


Local verification and fact-checking strategies in Brazil: National Network to Combat Disinformation, COAR Noticias, Colectivo Bereia, Verifica RS and Agência Tatu

Estrategias locales de verificación y fact-checking en Brasil: la Red Nacional de Combate a la Desinformación, COAR Noticias, Colectivo Bereia, Verifica RS y Agência Tatu

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Antonia Isabel Nogales-Bocio. Associate Professor at the Predepartmental Unit of Journalism, Audiovisual Communication, and Advertising, University of Zaragoza. PhD and Bachelor's Degree in Journalism from the University of Seville. Master's Degree in Philosophy and Modern Culture from the University of Seville. Director of *Radio Unizar*. Member of the research groups GICID (Digital Communication and Information Research Group) at the University of Zaragoza and SMEMIU, affiliated with UNED (Spanish Distance Learning University). Accredited as a University Senior Lecturer by ANECA (Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation). Holds 1 six-year research period (*sexenio*) recognized by CNEAI (National Commission for the Assessment of Research Activity). According to Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=-KueKSgAAAAJ&hl=es>), her work has received 523 citations on the platform, with an h-index of 10 and an i10-index of 11.

University of Zaragoza, Spain 
anogales@unizar.es
ORCID: 0000-0003-0050-6979



Julieti Sussi De Oliveira. PhD in Communication from the University of Seville, with an International Mention from the University of Algarve (Portugal) and *cum laude* distinction (unanimous decision). Lecturer. University of Barcelona. Author of over 40 publications in her research areas: *communication and culture, political communication, and communication and power*. Member of the international scientific committee and organizing committee of the *International Congress on Communication and Thought* (CICYP). Visiting professor at at the Federal University of Santa Catarina in Brazil and the University of Algarve in Portugal.

University of Barcelona, Spain 
julieti.oliveira@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0003-4476-7791

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Carmen Marta-Lazo. Carmen Marta-Lazo. Full Professor of Journalism at the University of Zaragoza. Principal Investigator of the Digital Communication and Information Research Group (GICID). Director of the Pre-Departmental Unit of Journalism, Audiovisual Communication and Advertising at the University of Zaragoza and of the digital platform Entremedios. Co-editor of the Mediterranean Journal of Communication (Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación). Author of more than two hundred publications, including books, book chapters, and articles related to her research areas: media literacy, digital competencies, and social media uses and interactions. An h-index of 34 on Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=vxisuH0AAAAJ&hl=es>. 207 publications registered on ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0004-1094>. 1,638 citations on ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Carmen-Lazo-2>. According to Dialnet, she is the most cited female author in the field of Journalism: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/autor?codigo=2308979>
University of Zaragoza, Spain 
cmarta@unizar.es
ORCID: 0000-0002-0004-1094

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Abstract:

Disinformation is a growing phenomenon that is increasingly present in contemporary societies. In recent years, fact-checking initiatives have become one of the central strategies in the fight against false information that is increasingly shared and viralized. Although most of these initiatives have their origin in the journalistic profession, becoming just another professional specialization, strategies and policies to combat disinformation in local contexts by academic bodies or non-profit organizations are on the rise. However, research in this area is still scarce and shallow. In this article, we examine the role of the National Network to Combat Disinformation (RNCD), created in Brazil in 2019, as well as four of its most prominent initiatives: COAR Noticias, Colectivo Bereia, Verifica RS and Agência Tatu. Through a qualitative approach, a case study design is adopted, complemented with semi-structured interviews, to analyze the implementation and verification strategies of these initiatives to combat misinformation and the specificities they face in the local environment.

Keywords:

Misinformation; disinformation; fact-checking; verification; fake news; local environment.

Resumen:

La desinformación es un fenómeno creciente y cada vez más presente en las sociedades contemporáneas. Las iniciativas de verificación o fact-checking se han convertido en los últimos años en una de las estrategias centrales en la lucha contra la información falsa que se comparte y se viraliza cada vez más. Aunque la mayoría de estas iniciativas tienen su origen en la profesión periodística, convirtiéndose en una especialización profesional más, las estrategias y políticas para combatir la desinformación en contextos locales de la mano de instancias académicas u organizaciones sin ánimo de lucro van en aumento. No obstante, las investigaciones en esta línea son aún escasas y poco profundas. En el presente artículo, examinamos el papel de la Red Nacional de Combate a la Desinformación (RNCD), creada en Brasil en 2019, así como de cuatro de sus iniciativas más destacadas y proactivas: COAR Noticias, Colectivo Bereia, Verifica RS y Agência Tatu. A través de un enfoque cualitativo, se adopta el diseño de estudio de caso, complementado con entrevistas semiestructuradas, para analizar las estrategias de implementación y verificación de estas iniciativas de combate a la desinformación y las especificidades que enfrentan en el contexto local.

Palabras clave:

Desinformación; fact-checking; verificación; fake news; contexto local.

1. Introduction

1.1. *Disinformation, Info-Pollution, and Media Literacy*

Disinformation has become a global challenge for states and supranational organizations. It fosters public distrust in journalism and can be exploited to amplify narratives contrary to democratic values, science, and human rights. Creators of disinformation, regardless of its various forms (misinformation, false or malicious content) or motivations (provocation, parody, partisanship, profit, power, influence, or propaganda) (IFJ, 2018), intentionally blend it with truthful information to evade detection. This increases the likelihood that users will believe it uncritically or share it without considering the potential consequences (Marta-Lazo, 2023).

In today's digital landscape, the transformation of media has spurred the emergence of new professional roles in Communication and Journalism, particularly in fact-checking (Cantón-Correa et al., 2025).

Verification is an integral part of journalistic routines, requiring journalists to authenticate data before publishing news. This necessity has also given rise to a distinct journalistic practice (Cano, Capelli & Lali, 2023). Fact-checking focuses on verifying political statements and statistical data presented by authorities –regardless of whether they were published in traditional media or on social platforms. It employs data journalism techniques to uncover errors, ambiguities, falsehoods, lack of rigor, or inaccuracies (Véllez & Enríquez, 2024). In this context, fact-checkers must leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies to automate and enhance the accuracy of news verification– without overlooking critical thinking and ethical considerations when assessing information (Cifuentes & Sixto-García, 2022). With the rapid advancement of AI, and depending on the various purposes of disinformation tactics, disinformation techniques have diversified and multiplied: active or passive data manipulation, information suppression (censorship), audiovisual format manipulation (deepfakes), creation of compelling narrative frameworks, or fragmented attention (Marta-Lazo, 2024, p. 108). Consequently, there is a growing need for fact-checking initiatives and skilled verifiers who are digitally competent, technically proficient, and committed to truthfulness. The optimal use of AI and robotics, OSINT techniques (open-source intelligence), image analysis, or data visualization are among the most specific training areas for fact-checkers, while the diversity of themes within disinformation practices demands an increasing trend toward specialization (García-Marín, Rubio-Jordán & Salvat-Martinrey, 2023) among fact-checkers.

In today's newsrooms, production routines are being adapted through various verification processes that involve: monitoring and identifying claims to verify (detection), gathering data to check content (reporting), and disproving falsehoods (debunking) –processes in which AI implementation streamlines operations (Guo et al., 2022). Additionally, digital media websites typically specify the verification methodology used and the measurement scales employed (López-Pan & Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2020). These practices provide citizens with guidelines for information verification processes, thereby enhancing the mediating role of information professionals within media organizations through their transparent methods of implementing source filtering and news production processes. The inclusion of transparency recommendations regarding AI use in major fact-checking codes of best practices is a key aspect for strengthening the ethical application of this technology in the verification field (Cuartielles, Mauri-Ríos & Rodríguez Martínez, 2024).

Meanwhile a growing number of studies in the educational field are focusing on the need to equip students with tools to combat disinformation (Cebrián, 2019; Martínez-Costa et al., 2023; Sábada, Salaverría & Bringué-Sala, 2023) through educommunication dynamics and the acquisition of digital competencies. From the perspective of media literacy studies, there is increasing reflection on how shared and viralized content connects with individuals' personal development, analyzing how social networks play an essential role in shaping both online and offline identity. Far from the utopian premise of Net neutrality, it is important to acknowledge that "these platforms, networks or media are subject to economic, political and ideological control that conditions which cultures are truly represented and promoted within them" (Nogales-Bocio, 2023, p. 233). We thus face a world with an overwhelming amount of information, where most citizens -barring disruptions caused by various digital divides (connectivity, territorial, educational, social, etc.)- can access this vast informational offering, which is dominated by contamination or "*infopollution*".

1.2. Verification initiatives, journalism and proximity

The relationship between journalism and verification is particularly close and has been the subject of many studies (Graves & Konieczna, 2015; Robertson & Mourao, 2020; Singer, 2021; García-Marín, Rubio-Jordán & Salvat-Martinrey, 2023). Today, fact-checking has become another form of journalism (Graves, 2018), gaining prominence due to the rise of digital communication and the diversity of media platforms that facilitate both, the creation and the dissemination of information. This shift has led to a context that some scholars name the "disinformation order" (Bennett & Livingston, 2018) or "post-truth" era (Lewandowsky et al., 2017).

It is in this context that the first verification initiatives emerged, such as Spinsanity, created in 2001 to expose political propaganda and partisan media content (Fritz et al., 2004). For the most part, these initiatives focus on verifying political content, where the pioneering initiatives are FactCheck.org or PolitiFact (Steensen et al., 2023). According to an IFCN report (2024), politics constitutes 95.6% of the content addressed by fact-checkers. However, an expansion into other topics is also being observed, such as content spread through social media, matters related to democratic values, or issues like climate change (Paulau, 2024; Siwakoti et al., 2021) or migration (Renedo, Alonso & Díez, 2024).

Interest in fact-checking has global reach, growing from 11 initiatives in 2008 to 424 in 2022 (Stencel et al., 2023), with different operating protocols and business models (Esteban-Navarro et al., 2021). The creation of entities like the International Fact Checking Network (with 145 active members as of January 2025) has given institutional character to the activity and enhanced collaboration, which is also an essential and recurring practice for verification. In this regard, some notable examples of fact-checkers have been compiled: Electoland 2017, to monitor the 2016 U.S. elections (Klein, 2017); Verificado 2017, for information related to Mexico's earthquake that year; Chequeado in Argentina, created in 2010 by a non-profit organization and constituting the first case in Latin America and a reference for the emergence of other initiatives; Ecuador Chequea, a media outlet emerging from a regional non-profit organization (Ecuador Chequea, 2024); etc. In Brazil, in 2020 some initiatives were promoted by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) to verify fake news related to the electoral process, such as: Election verification network, "Fact or fake news" website, or the creation of a WhatsApp Chatbot that allowed access to verified information (TSE, 2024). In Spain, we find initiatives like Maldita.es, Verifica RTVE, Newtral, etc. In the case of the Maldita.es

Foundation, it has also driven the organization of a national network of local journalists to combat climate misinformation. Likewise, Verificat is an association dedicated to fighting disinformation in Catalonia.

Strategies and policies to combat disinformation adapted to local contexts represent a field of notable interest, though still understudied. So it is essential to analyze the role of local journalism initiatives against a phenomenon that is global (Jerónimo, 2024), particularly given that the adaptation of disinformation tactics to regional or local frameworks possesses its own characteristics and manifestations.

Just as verification initiatives have increased since 2016, academic research on fact-checking has also become significant. The issue is approached from multiple perspectives, such as the exponential growth and characteristics of fact-checking in Spain (López Pan & Rodríguez Rodríguez, 2020) or the specificities of local contexts, as seen in the “FAKELOCAL” project to map disinformation in Spain’s autonomous communities and local entities (Rúas-Araújo & Paniagua-Rojano, 2023).

Another line of research focuses on the consolidation of verification platforms, examining their organization, production routines, and dissemination strategies. Vizoso and Vázquez Herrero (2019) analyze the international landscape of Spanish-language fact-checking, highlighting Latin America’s growing relevance in this field and showcasing initiatives like LatamChequea. Meanwhile, Cuartielles and Carral (2024) study the operations, viability, and best practices of collaborative fact-checking in the Spanish electoral context through the specific case of the “Comprobado” alliance during Spain’s 2023 general elections. Palau Sampio (2024) focuses on collaborative projects during electoral campaigns in Europe and Latin America, aiming to analyze how journalists and civil society organizations coordinate to counter electoral disinformation. In Brazil, Seibt (2019) examines three pioneering initiatives: Agência Lupa, Aos Fatos, and Truco, to identify the limits and possibilities of this new journalistic practice in a context marked by disinformation.

The analysis of the professional profile and the considerations of journalists and the public regarding fact-checking is another relevant line of research. Herrero and Herrera-Damas (2021) primarily study the profile, perceptions, and challenges of fact-checkers in the Spanish-speaking world, with the overarching goal of contributing to its development by shedding light on the reality of those who practice it and helping to design better training programs for future journalists. Baptista et al. (2023) focus on the Portuguese public’s perception of fact-checking, in one of the first systematic attempts to explore citizens’ attitudes toward this phenomenon in the country. The study highlights the need for greater visibility, transparency, and media literacy to promote the acceptance and effectiveness of this practice in Portugal. Meanwhile, Morais and Grafolin (2023) offer a critical reflection on the role of fact-checking in the contemporary media ecology.

The role of digital platforms and social media in the dissemination and reception of fact-checking constitutes another thematic axis of interest. Empirical studies in Spain have shown, for example, that platforms primarily use Instagram as a channel for visual presentation but not as a space for dialogue with the audience (Abuín-Penas et al., 2023). Likewise, the use of WhatsApp as a tool to create closer ties with readers and successfully channel debunked content has been documented, as in the case of the Malaga-based newspaper *Sur* and its section “*B de Bulo*” (Palomo & Amundarain, 2018). Or the use of mobile devices and social media in the fight against disinformation by *Maldita.es* (Bernal-Triviño & Clares-Gavilán, 2019).

1.3. Disinformation, democratic crisis and journalism in the Brazilian context

Brazil is currently facing a critical period where truthful information and independent journalism play a fundamental role in preserving democracy. Political polarization and technological changes have transformed the way politics is communicated and conducted. The 2018 elections marked a turning point in the climate of disinformation, where false content significantly contributed to Jair Bolsonaro's victory –events that were even investigated by the Superior Electoral Court (Gilbert, 2018). According to Sánchez del Val et al. (2025), the loss of trust in traditional media and institutions, along with populist tactics during the 2018 elections, marked the starting point of the wave of disinformation in Brazil's contemporary context.

During the Bolsonaro administration (2019-2022), a “hybrid warfare” strategy was consolidated that combined attacks on traditional media with the mass production of false content on social media (Palau, 2021). A phenomenon that Castro Rocha (2024) defines as an extremist mediasphere: “*a powerful machine for producing polarizing narratives, based on fake news and conspiracy theories*” (p. 89). With the outcome of the 2022 elections and the victory of opposition candidate Lula da Silva, narratives portraying him as an illegitimate president intensified, leading to serious incidents such as the assault on government institutions in January 2023.

The crisis of traditional media, their declining relevance as social agents and their loss of status as sole information gatekeepers (Parisi & Rega, 2011) has coincided with the rise of social media. As Schudson (2008) notes, the watchdog journalism model has been weakened by media concentration in Brazil, where six families control 80% of traditional outlets (ABRAJI, 2023). This structure fosters content homogenization and limits pluralism, creating information voids now filled by social platforms. According to the Reuters Institute (2024), 45% of Brazilians distrust traditional news sources, facilitating the viral spread of misinformation –particularly on WhatsApp and Telegram.

In this context, verification initiatives are emerging as key players in the public sphere, offering resistance through collaborative methodologies. In Brazil, a number of fact-checking initiatives have been established –promoted by both the media and civil society– such as Agência Lupa, Aos Fatos, and the National Network to Combat Disinformation, which have emerged as counterweights to promote access to verified information.

2. Method

The general objective of this study is to analyze the local verification initiatives that are integrated in the National Network to Combat Disinformation (RNCD) in Brazil. In order to achieve this goal, the following specific objectives have been defined:

- O1. To describe the organization and scope of the RNCD project.
- O2. To conduct an in-depth examination of four fact-checking projects that are part of the RNCD.
- O3. To identify the approach and purpose of these initiatives in the process of verifying disinformation.
- O4. To analyze potential differences between the initiatives based on their specific context of implementation or other distinguishing variables.
- O5. To evaluate the achievements and challenges of these types of projects by assessing the degree to which they fulfill and are satisfied with their core function.

Given that the existing literature on local fact-checking initiatives is very limited, research questions have been formulated instead of hypotheses, in order to identify new findings on the subject.

RQ1. How is the RNCD organized, and what is the scope of the project?

RQ2. What is the approach and purpose of the initiative when conducting fact-checking?

RQ3. What specific characteristics and goals do the initiatives have in relation to their local context?

RQ4. Are there significant differences between the initiatives?

RQ5. What prospects can be envisioned for the future of the analyzed initiatives?

The study focuses on the analysis of four local fact-checking initiatives that have emerged from both journalistic and civil society spheres. All of them are part of an academic-based organization dedicated to combating disinformation: the National Network to Combat Disinformation (RNCD).

The research adopts a qualitative approach and follows a case study design to understand the development of local initiatives against disinformation, as well as the specific challenges they face within their respective contexts.

In order to select the case studies, the researcher first contacted the founder of the RNCD, who recommended the four initiatives analyzed in this study. Although there are a total of six fact-checking initiatives within the RNCD, continuity and project stability were the main selection criteria. Based on this, the following were chosen: COAR Noticias, Colectivo Bereia, Verifica RS, and Agência Tatu. All were founded between 2019 and 2020, with the exception of Verifica RS, that was launched in 2024. All remain active to date.

For data collection, five semi-structured interviews were conducted. These were based on a pre-established interview guide to ensure that all participants responded to the same core questions, thus facilitating comparative analysis. At the same time, the flexibility of this format allowed new relevant topics to emerge during the process (Bryman, 2016).

The interviews were conducted with five journalists, all of whom are creators and current coordinators of the respective fact-checking initiatives. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted via Google Meet between November and December 2024, and April 2025. An interview guide was used to explore each initiative's goals, the tools employed, and their methodological approach.

The data were analyzed through manual content analysis, identifying thematic patterns and categories by closely reading and organizing participants' responses.

Table 1. Organization of the interviews

Element	Description
Profile of the interviewees	<p>Profile 1. Ana Regina Rego. Journalist with a Ph.D. in Communication Processes. Professor at the Federal University of Piauí (UFPI) and the founder of the RNCD.</p> <p>Profile 2. Marta Alencar. Journalist specialized in fact-checking. Ph.D. candidate in Communication. Founder of COAR.</p> <p>Profile 3. Magali Cunha. Journalist. Ph.D. in Communication. Researcher specialized in Communication and Religion. Founder of Bereia.</p> <p>Profile 4. Taís Seibt. Journalist. Ph.D. in Communication. Expert in fact-checking. Founder of Verifica RS.</p> <p>Profile 5. Graziela França. Journalist. Expert in Data Journalism. Content Director at Agência Tatu.</p>
Interview guide	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does your agency identify the disinformation topics or narratives to be verified? 2. What steps do you follow in the information verification process? 3. What criteria do you use to decide which information to verify first? 4. Do you use specific methodologies to address the particularities of disinformation in local or regional contexts? 5. What digital or technological tools does your agency use for monitoring and verification? 6. What do you consider to be the main achievements of your agency's work? 7. Have you observed changes in disinformation patterns as a result of your interventions? 8. What sets your agency apart from a national fact-checking organization? 9. What role do you believe the RNCD plays in supporting and coordinating local fact-checking agencies?

Source: own elaboration, 2025

3. Results

3.1. Case Study: The National Network to Combat Disinformation

The National Network to Combat Disinformation (RNCD) originated in 2019 within the academic sphere, as the result of a postdoctoral research project conducted by journalist and Ph.D. in Communication Ana Regina Rego at the Federal University

of Rio de Janeiro. In 2020, the initiative joined the Mandacaru Project, a platform that brought together volunteers from various scientific fields to combat science-related disinformation on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ana Regina Rego's experience in the project, along with her connection to the Brazilian Federation of Scientific and Academic Communication Associations (SOCICOM), helped facilitate the creation of a network aimed at linking institutions with civil society. Associated with the graduate program at the Federal University of Piauí (UFPI), the RNCD seeks to coordinate efforts to enhance the visibility of anti-disinformation work and serve as a connecting hub for projects and institutions of different natures, all contributing to the fight against disinformation.

The RNCD includes initiatives developed by universities, communication agencies, scientific journals, social projects, media literacy programs, disinformation verification apps, fact-checking projects, research initiatives, university media outlets, communication and technology research labs, NGOs, among others.

In 2023, the organization was awarded by the Brazilian Society for Interdisciplinary Studies in Communication (INTERCOM) for its innovative contributions in theoretical, technological, and practical dimensions within the field of communication. Another key milestone in its trajectory was its collaboration with the Federal Supreme Court (STF) as part of the Program to Combat Disinformation (PCD). According to Rego (2024), this partnership was highly productive: *"During 2022, we worked directly with several partners, particularly those focused on media literacy, carrying out awareness campaigns on election-related issues and on how voters and users could report disinformation across all digital platforms active in Brazil during that period."* In 2023, the Supreme Court's program was formalized as a permanent department within the court itself, with its own dedicated coordination. The collaboration with the RNCD grew even stronger, with new partners actively joining in the development of training courses, educational materials, and other initiatives.

The RNCD operates as a virtual and collective organization bringing together existing projects on a single platform. Its main resource is its website, which, besides listing all partner organizations, publishes fact-checks and compiles content produced by its members. It also hosts a repository that gathers academic and journalistic research and materials related to the various fields affected by disinformation.

The RNCD maintains an active presence on social media platforms such as Facebook (779 followers), YouTube (1.49k followers), and Instagram (21K followers). Instagram is its most active channel and the one with the greatest impact and number of followers in Brazil. In addition to sharing original content, these platforms serve to amplify the reach of work produced by members of the network.

Regarding the future of the RNCD, Rego (2024) reveals that changes in leadership are expected, with Professor and researcher Marcos Schneider, from the Brazilian Institute of Information in Science and Technology (IBICT), set to take over coordination duties.

On the topic of what disinformation represents for Brazilian society, Rego (2024) notes that since 2021, studies such as the Digital News Report from Oxford University and the Reuters Institute had already indicated that 82% of Brazilians distrusted the information they received, reflecting a more critical and aware civil society. She also points out that the current context enables mass manipulation of images through low-cost, easily accessible artificial intelligence, which presents significant challenges for those working to combat disinformation.

3.2. Case study of local fact-checking initiatives: COAR Noticias, Coletivo Bereia, Verifica RS, and Agência Tatu

3.2.1. Origin of the proposals

Coletivo Bereia was established in 2019 as a result of a scientific research project conducted by the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), through the Nucleus of Studies in Technology and Health (Nutes), in collaboration with the company META, focusing on disinformation in the health sector. According to researcher and journalist Magali Cunha (2024), this issue is particularly concerning within religious groups due to content promoting so-called miraculous cures or encouraging rejection of conventional pharmaceutical treatments. The research revealed that the level of disinformation in these contexts was alarming. As a result, a fact-checking initiative emerged in digital environments, specifically targeting communities linked to religious groups. This focus is closely related to the rise of conservative political blocs in Brazil backed by evangelical religious principles, which have gained significant influence in matters of public interest.

The project operates on a volunteer basis and is supported by individual donations and organizations such as the Latin American and Caribbean Communication Agency (ALC). Financial support has also come from participation in various projects, which enabled the team to strengthen their website, establish digital media management, and join the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). Since 2023, volunteers began receiving payments through freelance contracts, following rates established by the Rio de Janeiro journalists' union. The team consists of an editorial board, a general editor, an executive editor, a communications advisor, a social media coordinator, and eight fact-checkers. According to the founder, their main challenge is financial –specifically, creating a paid position dedicated to disseminating verified content on social media platforms.

COARNoticias, on the other hand, was launched during the COVID-19 pandemic in response to the sharp rise in disinformation. Its founder, journalist Marta Alencar (2024), explains that the initiative was born out of a need to focus on the “news deserts” and “near-deserts” in Brazil’s Northeast region. According to the Atlas da Notícia (2023), 56.74% of the municipalities in the Northeast are areas where professional journalism is either nonexistent or nearly nonexistent.

The initiative was originally based on volunteer work, with up to 50 fact-checks being conducted per week. Currently, it has a team of seven people who receive some form of funding, mainly obtained through calls for proposals and projects supported by private entities. According to Alencar (2024), this model is a common practice among independent initiatives in Brazil, and she highlights the importance of support from organizations like Google for Startups. “Technology platforms such as Google and Meta have been fundamental in financing our initiatives. In 2020, Meta contributed \$2,500 to the project.” For Alencar (2024), one of the main challenges for the project’s growth is the lack of economic stability to sustain a team fully dedicated to the initiative.

The third initiative analyzed, Agência Tatu, was founded in 2020 in response to the need for locally produced journalism based on data and evidence. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it began its verification activities in collaboration with the government of Alagoas, focusing on disinformation related to the coronavirus. In 2022, it launched the project “Nordeste sem Fake,” targeting the nine states of Brazil’s Northeast, with an emphasis on verifying local content during the electoral process. The project incorporated artificial intelligence through the use of the Dandara bot to automate information collection.

Verifica RS, in turn, emerged in May 2024 during the floods that affected Porto Alegre and its metropolitan area. The initiative was proposed by journalist Luiza Fritzen in response to the spread of disinformation in WhatsApp groups used by neighbors, shelters, and rescue teams to coordinate aid, which hindered relief efforts. The project was established as a volunteer network, initially on WhatsApp, with the goal of distributing verified information from specialized agencies. Later, an Instagram account was created to serve as a content repository, using accessible visual language to facilitate its circulation. According to journalist Taís Seibt (2025), partnerships were established with universities, social organizations, and local content creators, which helped expand Verifica RS's visibility within the community.

3.2.2. *Verification methods*

At Bereia, the work is carried out collaboratively, with journalists organized into pairs to fact-check content published daily in religious media outlets and sources related to religions and their leaders, both in Brazil and abroad. Only informational material is verified, such as news reports—opinions and analyses are excluded. Pair assignments take place from Monday to Wednesday, which, according to Cunha (2024), are the days with the highest volume of disinformation content.

The team monitors evangelical news sites and portals, as well as statements and public pronouncements from politicians and religious authorities of national relevance, such as leaders of the Religious Caucus and government ministers. The verification process is carried out in six steps:

1. **Identification:** Selection of news stories, statements, or pronouncements that, based on the characteristics of their headlines (absolute claims, exaggerations, unusual cases), require verification due to their public relevance and visibility in the media.
2. **Investigation of the original source:** Location and analysis of the primary source of the information, if available.
3. **Review of prior context:** Search for existing publications related to the topic in question.
4. **Data confirmation:** Verification through official and alternative sources, including individuals, groups, and institutions mentioned, in order to confirm, identify gaps or distortions, or refute the content.
5. **Contextualization:** Analysis of the verified information, supported by bibliographic references and consultation with specialists when necessary.
6. **Classification:** Evaluation and categorization of the content as true, inaccurate, misleading, inconclusive, or false.

The editor explains that a more in-depth, qualitative methodology prevails, based on observation. As tools, Magali (2024) highlights the use of Google Analytics and the Lupa Scan tool, provided by Agência Lupa, for verifying and monitoring social networks. The main dissemination tools are their website and social media profiles. In addition to a wide reach on Instagram, Cunha (2024) highlights the positive results of the work done on TikTok, where they publish summaries of news stories to counter disinformation, as well as the educational use of this content with high school students.

Another element they pay attention to is viral content. Cunha (2024) explains that content virality is evaluated during the weekly editorial round so as not to focus on items with no visibility, which could inadvertently increase their exposure.

In the case of COAR Noticias, fact-checking work is combined with a broader focus on media literacy, using a methodology adapted to regional realities and languages. The initiative prioritizes linguistic and cultural adaptation and aims to promote equity in access to educational resources. In this sense, it stands out as the first initiative in Brazil to promote media literacy using a regional language approach. This perspective was consolidated with the launch of the manual *Arriegua: Olha as Fake News*, written in a language adapted to the cultural specificities of Brazil's Northeast. The project had a very positive impact and was expanded to other regions of the country, being distributed in schools and universities.

Alencar (2024) argues that citizen media literacy is key to combating disinformation. She emphasizes the importance of transparency in the verification process to strengthen public trust in journalism. She adds that clearly explaining the methods and tools used in the verification process allows users to replicate them independently, thus empowering citizens with the skills to verify information themselves.

The verification process includes identifying areas considered “news deserts.” In these areas, social media becomes an even more relevant source of information:1. The process begins with tools like Google Trends, which allow for location-based search and the identification of keywords and real-time search trends; 2. Monitoring hashtags on social media and analyzing videos going viral on platforms like Kwai;3. Using tools like Google Images and Google Maps to conduct visual and geographic analyses to verify content authenticity; 4. As sources, they consult government transparency portals and, due to proximity to local contexts, personal sources become particularly relevant.

From COAR's perspective, prioritizing speed in verifying and publishing accurate information is more effective than trying to convince those spreading disinformation. The virality of a piece of content is an essential criterion when deciding what to verify. It's not just about the topic's relevance, but also its reach and potential for spread. If a piece of content hasn't achieved significant dissemination, verifying it could backfire, amplifying the disinformation and spreading it more than the correction itself (Alencar, 2024).

An important step in COAR's workflow is establishing contact with local radio stations and using accessible channels, such as sending audio messages via WhatsApp, to distribute verified information. These audios last up to three minutes and are designed to be clear, concise, and easily understandable.

The organization also maintains a website, developed with support from Google, where the most recent fact-checks are published. However, its founder considers Instagram (2,707 followers) to be the most dynamic channel for audience reach and engagement, and it also serves to redirect traffic to the website.

Seibt clarifies that Verifica RS is not a permanent fact-checking initiative, nor does it produce original verification content, as this would be unfeasible without a formal structure and relying solely on volunteers. During the most critical period of the flood, the group focused on distributing verified content from professional agencies, always including author attribution. In the monitoring area, support was provided by the agency Aletheia.Fact for the development of an Instagram bot designed to receive suggestions of suspicious content. This tool remains active and is expected to be improved under the “Verifica Pra Mim” program. The creation of this channel also responded to organic demand, as the initiative gained visibility and began to receive requests via direct messages, even after the emergency had passed.

Agência Tatu developed its own tool in 2022, the Dandara bot, which extracted suspicious content published on social media. However, França states that restrictions imposed by major tech platforms have made it difficult to sustain tracking efforts. Currently, a monitoring system is used to detect the spread of disinformation on social networks. This system is part of the Comprova Project, a non-profit initiative promoted by the Brazilian Association of Journalists, which brings together journalists from 42 media outlets. At the end of each verification, a label is assigned to indicate the reliability level of the information.

1. **It's true:** When all sources confirm the accuracy of the information, meaning the content is true.
2. **Not exactly that way:** When the information is inaccurate or taken out of context.
3. **This is a meme:** When the content was created as satire, parody, a joke, or another form of humor.
4. **Oxe, it's fake:** When the information being circulated is false.

Technological tools are also used to trace the origin of images and videos, detect possible deepfakes, and transcribe or translate audiovisual content. However, the journalist acknowledges that these tools alone do not guarantee accuracy. Critical and contextual analysis by the professional remains essential for verification.

3.2.3. *Changes in disinformation patterns*

According to Cunha (2024), in the area of religious disinformation, a thematic pattern persists, with recurring topics such as “gender ideology,” “Christianophobia,” or alleged religious persecution, as well as health-related themes. These have led the collective to develop educational materials addressing these issues. In total, five educational resources have been produced, including informational cards and videos, which are available in the “Bereia na Educação - Materiais” section.

On the other hand, Alencar (2024) expresses concern over the increasing use of AI and its ability to create content that challenges journalists’ capacity to verify information –especially in local contexts, where most communicators are bloggers and influencers in remote areas with limited access to tools or technical knowledge to identify advanced manipulation processes. AI creates an illusion of credibility that makes verification more difficult.

Seibt (2025) maintains that in the case of Verifica RS, disinformation tends to appear in waves, evolving with the course of the event. In the initial phase, misleading information circulates about flooded areas, fake shelters, or scams. Later, false content appears regarding donation misappropriation, political exploitation of social actions, or alleged government inaction in relief efforts. In the final stage, confusion spreads about access to public aid, contamination risks, and other related topics.

França (2025) notes that in early 2020, disinformation focused primarily on health topics and spread mainly through messaging apps. As the most critical period of the pandemic ended, the range of topics expanded—to include politics, public safety, and education—and the content began circulating on a variety of social networks such as Instagram, TikTok, and Kwai. In addition, artificial intelligence began to be used to make the process more sophisticated and convincing.

3.2.4. *Distinctive aspects of local fact-checking initiatives*

According to the founder of COAR Noticias, what sets them apart from national agencies such as Lupa and Aos Fatos is not the quality of the work nor the impact achieved. Alencar (2024) highlights that during participation in programs like GNI Audience, it was confirmed that the data handled by COAR displayed a level of rigor and quality comparable to that of these leading initiatives. They have also demonstrated significant engagement with their audience.

The main difference lies in the area of funding. While these well-established organizations have access to resources from major funders, corporate partners, etc., COAR Noticias operates through donations, one-off grants, or participation in programs run by big tech companies. This aspect, according to the journalist, represents a complex and often controversial relationship.

On one hand, they play an important role in supporting the training and development of journalists, as well as providing financial assistance through initiatives such as the Google News Initiative (GNI). However, the transformation of the media market is undeniable, with the centralization of information traffic and the rise of pseudo-journalistic content production. In the local and regional context, the loss of subscribers and advertising revenue was a key factor in the closure of many media outlets (Alencar, 2024).

Cunha (2024) focuses on the specificity of the content, as Bereia is the only initiative thematically specialized in digital religious environments. She also highlights the need to fact-check mainstream media coverage on this topic. Due to the significant amount of disinformation produced by these outlets –either because of ideological affinities with certain religious figures who are promoted and amplified by traditional media, or due to a lack of expertise among journalists not specialized in religion– a series of recurring errors emerge in coverage of this field.

The coordinators of Verifica RS and Agência Tatu agree that the relationship with the local community is a key distinguishing factor: “understanding the local context is essential to effectively combat disinformation and establish direct dialogue with the affected populations” (França, 2025).

3.2.5. *The role of the RNCD in the work of fact-checking initiatives*

Cunha (2024) acknowledges the fundamental role of this network in bringing together projects dedicated to fact-checking and the fight against disinformation, especially in the educational sphere. The contacts and collaborations facilitated by the RNCD have enabled the development of activities and materials focused on media literacy and training to combat disinformation. It allows shared initiatives to serve as a foundation and reference for developing more effective strategies in this field.

For Alencar (2024), the RNCD plays a crucial role in promoting three key pillars: education, the fight against disinformation, and the defense of democratic rights. One of the network’s greatest achievements is fostering cooperation among participants, thereby strengthening collective impact. These exchanges among colleagues and partners are essential for bringing initiatives to places that previously would have been unimaginable –such as the most remote areas of northern and northeastern Brazil. “The network not only connects people and projects, but also expands the reach of actions, reaching vulnerable communities that are often underserved.”

Regarding the role of the RNCD, França (2025) states that all initiatives aiming to carry out fact-checking with clear and professional methodologies are highly necessary. For Seibt (2025), the network helps strengthen partnerships and share best

practices. The bot developed in collaboration with Aletheia.Fact, for example, operates through the RNCD. It is, therefore, a key space for coordination among the various initiatives spread across the country.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The National Network to Combat Disinformation (RNCD Brazil) is, as has been demonstrated, an autonomous organization that joins six regional and local fact-checking services within the Brazilian landscape. Analyzing its structure and methods of operation has provided insight into the project's actual scope and revealed the motivations behind its creation, thereby addressing Research Question 1 (RQ1). In addition to the reasons cited throughout this study by its founder, Brazil is a country that urgently requires measures to combat disinformation. A clear example is the normalization of disinformation as a political tool, as denounced by the President of the Brazilian Superior Electoral Court: "in the 2022 elections, the number of disinformation complaints submitted to digital platforms increased by 1,671% compared to the 2020 elections" (TSE, 2022). Nevertheless, despite the pressing need for anti-disinformation measures, most of the entities within the RNCD were designed for specific, time-bound fact-checking efforts in response to surges in fake news –such as during election periods, natural disasters, or health crises. Most do not have ongoing operations, with the exception of the four initiatives analyzed in this study: COAR Noticias, Coletivo Bereia, Verifica RS, and Agência Tatu.

Regarding RQ2, the approach and purpose of these initiatives in carrying out fact-checking processes tend to reflect a professional commitment to the work, even though this must often be balanced with the challenges of operating without permanent financial infrastructure. As a result, the entities rely on donations, occasional private grants, or participation in big tech funding programs. The initiatives studied share three core objectives: debunking false information on sensitive topics that significantly impact Brazilian communities (especially regarding fake healing rituals and anti-scientific discourse); providing accurate and rigorous journalistic coverage in "news deserts," particularly in remote regions of northern and northeastern Brazil; and transferring knowledge to communities through media literacy campaigns and materials designed to fight disinformation.

One of the most novel contributions of this research relates to RQ3, which addresses the specific characteristics and aims of these initiatives in relation to their local contexts. It is clear that local conditions greatly influence the work being done, which reinforces the relevance of these glocal initiatives –local in scope, but addressing a global problem. Some of the most notable context-driven features in their fact-checking strategies are the following: hyper-specialization in content is a key feature– for example, in the case of Coletivo Bereia, journalistic work focuses on verifying fake news circulated in religious media and sources related to religions and their leaders. This is particularly relevant in Brazilian communities, as during the 2018–2022 legislative period, "more than 15% of elected politicians were affiliated with highly conservative evangelical movements. If we include conservative-charismatic Catholic politicians –approximately 10 deputies– more than 20% of Congress falls into the conservative-Christian-reactionary category" (Sena da Silveira, 2022, p. 64). Their political and sociocultural influence is therefore evident, especially in local communities that maintain close ties with their religious leaders.

Another local specificity is found in content production routines; for example, content is assigned for verification between Monday and Wednesday, due to the higher volume of disinformation typically produced during that time frame. The context

also shapes verification strategies and content creation. This is particularly evident in the northern and northeastern regions of Brazil, where there is a total or partial absence of professional journalism.

Additional distinctive features of these local fact-checking initiatives are closely linked to their specific environments. These include the use of regionally adapted language that reflects the cultural specificities of northeastern Brazil—a linguistic and cultural adaptation aimed at promoting e-citizen empowerment and equity through media literacy; the use of personal sources for information verification, which is feasible in local contexts but not on a national scale; the creation of online communities via personal communication channels such as WhatsApp; and direct contact with local communicators (bloggers and influencers) who can help amplify the reach of verified content.

Regarding RQ4, the main differences found among the analyzed initiatives lie in the thematic areas they cover and the specific purpose of each platform—whether it is more focused on journalistic work and the verification of content within a particular field, or on the creation of educational materials to foster practical media literacy. In this sense, collaboration with schools, associations, and community centers is essential to empower users to become potential fact-checkers themselves. Another point of differentiation is the stability and size of each project. Some initiatives operate on a more occasional basis and are made up entirely of volunteers.

The analysis conducted in RQ5—concerning the future outlook of these verification platforms—reveals that one of the main challenges they face is the instability of their funding structures, which threatens their long-term sustainability. Often, projects like these are supported through grants for specific reporting topics, providing only temporary financial support that does not allow for the creation of stable staff or infrastructure. Moreover, there is a paradox: while companies like Google and Meta have funded these anti-disinformation initiatives, Meta—the parent company of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp—announced in January 2025 the termination of its fact-checking programs, which had been active on its platforms since 2016.

This study has focused on the RNCD initiatives that have remained active beyond one-off projects or isolated events, although Verifica RS is a more recent effort. As a main conclusion, we can outline the fact-checking strategy these local initiatives follow, which generally involves the following steps: identifying content that requires verification based on its reach and public relevance; locating and analyzing the primary source of the information; assessing prior context; verifying data through reputable official, personal, and documentary sources; contextualizing the verified information; and evaluating and labeling the content with a specific tag indicating the degree of manipulation or disinformation present.

Throughout this study, it has become clear that for those interviewed, prioritizing speed in verifying and publishing accurate information is more effective than attempting to persuade those who spread disinformation. As a result, these initiatives focus their efforts on reducing verification times and using interpersonal channels (such as WhatsApp) to build online communities that make communication more direct and effective. Contact with radio stations and local communicators and influencers is also essential for disseminating verified content.

Additionally, experimenting with accessible and agile formats has proven essential for effectively transmitting information to the public. These initiatives have implemented the use of short WhatsApp audio clips—up to three minutes long—containing verified content, designed to be clear, concise, easy to understand, and easily shareable. Special emphasis is also placed on

creating content for Instagram, the most impactful social media platform in Brazil. This shapes the language, visual style, and aesthetic design of the content, which must suit a platform where imagery plays a dominant role.

Since these four are the most active and enduring initiatives within the RNCD, this study has focused on them to allow for a more in-depth examination, prioritizing the analysis of their fact-checking methodologies and the particularities imposed by their local contexts. However, this research may serve as the beginning of a largely unexplored area of study and could be expanded by including more entities and evaluating specific verification processes during periods of high informational instability.

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6. Specific contributions of each author

	Names and Surname
Conception and design of the work	Julieti Sussi de Oliveira and Antonia Isabel Nogales-Bocio
Methodology	Carmen Marta-Lazo and Julieti Sussi de Oliveira
Data collection and analysis	Julieti Sussi de Oliveira
Discussion and conclusions	Antonia Isabel Nogales-Bocio and Carmen Marta-Lazo
Drafting, formatting, version review and approval	Antonia Isabel Nogales-Bocio

7. Conflict of interest

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

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