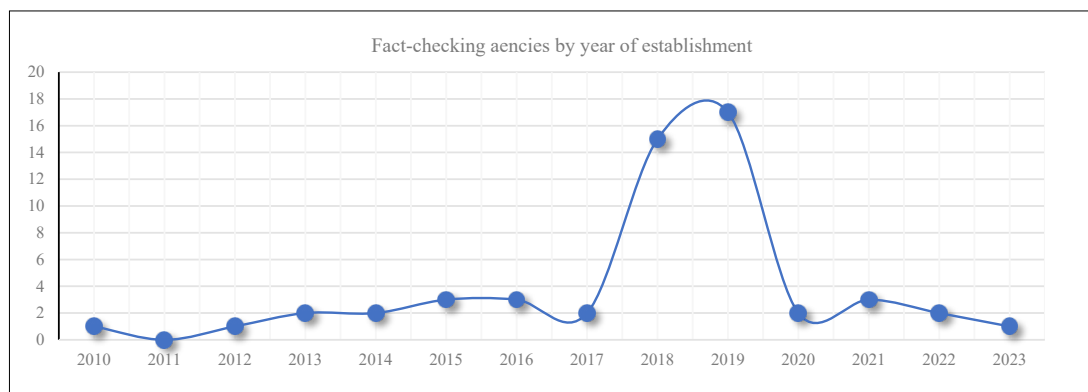
Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Created by the authors

3.3. The people who do the checking. Sex/gender analysis

In order to collect data on the people who work in these agencies and analyse the role of women therein, the corresponding websites have been visited and the data they offer in their personnel section has been catalogued, taking into account their sex and the type of tasks they perform, data that is not included in the Duke Reporters' Lab reports.

This information was not available on all websites, either because it did not exist or because they were not disaggregated from the parent institution or company, especially true of those associated with the media. In such cases the data was requested through their respective contact channels, either via the web or via email. And finally, when this route did not prove to be effective, individual authorship of the fact-checking over the most recent period (January-July 2023) was looked at. All of which provides added value to this study.

It should be noted that, when refining the data, a series of restrictive criteria have been established. Thus, Ecuador's two fact-checking agencies, Ecuador Verifica and Ecuador Chequea, which share Ecuador Chequea personnel, are considered, for the purposes of this study, to be a single fact-checking site; for the Reverso and Chequeado agencies in Argentina, which also share personnel, staff were counted as working for Chequeado, and in Spain where El Objective from La Sexta uses Newtral

personnel, only Newtral has been considered and, from among its personnel, only those specifically dedicated to fact-checking tasks, as stated on its public website.

After these refinements, the global sample was deemed to be representative and reliable for the purposes of this study.

The first conclusion is that women predominate in the media analysed in all the countries, except in Chile, Ecuador, and Venezuela. 57% of the total of personnel analysed were women and 43% men, a difference of 14 percent (Figure 7). The country with the most people counted is Spain (86) followed by Portugal (78), Brazil (70), Argentina (52) and Chile (34) (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Personnel in active fact-checking agencies by country and sex (2023)
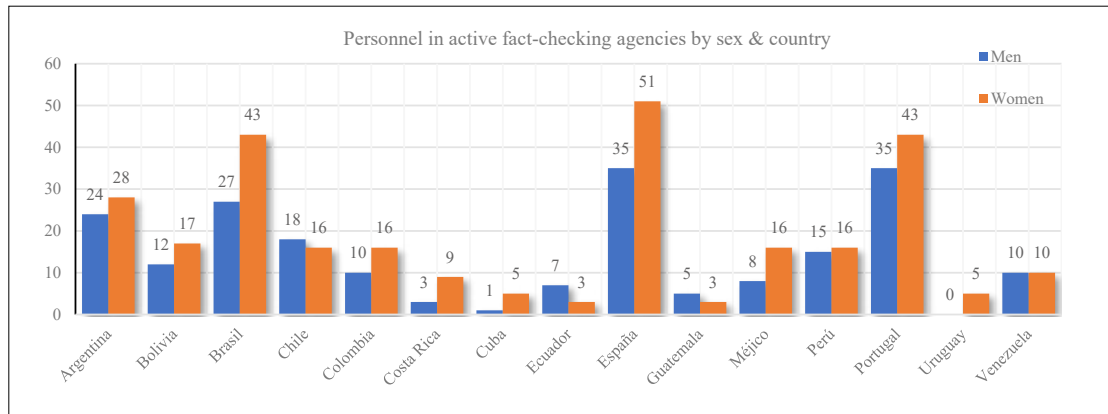
Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Fact-checking agency websites. Created by the authors

Figure 7. Personnel in active fact-checking agencies by sex (2023)
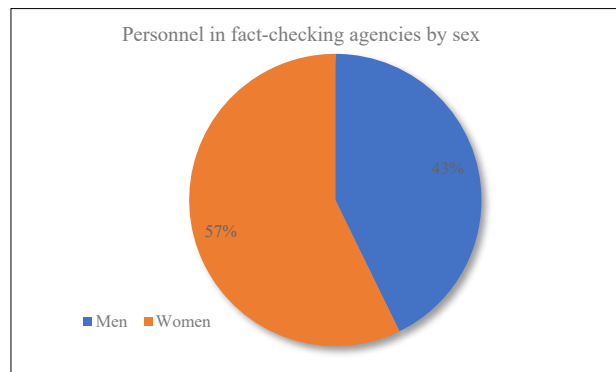
Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Fact-checking agency websites. Created by the authors

Among the agencies with the greatest number of people employed are Chequeado from Argentina, with 38, Bolivia Verifica, with 21, Agencia Lupa from Brazil, with 31, Maldita.es from Spain, with 44 and Polígrafo and Viral Check from Portugal, with 30 employees. The differences in the numbers of people dedicated to fact-checking may be due to the type of agency, thus those specifically dedicated to fact-checking employ more personnel, some dedicated to administrative or technical work at the same time as checking, while in others these tasks are assumed by the global structure sustaining the agencies.

To contextualise the personnel data disaggregated by sex, the active population and employment data provided by the International Labor Organization (International Labor Organization. ILOSTATS, 2023-1, 2023-2) has been used, the data figuring in Table 6 and Figure 8. For the purposes of the study, active population is understood to be all people of working age who are currently employed or unemployed, while the employed or active population are considered to be all those of working age who, during the specified time, were engaged in paid employment or self-employment.

**Table 6. Active population and employed population by sex and country in thousands**

Country	Year	Active population					Employed population				
		Both genders	Men	Women	%Men	%Women	Both genders	Men	Women	%Men	%Women
Argentina	2021	13,413.4	7,557.1	5,856.3	56.34%	43.66%	12,241.6	6,960.7	5,280.9	56.86%	43.14%
Bolivia	2022	6,645.2	3,518.2	3,127.0	52.94%	47.06%	6,149.1	3,274.6	2,874.5	53.25%	46.75%
Brazil	2022	107,877.3	60,519.4	47,357.9	56.10%	43.90%	97,919.0	56,003.0	41,916.0	57.19%	42.81%
Chile	2022	9,675.1	5,561.6	4,113.5	57.48%	42.52%	8,877.0	5,125.9	3,751.1	57.74%	42.26%
Colombia	2022	24,629.8	14,270.3	10,359.5	57.94%	42.06%	22,032.2	13,039.8	8,992.4	59.19%	40.81%
Costa Rica	2022	2,521.4	1,497.1	1,024.3	59.38%	40.62%	2,235.9	1,367.5	868.3	61.16%	38.84%
Cuba	2014	5,105.5	3,197.4	1,908.1	62.63%	37.37%	4,918.8	3,080.2	1,838.6	62.62%	37.38%
Ecuador	2022	8,356.0	4,834.1	3,521.9	57.85%	42.15%	8,041.8	4,676.4	3,365.4	58.15%	41.85%
Spain	2022	23,415.3	12,357.9	11,057.4	52.78%	47.22%	20,390.5	10,965.2	9,425.3	53.78%	46.22%
Guatemala	2022	7,171.2	4,470.0	2,701.2	62.33%	37.67%	6,952.4	4,373.9	2,578.5	62.91%	37.09%

Mexico	2022	59,209.5	35,587.3	23,622.2	60.10%	39.90%	57,281.6	34,440.7	22,841.0	60.13%	39.87%
Peru	2022	19,350.4	10,538.3	8,812.1	54.46%	45.54%	18,605.2	10,190.4	8,414.8	54.77%	45.23%
Portugal	2022	5,222.7	2,615.1	2,607.6	50.07%	49.93%	4,908.7	2,470.1	2,438.6	50.32%	49.68%
Uruguay	2022	1,806.3	977.0	829.3	54.09%	45.91%	1,664.1	909.8	754.3	54.67%	45.33%
Venezuela	2020	14,654.3	8,829.4	5,824.9	60.25%	39.75%	13,551.4	8,186.6	5,364.8	60.41%	39.59%

Source: International Labor Organization. ILOSTATS (September 2023). Created by the authors

Contrary to what can be observed in the sample of fact-checking agencies in all the countries in our study, the number of women who form part of the labour force, whether in the active population or the employed population, is lower than that of men, with considerable percentage differences, over 10%, except in Bolivia, Spain, Portugal and Uruguay, in both cases, and in Peru concerning the active population, while in the personnel counted in the agencies studied there is a 14% average majority of women over men.

Figure 8. Employed population by country and sex
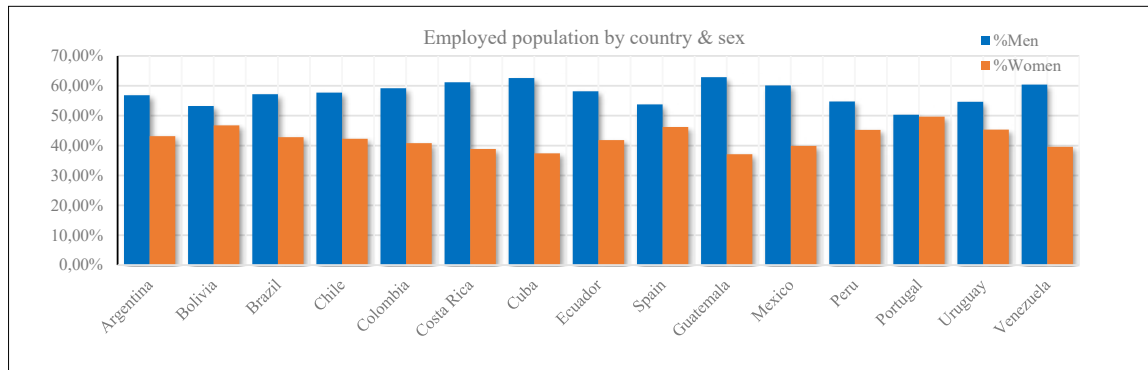
**Source: International Labor Organization. ILOSTATS (September 2023). Created by the authors**

Regarding the type of association, the personnel are distributed as shown in Table 7 and Figure 9. The largest number of people corresponds to the agencies related with the media (more than 44%), followed by agencies classified as independent, non-governmental organisations and lastly, academic institutions.

Table 7. Personnel in active fact-checking agencies by association and sex (2023)

Category	Number			Percentage	
	Men	**Women**	**Total**	**% Men**	**% Women**
Media	86	132	218	39.45	60.55
Independent	77	90	167	46.11	53.89
NGO	33	33	66	50.00	50.00
Academic institution	14	26	40	35.00	65.00
Total	210	281	491	42.77	57.23

Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Fact-checking agency websites. Created by the authors

Figure 9. Personnel in active fact-checking agencies by category (2023)
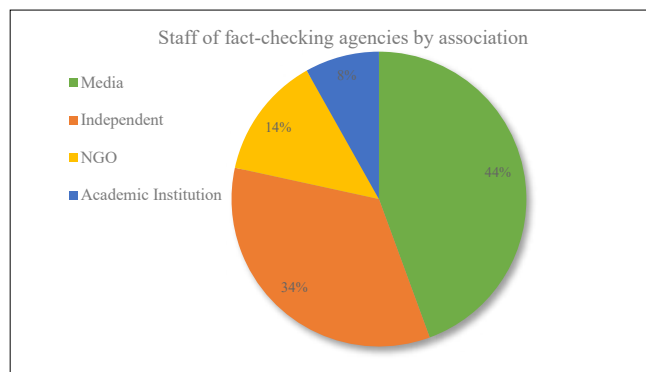
Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2023). Fact-checking agency websites. Created by the authors

If Figures 4 and 9 are compared, both of which refer to the percentual weights of the different types of association, it can be seen that while in number of agencies those tied to the media represented 54%, in terms of personnel they represent only 44%; Independent agencies represent 33% of the total of agencies and 34% of the staff. NGOs accounted for 9% of the number of agencies and represented 14% of staff, academic institutions, 6% of agencies, accounted for 8% of staff. This may be due, as mentioned previously, to the fact that in agencies associated with corporations, certain jobs, such as organisation or administration, are carried out by personnel from the general structure of the corporation, not assigned, therefore, to fact-checking data.

In all cases the number of women is higher than that of men, over 20 percent higher for the media, 8% more for independent agencies, there are no differences in the case of NGOs and 30% for academic institutions.

To systematise the tasks performed by people working for fact-checking agencies, three categories have been established: production/administration, writing/editorial, and technical support.

The first category includes tasks such as executive and journalistic management, senior management, heads of media, press, communication, training, coordination, human resources, middle management, accounting, etc. As previously mentioned, such tasks are present above all in independent or NGO agencies since those linked to the media or academic institutions use the resources of their parent institutions. Classified as editorial staff are editors, journalists, reporters, fact-checkers, etc. Finally, grouped as technical support staff, are those who carry out tasks related to audiovisual media, graphics, web editing or technological infrastructure (Table 8 and Figure 10).

Table 8. Personnel in active fact-checking agencies by task and sex (2023)

	Task	Number			Percentage	
		Men	**Women**	**Total**	**%Men**	**%Women**
Number	Production/administration	41	66	107	38.32%	61.68%
	Writing/editorial	141	202	343	41.11%	58.89%
	Technical support	28	13	41	68.29%	31.71%
	Total	210	281	491	42.77%	57.23%
Percentage	Production/administration	19.52%	23.49%	21.79%		
	Writing/editorial	67.14%	71.89%	69.86%		
	Technical support	13.33%	4.63%	8.35%		

Source: Fact-checking agency websites. Created by the authors

Figure 10. Personnel in active fact-checking agencies by task and gender (2023)

Staff in fact-checking agencies by tasks
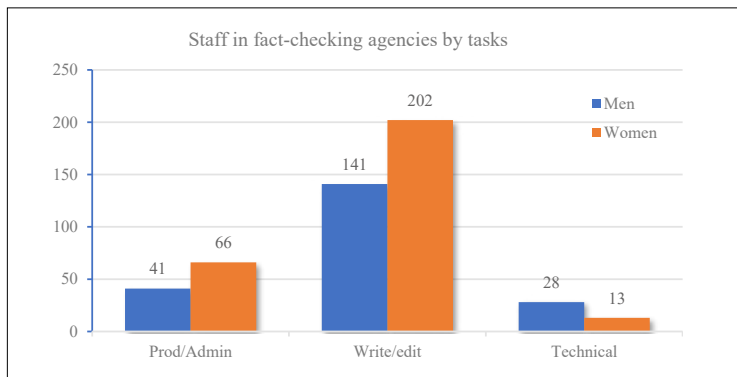
Source: Fact-checking agency websites. Created by the authors

The largest number of people is dedicated to writing tasks, 70%, both among men, 67%, and women, 72%; 22% are dedicated to production/administration tasks, while 8% perform technical tasks. The generalised bias of a greater number of men dedicated to technical tasks raises its head again here, as well as the greater number of women dedicated to production/administration jobs, which shows a certain horizontal segregation.

One of the occupations specified in many agencies as a key task is that of training. Of the people analysed, 23 were specifically assigned as trainers, training coordinators or training directors, of these, 17 are women and 6 men. Although the number of cases is small and it would be dangerous to draw general conclusions, the data would seem to confirm the dedication of women to teaching (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Personnel in active fact-checking agencies in training tasks (2023)

Personnel in fact-checking agencies in training tasks
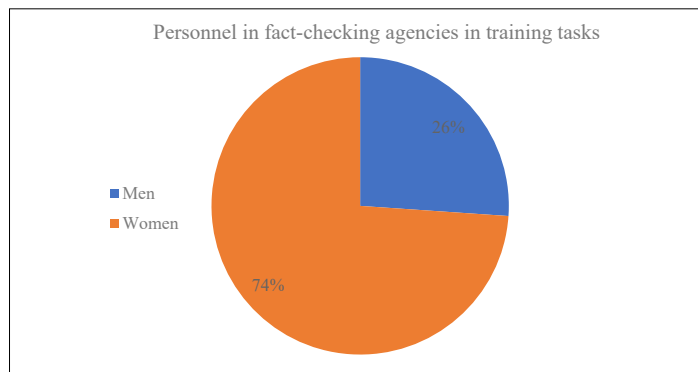
Source: Fact-checking agency websites. Created by the authors

Managerial responsibility of different employees has also been established by defining two categories: managers and non-managers. The category of managers includes all those persons thus designated, such as Executive Management, Senior Management, Management of New Technologies, or who hold a relevant position of leadership, coordination or responsibility, Presidency, Vice-Presidency, or as General Secretary.

Table 9 and Figure 12 show the results obtained, which, although they coincide, reveal the vertical segregation by sex that takes place in this as in other activities since 54% of the managers are women, while among the total staff women make up 57%. Analysing by sex, 21% of men deal with managerial tasks as opposed to 19% of women.

Table 9. Personnel in active fact-checking agencies by responsibility and sex (2023)

Responsibility		Number			Percentage	
		Men	**Women**	**Total**	**%Men**	**%Women**
Number	Executive	44	51	95	46.32%	53.68%
	Non-directive	166	230	396	41.92%	58.08%
	Total	210	281	491	42.77%	57.23%
Percentage	Executive	20.95%	18.15%	19.35%		
	Non-directive	79.05%	81.85%	80.65%		

Source: Fact-checking agency websites. Created by the authors

Figure 12. Personnel in active fact-checking agencies by responsibility and gender (2023)
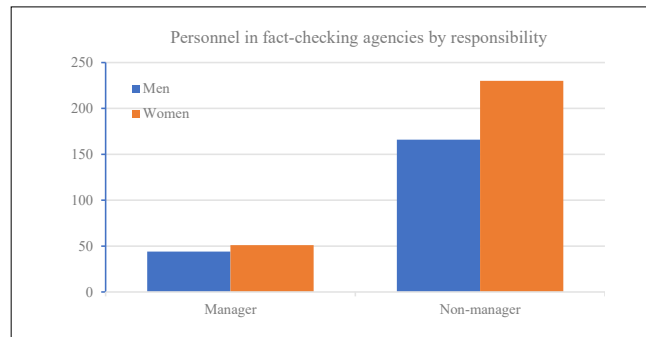
Source: Fact-checking agency websites. Created by the authors

To refine the result obtained, it is compared once again with the data that, at a general level, is provided by the statistics system of the International Labor Organization, which provides the percentage of women in management positions (Portion of women in managerial positions %) (International Labor Organization. ILOSTATS, 2023-3) which understands managerial employment as that which falls into category 1 of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), that is, directors and managers, with the results shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Percentage of women in management positions

Country	Year	%Men	%Women
Argentina	2021	67.3%	32.7%
Bolivia	2022	65.6%	34.4%
Brazil	2022	60.7%	39.3%
Chile	2022	70.4%	29.6%
Colombia	2022	56.5%	43.5%
Costa Rica	2022	54.0%	46.0%
Cuba	2010	61.9%	38.1%
Ecuador	2022	61.2%	38.8%
Spain	2022	65.3%	34.7%
Guatemala	2022	64.7%	35.3%
Mexico	2022	60.8%	39.2%
Peru	2022	64.2%	35.8%
Portugal	2022	63.1%	36.9%
Uruguay	2022	64.0%	36.0%
Venezuela	2017	67.2%	32.8%

Source: International Labor Organization. ILOSTATS (September 2023). Created by the authors

An average difference greater than 26% in favour of men can be estimated. The largest gender gap is in Chile, at 41 percent, and the smallest in Costa Rica, 8%, but the majority are over 20%.

Among the total active and employed population one can estimate an average gender gap of 15 percentage points in favour of men, while amongst those who work in fact-checking agencies this average gap would be 14% in favour of women. In the case of management positions, this difference reaches 26 percent among the total population, while in the case of personnel counted in the fact-checking agencies analysed it is 8 percent in favour of women.

Reuters Institute has recently published the results of its study Women and Leadership in the News Media in 2023: Evidence from 12 Markets (Reuters Institute, 2023). The sample includes South Africa, Kenya, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Finland, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, Mexico, and Brazil. Its conclusions highlight that barely 22% of the 180 hierarchical positions in the 240 media outlets analysed are held by women, despite the fact that, on average, women represent 40% of the total number of journalists in the profession across the 12 markets. Last year this figure was 21%. The percentage of women in management positions varies significantly between the different markets, from 5% in Mexico to 44% in the United States.

Although the geographical areas studied may differ, the greater presence of women in positions of responsibility within data fact-checking agencies is apparent once again.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Throughout this study, the main objective has been to analyse fact-checking agencies in the Ibero-American area, that is, in Latin America, Spain and Portugal. Previous consideration showed a manifest interest amongst media organisations, universities and in civil society for action of this type, this having been confirmed since the global census of the Duke Reporters' Lab, composed in 2023 of 417 active agencies, showed 54 in this geographical region (Dafonte, Corbacho & García, 2021).

One of the most significant findings has been the degree of complementarity and shared work carried out by many of the agencies, both within one country and among several, creating networks of cooperation, among which LatamChequea stands out, including as it does 38 fact-checking organisations from 18 nations. This data confirms previous studies (Thomas, 2017; Palomo, Teruel & Blanco, 2019) that showed how, due to the volume of data involved, the scarcity of resources or the weakness of the business structure, many of these agencies in Latin America decided to operate jointly to optimise their work and achieve results that they could not achieve utilising their resources alone. Such collaboration aims to consolidate large-scale public service information activity that prioritises the societal agenda (Palau, 2018).

With reference to the above, Saldaña & Mourão (2018) had identified difficulties in performing *watchdog journalism* in Latin America due to the lack of a culture of investigative journalism, the high levels of crime and corruption, censorship, and media ownership structure. This explains why the percentage of independent agencies is higher in the region than the global figures. Thus, of the 54 agencies studied, 57%, are associated with the media, versus 59%, in the total census; 29% consider themselves independent or unaffiliated, compared to 23% around the world; those associated with NGOs make up 9%, compared to 12%. As Westlund and Ekström (2018) point out, research must pay attention to news platforms that operate independently on

networks outside of mainstream media. Even more so since these agencies, despite their generally being quite small, are pioneers in applying new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence in daily journalistic work and this marks a way forward for traditional media (Sánchez & Sánchez, 2022).

The second specific objective of this study was to address the sex-gender analysis of the employment structure of these fact-checking companies. To this end, a specific categorisation has been established for the study and it has been compared with the data provided by the agencies, contacting them on the many occasions where the data was not public.

Of the total number of staff analysed, 57% were women and 43% men, a difference of 14 percentage points. In all countries, with the exception of Chile, Ecuador and Venezuela, the number of female fact-checkers is greater than that of men. The figures show a positive balance in terms of equality for this new journalistic business model. Something of particular value as it occurs in a context of violence in which female journalists face additional difficulties in the performance of their profession (Tejedor, Cervi & Tusa, 2022). In fact-checking agencies, they manage to overcome the systematic exclusion in the public sphere and the structural discrimination that characterises the region (De Frutos & Jorge, 2022).

However, the fine print of this data needs to be studied, here one finds that there are a greater number of men dedicated to technical jobs and of women in production/ administration jobs. Training tasks usually fall to the women as well.

The fact that 54% of the executives in these companies are women - and that is a figure which is growing - is at least encouraging. It is a figure that encourages one to consider that progress is being made in eliminating the glass ceiling, because they represent 57% of the workforce in the projects analysed. It can be concluded that, in the area studied, progress is being made to end the vertical segregation present across a wide range of economic sectors.

These figures bring to mind that fact-checking tasks were *women's work* in the printed press during the first half of the 20th century and continue to be so on the new fact-checking platforms; and how women have traditionally been in charge of meticulous tasks of recompiling and systematising data in science throughout the centuries. But now the concept has been updated and means that women have made a place for themselves at the forefront of new journalistic initiatives that seek to open up new markets and explore fresh ways of narrating information.

Finally, it should be noted that this work has been supported by the information published by the Duke Reporters' Lab, in the first instance, and also by the different fact-checking agencies located in Latin America, Spain and Portugal, whose difficulties have already been listed. Regarding the limitations of this study, it is to be supposed that there are agencies not included in the Duke Reporters' Lab and that it is advisable to regularly corroborate the information which agencies publish on their websites their personnel.

From this point on, it is proposed to compare the results obtained for these countries with different national settings, such as Europe, in order to find possible patterns or lines of rupture between the fact-checking agencies that have emerged with such force over recent years. Consideration should also be given to seeing whether the presence of women fact-checkers in the European media has gained the same weight as it has in Latin America, Spain, and Portugal.

5. Acknowledgments

6. Specific contributions of each author

	Name and Surname
Conception and design of the work	Laura Teruel Rodríguez and M.ª Francisca Montiel Torres
Methodology	M.ª Francisca Montiel Torres
Data collection and analysis	M.ª Francisca Montiel Torres
Discussion and conclusions	Laura Teruel Rodríguez and M.ª Francisca Montiel Torres
Drafting, formatting, version review and approval	Laura Teruel Rodríguez and M.ª Francisca Montiel Torres

7. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest contained in this article.

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