Bringing journalism back to its roots: examining fact-checking practices, methods, and challenges in the Mediterranean context

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Abstract

The rise of fact-checking as an innovative tool aimed at improving democratic well-being has become a transnational movement in journalism. In June 2021, the *Duke Reporters' Lab* database features 341 such initiatives around the world, including 33 active fact-checking projects in countries pertaining to the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model (Hallin; Mancini, 2004). Following previous research on fact-checking in other territories, this qualitative study expands the understanding of how this practice is performed by four platforms of countries belonging to this journalistic culture: *Maldita.es* (Spain), *Les Surligneurs* (France), *Observador* (Portugal), and *Pagella Politica* (Italy). Through in-depth interviews with their decision-makers, this work offers a deep understanding of the structure, agenda, practices, and values, the role of the public, and the challenges that these organizations face. Normally run by small but multidisciplinary teams, the studied initiatives show high levels of transparency and a tendency for continuous improvement and professionalization despite their limitations. Following the example of leading initiatives in the USA, the UK, Latin America and Europe, the analyzed organizations cover a wide range of thematic areas and make use of the latest digital tools. They employ robust methodologies when selecting the content they verify, consult an extensive range of sources, and set various control filters before publication, which proves their commitment to transparency and accountability. Furthermore, they guarantee the right of reply and are widely open to public participation and broader dissemination of their work through mainstream media. From difficulties in accessing public information to scarcity of resources and increased competition, fact-checking platforms in the Mediterranean context face major challenges that have forced them to rethink their role and find new revenue streams. These organizations highlight the need to enhance the impact of fact-checking among citizens, journalists, and politicians and, ultimately, to go back to the roots of journalism.

1. Introduction

Several studies have revealed that modern fact-checking was born in response to major changes produced in digital media –including the rise of user-generated content, social media, and data journalism– that have led to a rethink of the standards of traditional journalism (**Cavaliere**, 2021). Similarly, some authors refer to fact-checking as a professional reform movement that has reached the heart of US elite media (**Graves**, 2013) in a context marked by a reputational crisis of journalism and its decline both professionally and economically (**Nielsen**, 2016). This context has also been characterized by political and social polarization as well as massive access to technology, which has

> "served to accelerate the time of the informative message, meaning that both the speed and the means to spread the truth are identical to those that can be used to transmit the lie" (**Figueira**; **Santos**, 2019, p. 4).

The "democratization" of content brought about a wave of disinformation (**Amazeen**, 2020) that reached its greatest expression during the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrating how this phenomenon can multiply and expand in contexts of uncertainty (**Mauri-Ríos**; **Ramon-Vegas**; **Rodríguez-Martínez**, 2020) and leading to what experts have described as an "infodemic" (**García-Marín**, 2020) while also contributing to the creation of a negative atmosphere during crisis management (**López-García**; **Costa-Sánchez**; **Vizoso**, 2021). This information disorder (**Wardle**; **Derakhshan**, 2017) and its potential contribution to the spread of disinformation pose a serious threat within a media ecosystem that seems more complex than ever. Traditional media have lost their monopoly and power as gatekeepers, and user-generated content can now reach as many readers as hegemonic media (**Allcott**; **Gentzkow**, 2017). Furthermore, the phenomenon of disinformation has become

> "an endogenous viral element that is permanently inserted in the information ecosystem" (**Aguaded**; **Romero-Rodríguez**, 2015, p. 46).

In other words, we find ourselves within

> "a growing online misinformation ecosystem that churns out false information at an increasing pace" (**Silverman**, 2015, p. 42);

in the world of post-truth, lying is not only accepted but even rewarded (**Lewandowsky**; **Ecker**; **Cook**, 2017).

In recent years, the rise of fact-checking as a new democratic institution or tool (**Amazeen**, 2020; **Graves**; **Cherubini**, 2016)

> "constitutes a rare example of a genuinely transnational movement in journalism" (**Graves**, 2016, p. 614)

whose main goals are

> "educating the public, improving political behavior, and improving journalism" (**Amazeen**, 2020, p. 5).

Several studies have proven that professionals see this practice not as a type of activism or the defense of social justice (**Mena**, 2019) but as an innovation that maintains the prestige and core principles of journalism (**Graves**; **Nyhan**; **Reifler**, 2016).

In June 2021, the *Duke Reporters' Lab* database brought together 341 active fact-checking projects in 102 countries (**Stencel**; **Luther**, 2021). The professionalization and internationalization of fact-checking practices thanks to organizations such as the *International Fact-Checking Network* (**Graves**; **Anderson**, 2020) –and the launch of various projects by giants such as *Facebook* or *Google*– indicates that such fact-checking operations will continue in the short and medium term with a sustained growth of initiatives around the world. It also foresees an increase in their legitimacy, despite accusations of political bias and some instability derived from their short life (**Lowrey**, 2017).

According to **Mantzarlis** (2018), two moments were especially significant in the rise of fact-checking in the global context.

- First, the *Pulitzer Prize* won by *Politifact* in 2009 paved the way for dozens of projects embarking on verification practices around the world.
- Second, the emergence of so-called fake news linked to the presidency of Donald Trump in the USA or Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (**Hartley**; **Vu**, 2020; **Viscardi**, 2020) led to the emergence of new outlets that no longer focus only on verifying the political discourse but also on fighting viral hoaxes.

Geographically, the consolidation of fact-checking seems to be taking place at two different levels: while such practices in Europe are more diverse and emerge from various professional circles, in the USA there is a commitment to professionalism and compliance with the principles of independence and objectivity. Nevertheless, these models influence each other (**Cavaliere**, 2021) in all regards globally, resulting in what **Graves** (2016) defines as "cross-pollination."

Since the appearance of fact-checking in the first decade of the 2000s, conceived as a practice that evaluates "the truthfulness of political claims appearing in public" (**Nieminen**; **Rapeli**, 2019, p. 296), specific methods have been developed in this field, sharing common elements despite some differences (**Graves**, 2016; 2017). In the Latin American context, fact-checking outlets have been inspired by innovative, robust, and transparent methodologies established by leading projects launched in the USA and Europe (**Moreno-Gil**; **Ramon-Vegas**; **Rodríguez-Martínez**, 2021). Emerging literature that focuses on Southern Europe has revealed that independent initiatives in Italy and Spain approach this task similarly in terms of both the content and the channels used for its dissemination (**Ufarte-Ruiz**; **Anzera**; **Murcia-Verdú**, 2020).

2. Fact-checking in the Mediterranean context

According to **Cavaliere** (2021), the so-called disinformation crisis began in 2016, followed shortly thereafter by several initiatives intended to tackle this problem that threatens democratic well-being. In 2018, the European Union launched a code of practice on disinformation which was signed by *Facebook*, *Google*, *Twitter*, and *TikTok*, among other stakeholders. The *European Digital Media Observatory* (EDMO), which emerged as part of the action plan against disinformation, brings together fact-checkers, experts, and media organizations, including the Italian outlet *Pagella Politica* and the *Athens Technology Center* (*ATC*), a company with expertise in both technology and verification. The EU strategy reveals a growing concern about the vulnerability of democracies and the possibility of electoral manipulation by foreign countries (**Tuñón-Navarro**; **Oleart**; **Bouza-García**, 2019).

The Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model described by **Hallin** and **Mancini** (2004) is characterized by high levels of political parallelism, instrumentalization of the media by the State, a low level of professionalization, and the absence of media accountability instruments, conceptualized as those mechanisms whose main objective is to ensure that media fulfill their responsibility towards society (**Bertrand**, 2018). These factors can partly explain the distance between citizens and the media. According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021*, on average only 13% of the population pays for online information in Mediterranean countries. Confidence in news only exceeds 50% in Portugal (61%), while the figures for Italy (40%), Spain (36%), and France (30%) remain far below this level.

Regarding fact-checking, Southern European countries share common elements. First, fact-checking is mostly conceptualized as an alternative rather than supplement to conventional journalism. Second, the most widespread model in those territories is the "NGO model" (**Graves**; **Cherubini**, 2016), including independent and alternative outlets as well as projects launched or supported in collaboration with educational institutions. The *Duke Reporters' Lab* database currently includes more than 30 active fact-checking projects in the countries pertaining to the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model (**Stencel**; **Luther**, 2021).

Most of those entities appeared with the goal of monitoring false and misleading information during important media events such as elections. The Catalan independence referendum of 2017 became crucial for the appearance and consolidation of the most important Spanish fact-checking outlets (*Maldita.es* and *Newtral*). *Observador* was launched in Portugal in 2015, in the context of the country's parliamentary election and the upcoming arrival of Donald Trump at the White House. A second Portuguese fact-checker, *Polígrafo*, appeared in November 2018, just months before the 2019 parliamentary election. In France, *Libération* launched *Désintox* in 2008, when the country's municipal and cantonal elections were held; and *Les Décodeurs* became a professional project in 2014 in the run-up to the 2014 *European Parliament* election. *Les Surligneurs* took its first steps in 2017 in the context of the presidential election campaign. Meanwhile, *Pagella Politica*, the most important fact-checking outlet in Italy, emerged in 2012, at a time marked by Silvio Berlusconi's political downfall after almost two decades in power and the rise of the *Five Star Movement* and the *Lega Nord*.

Recent studies have shed light on crucial aspects of fact-checking in Southern Europe and perceptions about it. In this region, fact-checking remains an incipient practice that is usually carried out through independent projects that verify political claims and/or debunk false content that goes viral on social media. In addition, its presence in mass media is inconstant and usually linked to significant political events such as elections (**López-Pan**; **Rodríguez-Rodríguez**, 2020). A study on the perception of fact-checking and verification services concluded that there are conflicting opinions about this practice among journalists and social media users. While social media users were ambivalent about their usefulness, journalists revealed a more nuanced perspective since they considered that, despite the lack of transparency of some processes, these services can be a useful starting point to fight disinformation (**Brandtzaeg**; **Følstad**; **Chaparro-Domínguez**, 2018). Other scholarly research in those countries has revealed that various social groups are aware of the existence of disinformation but do not always know how to identify it correctly (**Figueira**; **Santos**, 2019).

Existing research on Mediterranean countries has focused predominantly on providing an overview of the organizational structures, methods, and type of content offered by fact-checking sites in those territories: France (**Bigot**, 2018); Spain (**López-Pan**; **Rodríguez-Rodríguez**, 2020); Portugal and Brazil (**Póvoa-Cazetta**; **Reis**, 2019); Spain and Italy (**Ufarte-Ruiz**; **Anzera**; **Murcia-Verdú**, 2020); Spain, Italy, France and UK (**García-Vivero**; **López-García**, 2021); Spain and Latin America (**Vizoso**; **Vázquez-Herrero**, 2019). This article, however, seeks to provide further insights into the underlying aspects of fact-checking practices in France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. This qualitative study is informed by the perspectives of the decision-makers of four leading organizations in these countries (*Maldita.es*, *Les Surligneurs*, *Observador*, and *Pagella Politica*).

3. Method

This research endeavors to deepen understanding of how fact-checking is performed by the following platforms in the Mediterranean context: *Maldita.es* (Spain), *Les Surligneurs* (France), *Observador* (Portugal), and *Pagella Politica* (Italy) (Table 1). These organizations are included in the *Duke Reporters' Lab* database and were chosen bearing in mind the criteria of their visibility and development within each territory. Those entities, now well established within their home countries, paved the way for the emergence of other fact-checking platforms such as *Verificat*, *Polígrafo*, and *Facta*.

The four initiatives are verified signatories of the *International Fact-Checking Network* (*IFCN*) code of principles, which is built around five essential principles: (1) non-partisanship and fairness, (2) standards and transparency of sources, (3) transparency of funding and organization, (4) standards and transparency of methodology, and (5) an open and honest corrections policy. To include a broader range of perspectives within the analysis, the sample encompasses projects pertaining to both models described by **Graves** and **Cherubini** (2016): the "NGO model" and the "newsroom model." Initiatives within the former include independent journalistic organizations based in Madrid and Milan (*Maldita.es* and *Pagella Politica*) and a Paris-based project launched by a collective of law professors and researchers (*Les Surligneurs*). The latter is represented by the fact-checking unit of *Observador*, an online newspaper based in Lisbon.

Four research questions guided this study:

- RQ1. What is the structure of these projects? What is their agenda and volume of publication?
- RQ2. Which fact-checking procedures and resources are employed by these initiatives?
- RQ3. Through which channels do they disseminate their verifications, and what role does the audience play in the process?
- RQ4. What are the internal and external challenges faced by these organizations, and how do decision-makers evaluate the impact of fact-checking?

Table 1. Characteristics of the studied fact-checking platforms

Project	Website	Country	Creation	Staff	IFCN signatory
Maldita.es	https://maldita.es	Spain	2014	15	Yes
Les Surligneurs	https://lessurligneurs.eu	France	2017	4	Yes
Observador	https://observador.pt/seccao/observador/fact-check/	Portugal	2015	60	Yes
Pagella Politica	https://pagellapolitica.it	Italy	2012	15	Yes

Source: Interviews with fact-checking projects' representatives /websites.

To answer these questions, four in-depth interviews were carried out with decision-makers of these platforms: Clara Jiménez (director and co-founder of *Maldita.es*), Vincent Couronne (director and co-founder of *Les Surligneurs*), Pedro Rainho (head of the fact-checking unit of *Observador*), and Tomasso Canetta (deputy director of *Pagella Politica*). The conversations, ranging between 60 and 120 minutes in length, were conducted via *Skype*. All the interviews were audio-recorded for subsequent transcription and detailed analysis.

As **Tracy** (2020, p. 79) highlights, qualitative interviews represent a valuable technique

> "for providing information and background on issues that cannot be observed or efficiently accessed"

while serving as an efficient procedure to "get to the heart of the matter." In-depth interviews deliver an invaluable opportunity for

> "understanding, reflection, and explanation via a path that is organic, adaptive, and oftentimes energizing" (**Tracy**, 2020, p. 156).

Considering these essential advantages, qualitative interviews with decision-makers have been widely employed in recent studies on fact-checking in different contexts: Poland (**Kuś**; **Barczyszyn-Madziarz**, 2020), Spain (**López-Pan**; **Rodríguez-Rodríguez**, 2020; **Palomo**; **Sedano**, 2018); Spain and Italy (**Ufarte-Ruiz**; **Anzera**; **Murcia-Verdú**, 2020); Colombia (**Rodríguez-Pérez**; **Paniagua-Rojano**; **Magallón-Rosa**, 2021); Spain and Latin American countries (**Moreno-Gil**; **Ramon-Vegas**; **Rodríguez-Martínez**, 2021); fact-checking organizations in Europe, Africa, Middle East, Asia, US and Oceania (**Singer**, 2021); and verified signatories of the *IFCN* code of principles (**Graves**; **Anderson**, 2020). In this study, first-hand descriptions provided by decision-makers have allowed researchers to obtain nuanced insight on the fact-checking operations conducted by *Maldita.es*, *Les Surligneurs*, *Observador*, and *Pagella Politica*. Such contributions help to advance the understanding of the practices, methods, and challenges faced by those organizations in the Mediterranean context.

Due to the transnational nature of the sample, interviews were conducted via *Skype*. As noted by **Cin** *et al*. (2021, p. 2), interviewing by *Skype* offers the

> "ability to mitigate distance and enable communication with people from diverse geographic locations, of particular importance in Covid times."

Online interviews through voice over internet protocol (VoIP) technologies also present other significant advantages, such as the fact that

> "time can be used in a more flexible way, around the needs of participants, while retaining synchronicity with the interviewer" (**Lo-Iacono**; **Symonds**; **Brown**, 2016, p. 5).

Conversational guides were used, comprising a total of 28 questions centered around the following core areas based on the research purposes and questions: (1) a description of each project's origins, staff, and structure; (2) the agenda,

volume, and frequency of verifications; (3) the fact-checking procedures, routines, and resources; (4) the dissemination of fact-checks; (5) the role of the public; and (6) the editor's opinions on the internal and external challenges they face and the impact of fact-checking practice. With the goal of building comprehensive interview guidelines, we previously consulted the material offered by these fact-checking organizations on their websites and social media accounts. These interview guides were used to stimulate each of the conversations, but the flexibility inherent to the qualitative interviewing process allowed for "emergent understandings to blossom" (**Tracy**, 2020, p. 158) as well.

After transcribing the interviews, the constant comparison technique (**Wimmer**; **Dominick**, 2013) was employed. Qualitative material arising from interview transcripts was assigned to the six themes of the research, allowing for a comparison and verification of the respondents' viewpoints and observations. With the aim of ensuring the rigorousness and trustworthiness of the data, the interview transcription and coding were assessed by all the authors (**Janesick**, 2015).

4. Results

4.1. Description of projects' origins, staff, and structure

Maldita Hemeroteca was created in 2014 by the journalists Julio Montes and Clara Jiménez. After the Catalan independence referendum and the Catalan elections held in 2017, Montes and Jiménez acknowledged the growth of disinformation in the Spanish context, which led them to reinvigorate their operations and launch *Maldita.es*. *Les Surligneurs* started in January 2017, during the presidential election campaign in France. With the help of a designer and the support of his research center at the *University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines*, Vincent Couronne decided to create a website to scrutinize the mistakes in the political discourse about law that permeated French media at the time. Similarly, the desire to fact-check political statements was the driving force behind the creation of *Pagella Politica*, which was founded in 2012 by ten students at *Bocconi University*, and *Observador*, the first fact-checking platform in Portugal, launched in 2015. As Pedro Rainho explains,

> "we needed to take over a new way of making journalism and fact-check what our political representatives were saying."

From their inception, the studied projects were inspired by leading fact-checking platforms such as *Chequeado* (Argentina), *Full Fact* (UK), *Les Décodeurs* and *Libération Checknews* (France), *PolitiFact* (USA), and *Correctiv* (Germany). All four projects are signatories of the *IFCN Code of Principles* and have actively sought national and international cooperation. For instance, *Les Surligneurs* works with *Les Décodeurs* and the *Agence-France Presse*. In another revealing example, *Pagella Politica* participates in cooperative projects such as the *Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis* (*SOMA*) and the *European Digital Media Observatory* (*EDMO*) and has frequent contact with other organizations from Europe:

> "we rely on our colleagues, especially when our fact-checking article is about something that happened in their country,"

comments Tomasso Canetta.

These projects are generally run by small teams (Table 1). *Maldita.es* and *Pagella Politica*'s newsrooms are composed of 15 people, including full- and part-time staff. *Les Surligneurs*' team is much smaller, as the project relies on only four full-time workers, including two interns. Alongside them, there is a group of 15 collaborators (academics and researchers) who write articles on a voluntary basis. In contrast, as a project that originated within a newsroom, *Observador* has a larger structure. This specific reality clearly impacts on the way fact-checking is performed, as Pedro Rainho acknowledges:

> "Imagine that today the ministry of education says something, puts some data on the public. What I do is I speak to the society editor and I try to understand if a journalist from society, specially the journalist who is covering education, can verify that information. If it is a political subject, I talk to the political editor; if it is economics, the same […] In theory I have 60 journalists who are available to fact-check. This is really good because no matter what the subject is, I can find someone in the newsroom who can tackle that."

The staff's background varies from project to project. All the staff members of *Maldita.es* have a background in journalism, including an engineer and a biologist, who also have a master's degree in data journalism. The professionals at *Observador* mostly have a background in journalism. The full-time workers and collaborators at *Les Surligneurs* share a background in law but set themselves the challenge of writing "things for the general public, not just lawyers and themselves" (Vincent Couronne). The team at *Pagella Politica* is more multidisciplinary, being composed of professionals with experience in different fields (international law, literature, philosophy, journalism, and science).

4.2. Agenda, volume, and frequency of verifications

The studied projects cover a wide range of areas, including politics, economics, education, science, health, technology, and environmental issues. Certain initiatives, such as *Maldita.es*, have different sections to tackle specific areas such as science, migration, feminism, and food. According to the interviewees, there is no area or topic that they refrain from covering. The shared criteria for selecting the aspects to verify is the relevance of the news, i.e., of the person, the topic, or the repercussion/virality that the issue might have. As Pedro Rainho highlights:

"We cannot go everywhere so what we do is we try to understand what is more important in today's or each week's social agenda. If a specific event is gaining a lot of attention, we pay specific attention to that event because we know that the projection of a false claim said in that event has a lot of harmful potential."

Statements from political representatives and institutional sources form an important focus of their work. All interviewees underlined the importance of monitoring public discourses from governments and public representatives.

"We listen to everything that politicians say that day, based on an agenda that we develop in the morning, and as we listen, we see what things can be verified,"

described Clara Jiménez.

While focusing "on the principal politicians, ministers, prime minister and party leaders," Tomasso Canetta stressed the need to safeguard fairness:

"we also try to have some sort of balance in our work so that we do not check the same politician or the same party for five days in a row."

Vincent Couronne explained that, at *Les Surligneurs*, they only focus on politicians, since they "do not want to give more audience to something which has been posted on *Twitter*." In contrast, Pedro Rainho pointed out the importance of monitoring online disinformation as well:

"When the President of the Portuguese Republic says something that has a lot of weight on it, so it is important to us to verify it. But I do not know if that is more important than a claim that is going on *Facebook* that has like 400.000 shares and millions of visualizations […] Disinformation is disinformation and you have to fight it. Being the prime minister or someone on *Facebook*."

Beyond these essential criteria, some of the analyzed projects also apply specific criteria to select the content they verify. *Maldita.es* only selects claims "with the premise that they are false or that there is a dispute" (Clara Jiménez). For their part, *Les Surligneurs* focuses only on those political claims that are either "legally wrong" or "problematic from a legal point of view" (Vincent Couronne).

Despite operating with reduced teams, the capacity of these projects to verify facts is noteworthy (Table 2). *Maldita.es* produces around 25 verifications per week, followed by *Observador* (17–20) and *Pagella Politica* (10–15). *Les Surligneurs* produces one or two fact-checks per day from Monday to Friday. Notably, the volume and pace of publication varies greatly if there are major events to follow. As exemplified by Pedro Rainho:

Table 2. Volume of publication

Project	Number of fact-checks per week
Maldita.es	25
Les Surligneurs	5–10
Observador	17–20
Pagella Politica	10–15

Source: Interviews with fact-checking projects' representatives.

"in January we had our presidential elections, and it was very intense. During the two weeks of campaign, we had to fact-check a lot, so it varies from one month to another."

4.3. Fact-checking procedures, routines, and resources

The studied platforms employ robust and transparent methodologies that allow for a consistent fact-checking process. The different projects share a similar workflow, composed of five fundamental steps (Figure 1) that proceed from monitoring current affairs and selecting public statements (1) to writing, final grading, and publishing (5). As highlighted by the interviewees, it is of utmost importance to respect accuracy when selecting claims. As Tomasso Canetta admitted:
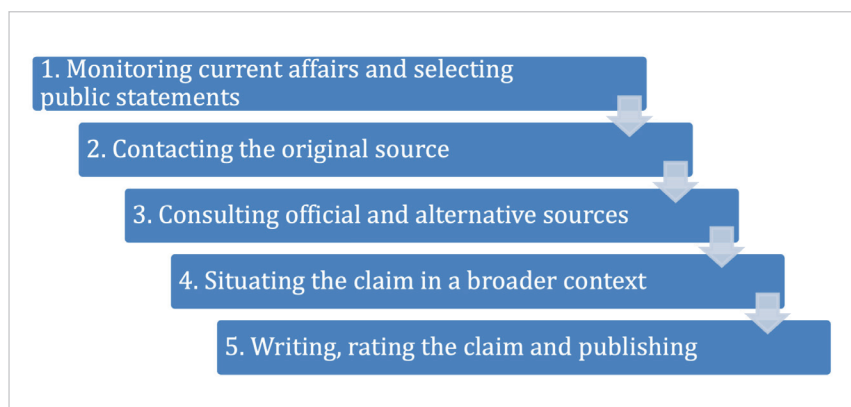

1. Monitoring current affairs and selecting public statements
2. Contacting the original source
3. Consulting official and alternative sources
4. Situating the claim in a broader context
5. Writing, rating the claim and publishing

Figure 1. Fact-checking workflow. Source: Based on information from projects' websites and interviewees' responses.

"we do not rely on newspapers and news agencies if it is possible, because sometimes they take them not precisely and we need that the statement as the politician said it to be 100% accurate."

In a similar vein, Pedro Rainho noted that

"if in a newspaper is a declaration of a member of the parliament is transcribed, you have to listen to that declaration […] in order to be strict, you have to understand if that was what the person said."

The number of categories used to qualify verification is 5 or 6, with the exception of *Les Surligneurs*, which uses 20 labels to rate fact-checks (Table 3). Surprisingly, *Les Surligneurs* does not have a "true" category, given that the project focuses only on those statements that are problematic to some degree. This framework is adjusted to address disinformation in the online sphere. Since in many cases it is not possible to contact the original source, other methodologies such as interviews with experts are used to verify data circulating via the Internet and social media. Pedro Rainho offered a revealing example of how they verified a manipulated video:

"There was an alleged speech of the Chinese president and it had subtitles and those subtitles indicated that the Chinese president was kind of making a warning to the world saying

'Be aware because our army is ready to go to war. We have a lot of people, we have a huge army, we are strong, and we are fed up with this and we are ready for war'.

And the subtitles said all this. This was the case of a video that was manipulated. We talked to people specialized in the Chinese language and what the president said was not related to what the subtitles said. This was a case that gave us some work and we had to talk to specialists."

Table 3. Categories employed by fact-checking platforms

Project	Categories	Definition of categories
Maldita.es	6	Political fact-checking: ***Falso*** (false), *verdadero pero* (true, but), *falso pero* (false, but); Disinformation: *Bulo* (hoax), *qué sabemos* (what we know), *no hay pruebas* (no proof).
Les Surligneurs	20	*Faux* (false), *impossible* (impossible), ***problématique*** (problematic), *très problématique* (very problematic), *illégal* (illegal), *ne nous a pas lus* (he or she did not read us), *inutile* (useless), *rien d'évident* (nothing obvious), *difficile* (difficult), *pas si simple* (not that easy), *pas evident* (not easy), *très improbable* (very improbable), *peu probable* (unlikely), *à préciser* (to specify), *oui mais* (yes but), *à nuancer* (to reduce), *supposons* (we assume), *compliqué* (complicated), *pas compétente pour ça* (not competent for this), *hors-sujet* (off topic).
Observador	6	***Errado*** (false), *enganador* (misleading), *certo* (true), *praticamente certo* (almost true), *esticado* (straight), *inconclusivo* (inconclusive).
Pagella Politica	5	*Panzana pazzesca* (completely false), *pinocchio andante* (false), ***ni*** (yes and no), ***c'eri quasi*** (almost correct), *vero* (true)

Source: Interviews with fact-checking projects' representatives. Note: The most commonly used categories are marked in **bold**.

All the initiatives consult a wide range of official and alternative sources to conduct verifications. Those include official databases from national and international organizations, gazettes and reports, legal texts, civil society organizations, consultants, foundations, experts and researchers, and scientific literature. In the interviews, respondents identified the sources they used most widely (Table 4).

Table 4. Most widely employed sources

Project	Most widely employed sources
Maldita.es	*National Institute of Statistics* (*INE*), *Eurostat, Ministry of Labor*
Les Surligneurs	*Legifrance* (French law), *Eur-Lex* (EU law), *HUDOC* (law of the European Convention of Human Rights), *United Nations* website (international law)
Observador	*National Institute of Statistics* (*INE*), *Directorate-General of Health* (*DGS*), *Government of Portugal*, Specialists
Pagella Politica	*Italian National Institute of Statistics* (*Istat*), *Eurostat, Gazzetta Ufficiale* (Italian official gazette), *Bank of Italy* bulletins, *European Central Bank* bulletins

Source: Interviews with fact-checking projects' representatives.

The relationships with the sources they consult vary from project to project. While Pedro Rainho acknowledged that "it is not frequent that sources call us," Vincent Couronne pointed out that sometimes "they send us an email, maybe either themselves or most commonly it is somebody of their team." Reflecting on the Italian context, Tomasso Canetta admitted that Italian partly leaders tend to either "ignore" or "attack" them:

"Now are having some strong reactions from politicians. For example, Giorgia Meloni, the party leader of Fratelli d'Italia. It is the third biggest party in the country, it is very conservative, nationalist and she really doesn't like us. She attacked us different times by naming us, saying that we are not very independent, we are not really competent, and so on. Her reaction is mostly to distrust us. In the best case, the politician admits the mistake. It happened to us when some minister called and said

'ok, my mistake. I wanted to talk about relocations of migrants and instead I talked about expulsions. This is my mistake, I wanted to say that thing. I am sorry. Thank you for your job'.

This is a very polite and correct reaction, but it is not the most common we have. Usually there are not reactions at all or not very respectful reactions or suspects that we are biased or that we are not very independent, that we have the political agenda and so on."

A good practice shared by these projects is to guarantee the right of reply. As noted by Vincent Couronne,

"it is very important that our work gets closer to what journalists do, and because it is also about ethics, I find it opportune that we tell the politician that we are going to publish something about him or her."

As well as being a matter of ethics, ensuring the right of reply can be beneficial to the accuracy and comprehensiveness of verifications: "nuances have been added to certain fact-checks from talking to the politician," emphasized Clara Jiménez.

In most projects, it is frequent for one person to carry out each fact-check, with the exception of more complex verifications. With the aim of guaranteeing rigor and trustworthiness in the process, verifications go through various control filters before publication (Table 5).

Table 5. Number and description of filters employed by fact-checking platforms

Project	Filters	Description of filters
Maldita.es	4	Author, three editors
Les Surligneurs	3	Author, expert/scholar, area specialist
Observador	3	Author, editor, head of project
Pagella Politica	3	Author, two other reporters (peer reviewers)

Source: Interviews with fact-checking projects' representatives.

The time dedicated to each verification varies greatly depending on the complexity of the issue under consideration. While Vincent Couronne noted that, at *Les Surligneurs*, each verification is usually published in a maximum of 48 hours, Clara Jiménez at *Maldita.es* underlined that "there are verifications that take a long time to do." Tomasso Canetta agreed with this, explaining that

"sometimes the statement is more complex so maybe we can take even one week to check the story […] especially if we need answers from experts or colleagues from foreign nations."

In contrast to the hyper-accelerated cycles that permeate contemporary journalism, on many occasions, adopting a slower pace is essential to carry out a thorough fact-check. Pedro Rainho presented an illuminating example of the importance of slowing down in fact-checking practice:

"There was a *Facebook* post that said something like 'why are you so intrigued by what this government is doing?' Because a lot of people are dying from the pandemic and so on. And it said 'remember that Adolf Hitler was a socialist as well'. This forced us to find the specific specialists who can talk about it: political specialists, historians and this takes times. The journalist, in this specific case talked to me and said: 'are you in a hurry to get this post?' And I said 'no, take your time because you have to present a solid fact-check. So take your time, talk to them, if you need it ask other specialists and we will see it in a couple of days, two, three days'. We adapt every situation to the context, to the claim itself."

Regarding technological resources, the different initiatives make intensive use of open-access digital tools, including tools aimed at verifying videos and photographs (*InVID*, *Amnesty International YouTube DataViewer*, *FotoForensics*), search engines (*Google*, *Bing*, *Yandex*, *DuckDuckGo*), and map verification applications (*Google Maps*, *Google Earth*, *Yandex Maps*, *Wikimapia*, *OpenStreetMaps*, *Baidu Maps*, *Naver Maps*). Different tools devoted to search the profiles and content of social media and websites (*Twitter*, *Trendsmap*, *Who posted what?*, *Foller.me*, *Wayback Machine*) are also employed. Interestingly, *Maldita.es* offers a toolbox on its website that gives users access to different open-access software:

https://maldita.es/herramientas-de-verificacion

so that they can learn to verify content by themselves. In addition, *Pagella Politica* and its sister website *Facta* also employ *Vera*, an in-house bot that provides answers about the Covid-19 crisis. In all the organizations, authors themselves employ these tools, as no training or specialized background are required to use them.

4.4. Dissemination of fact-checks

Verifications are published through myriad platforms, including the projects' websites and social media accounts. In addition, fact-checking organizations aim for a broader dissemination of their work. To illustrate this, *Maldita.es* has some of its verifications published in *Eldiario.es*, while articles developed by *Pagella Politica* have been featured in different outlets such as Italian public television (*Radiotelevisione Italiana*, *RAI*), the Italian news agency (*Agenzia Giornalistica*

Italia, *AGI*), and the magazine *Eastwest*. Similarly, *Les Surligneurs* sends press statements to journalists so that they can use them in their own articles.

Interestingly, *Observador* has consolidated a partnership with *Televisão Independente* (*TVI*) as part of its multiplatform strategy. As Pedro Rainho explained:

> "We publish on our website and then we have a radio, which is *Radio Observador*. Every morning around 10:15 in the morning we have a space on the radio. I go there and I pick up an article and I talk about it for five minutes every day, from Monday to Friday. Apart from this, we have a partnership with one of the main channels in Portugal, *TVI*, the fourth channel. Every Friday we have a TV program of about 10-15 minutes on prime time, around 8:30-9 o'clock in the evening, and they pick our fact-checks, and they transform them into TV language and they present our fact-checks in that partnership […] They have eight or nine fact-checks on that specific section. In addition, due to the agenda topics on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, they have just one fact-check about a specific topic. So this happens too."

The analysis of the examined experiences demonstrates the growing interest of mainstream media in fact-checking, a task that many organizations "cannot assume due to their structures, professional routines, or political ties" (**Moreno-Gil**; **Ramon-Vegas**; **Rodríguez-Martínez**, 2021, p. 258).

4.5. Role of the public

Regarding participation, all the examined projects are widely open to interaction with audiences. Different possibilities are offered to establish close relationships with the public, including email, forms on websites, and social media platforms (*Facebook*, *WhatsApp*, *Twitter*, and *Instagram*). Following a set of participation rules, audiences can comment, suggest topics and verifications, send questions, and even participate in quizzes. Citizens can also criticize or provide corrections to mistakes that have been published in fact-checking articles. Admitting such mistakes "is the only way you can establish a relationship of trust with the readers," commented Pedro Rainho.

As noted by Clara Jiménez, new channels are of utmost importance since they facilitate a "reconnection" between journalists and citizens, who can now become deeply involved in the fight against disinformation:

> "Journalism had a total disconnection with the audience and when we opened the channels of communication with people, we realized that we were not listening to the public […] I obviously decide what is important about certain topics, but I also allow them to be those who ask the questions and tell me what it is that interests them. Thanks to that, we have opened the possibility for citizens, with their expertise, to help us verify some hoaxes […] We have solved a lot of things using our own community. If citizens get involved in the fight against lies, they contribute to the viralization of truth."

According to the interviewees, fact-checks proposed by citizens play an important role in these projects. *Maldita.es* and *Pagella Politica* conduct verifications proposed by the public on a regular basis. *Les Surligneurs* incorporates a verification proposed by the audience at least once per week. Conversely, *Observador* does "not get a lot of requests to check certain information" (Pedro Rainho). Due to time constraints, the Portuguese outlet does not currently have a *WhatsApp* account, a channel which would certainly facilitate the involvement of citizens in the fact-checking process: "it is a very interesting way of connecting with your readers, but it is not possible at this point," admitted Rainho.

4.6. Editors' opinions on the challenges facing and impact of fact-checking platforms

These organizations face several problems and challenges. At the internal level, the core challenge that is common the across initiatives is the scarcity of resources, which limits the volume and range of output that can be delivered. Clara Jiménez points out that "there is no fact-checking newsroom that is over-funded." Although *Observador* has a newsroom of over 60 journalists, Pedro Rainho acknowledged that he "would like to have more people and more time for people to do fact-checking." For smaller projects such as *Les Surligneurs*, pursuing new avenues of revenue, such as professional training for companies and administrations, is even more essential to survive:

> "everyone tells us that what we do is out of interest, that it is very important, but if we do not find a business model, we will have to stop,"

admitted Vincent Couronne.

At the external level, a first challenge for fact-checkers is the difficulty in accessing public information. As Tomasso Canetta explains:

> "We need more public information accessible. When we have to use the Freedom of Information Act, the time needed is way longer and sometimes we do not have the numbers and the evidence that we need to write the article and this is bad, of course, for us and for the readers."

As highlighted by Clara Jiménez, a second challenge at the external level is related to the increased competition that fact-checkers are facing from other agents:

> "Many actors are trying to occupy the space. There are people with much more power than fact-checking platforms, such as technology companies that sell artificial intelligence tools to governments for lots of money and

other actors who don't have any methodology and have never conducted fact-checking but they suddenly decide to do it […] We are in a sweet moment for fact-checking, but we have to do it right."

A third major challenge, in the eyes of the interviewees, is working to enhance the impact of fact-checking among citizens, journalists, and politicians:

"The biggest challenge is to actually reach people and have a positive interaction with them because if we manage to reach even a huge audience, usually we face the problem of reaching to the core when we say something that is on the same page with the previous thought of the person reading us. If we say something that actually challenges their previous beliefs, more often than not we face rejection […] So the challenge is trying to find a way to have a more positive impact on the readers […] We also aim to have an impact on politicians so that they will be more careful, use correct data and make correct statements […] We aim to have an impact on journalists as well because if other journalists are aware of common lies and examples that politicians use maybe they are more well equipped to face the politician during talk shows, interviews and so on" (Tomasso Canetta).

"When we are fact-checking political information what I feel is that the political characters, being the prime minister or the various members of the government, they are not sensitive to the importance of fact-checking because they think 'well, that is just something people are saying on *Facebook* or on *Twitter*, I do not care'. What they do not understand is that many times political decisions are based on misinformation so I would really like for politicians to be more sensitive and more aware of the importance of this type of journalism" (Pedro Rainho).

Going forward, interviewees defended the essential role of fact-checking as a counter-offensive to false and misleading information and as a practice that represents "going back to the roots of journalism." As Pedro Rainho explained:

"In a newsroom you feel more and more that there is no time to verify any information that comes to the public. You have multiple voices in the political spectrum, in the social spectrum, lots of people are talking all the time and they are making more and more information public all the time. A normal newsroom does not have the time to verify everything it published something, before it lays an article, a piece of news on the TV at night. This is what fact-checking does. It is bringing journalism back to its roots and verifying everything in a more common way, in a more systematic way and, I want to believe, in a more truthful way."

Despite the pressing challenges of the current environment, the interviewees were optimistic about the future of fact-checking as a form of "niche journalism" (Clara Jiménez). Tomasso Canetta pointed out that fact-checking

"is a thing that is perceived as important, especially with the social platforms role in information and also with this populism rise in the last years that create some concerns about the quality of information." According to him, "we are going to have more years of growth in front of us."

5. Discussion and conclusions

Conceptualized as a reform movement of journalism, fact-checking first appeared in the USA in response to a challenging context characterized by the unprecedented transformations that occurred in digital media, the reputational and economic crisis of journalism along with polarization, the massive access to technology, and the "democratization" of content (**Amazeen**, 2020; **Cavaliere**, 2021; **Figueira**; **Santos**, 2019; **Nielsen**, 2016). The initial role of fact-checking platforms, i.e., verifying political claims (**Graves**, 2016; 2017; **Nieminen**; **Rapeli**, 2019), has expanded in recent years to include debunking hoaxes (**Nicey**, 2020). This crucial task is more essential than ever in the present landscape, where the Covid-19 crisis has triggered an unstoppable wave of disinformation and fakes in a context described as an "infodemic" (**Cinelli** *et al*., 2020; **García-Marín**, 2020).

Following previous work on fact-checking in other territories –specifically Spain (**López-Pan**; **Rodríguez-Rodríguez**, 2020; **Palomo**; **Sedano**, 2018); Spain and Italy (**Ufarte-Ruiz**; **Anzera**; **Murcia-Verdú**, 2020); Spain and Latin America (**Moreno-Gil**; **Ramon-Vegas**; **Rodríguez-Martínez**, 2021; **Palau-Sampio**, 2018); and Latin America (**Vizoso**; **Vázquez-Herrero**, 2019)– this research endeavors to offer a deeper understanding of the internal practices, values, and challenges of four initiatives operating in different Mediterranean countries: *Maldita.es* (Spain), *Les Surligneurs* (France), *Observador* (Portugal), and *Pagella Politica* (Italy), within what **Hallin** and **Mancini** (2004) described as the Polarized Pluralist Model. This model is marked by high levels of political parallelism, media instrumentalization, a low level of professionalization, and the absence of media accountability instruments. It is also characterized by

"less developed commercial news media markets, a higher level of interpenetration between news media and various kinds of political interests, a less developed journalistic profession, and high levels of state intervention in the media sector" (**Nielsen**, 2016, p. 6).

Through in-depth interviews, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering valuable insights on fact-checking practice as described by decision-makers: the projects' structure, agenda, and volume of publication (RQ1); procedures and resources (RQ2); dissemination of fact-checks and the role of the audience (RQ3);

> Polarized pluralist countries share high levels of political parallelism, media instrumentalization, low levels of professionalism and the absence of media accountability instruments

and the internal and external challenges faced and the impact of their work (RQ4). This is the first study to focus on fact-checking outlets in four different countries belonging to the same media system.

The results obtained indicate that the studied initiatives, which are signatories of the *IFCN Code of Principles*, first appeared in a bid to tackle disinformation, mainly mistakes or false content in the political discourse during election campaigns. Over time, they also started fighting against

> In Southern European countries fact-checking is mostly conceptualized as an alternative to conventional journalism rather than a supplement to it, and the 'NGO model' is the most widespread

viral hoaxes spread through social media. While statements from political representatives and institutional sources form an important part of their agenda, they also highlight the importance of debunking viral hoaxes since they can achieve millions of views on social media and therefore create great confusion or even trigger violent incidents. Recent examples of the latter would be the dozens of fake videos regarding Covid-19 in Wuhan and other parts of the world that have gone viral since the beginning of the pandemic or the high amount of conspiracy theories and false claims that ultimately led to the US Capitol attack in January 2021.

The inspiration for the examined organizations came from leading projects in the USA, the UK, and Europe, as well as from *Chequeado* (Argentina), in a similar vein to Latin American and Spanish fact-checking outlets (**Moreno-Gil**; **Ramon-Vegas**; **Rodríguez-Martínez**, 2021). They are normally run by small teams, except for *Observador*, whose unusually large structure is formed by 60 journalists working in the newsroom and represents a clear advantage in terms of journalism specialization and publishing capacity. Regarding the background of their staff, *Maldita.es and Observador* mainly rely on professionals who mostly have a background in journalism. However, the collaborators at *Les Surligneurs* share a specialization in law, whereas *Pagella Politica* relies on a more multidisciplinary team, with experts in areas such as literature, philosophy or science. The latter seems to be a growing trend in fact-checking, as revealed by a hybridization, a process of transversal skills and knowledge (**Ufarte-Ruiz**; **Anzera**; **Murcia-Verdú**, 2020), and the need for new professional profiles, such as data management and analysis, computer science, statistics, and economics (**Vizoso**; **Vázquez-Herrero**, 2019, p. 139).

In addition, the results reveal that these initiatives are up to date on the latest technology as they make intensive use of open-access digital tools, mechanisms devoted to searching the profiles and content of social media and websites, or even bots. This is the case of *Vera*, an in-house bot employed by *Pagella Politica*'s sister website *Facta* to provide answers about the Covid-19 crisis following the example of *Chequeabot*, developed to identify

> "fact-checkable statements from articles and video transcripts, saving journalists time" (**Riera**; **Zommer**, 2020, p. 602).

As a conversational assistant, *Vera* helps to tackle false, misleading or unreliable information sources by clarifying the readers' doubts on medical and scientific issues regarding the pandemic.

The studied projects cover a wide range of thematic areas –from politics to health, technology, or environment– and share common criteria when selecting the content that they verify: the relevance of news due to the person, the topic, or the repercussion/virality that an issue might have. Some of the examined platforms apply specific criteria to choose content. This is the case of *Maldita.es*, which only focuses on claims that seem to be false; and *Les Surligneurs,* which only verifies those political claims that are either legally wrong or problematic. Despite counting on small teams, their capacity to verify content is significant, carrying out no fewer than 1–2 fact-checks per day (*Les Surligneurs*) or up to 25 verifications per week (*Maldita.es*). These numbers, however, increase when the outlets cover major events such as elections, as already indicated by previous research focused on the Spanish context (**López-Pan**; **Rodríguez-Rodríguez**, 2020).

Following the example of pioneering projects such as *Chequeado*, the studied initiatives have implemented robust and transparent methodologies to ensure accessibility to information, openness, and accountability throughout the fact-checking process (**Riera**; **Zommer**, 2020). These include consulting a wide range of official and alternative sources –from each country's governments, institutes of statistics and central banks to European and international law websites– and adopting a similar workflow. This shared workflow implies monitoring affairs and selecting public statements; contacting the original source and consulting official and alternative sources to ultimately situate the claim in a broader context; writing the article and publishing it. At the end of the process, all the examined projects rate their content with a tag, chosen from a minimum of five and a maximum of 20 rating categories depending on the initiative.

They also guarantee the right of reply, which is not only a matter of ethics but also beneficial to the accuracy and thoroughness of verifications. Finally, verifications always pass through various control filters –a minimum of three in all cases– before publication, which once again proves their commitment to transparency and accountability. Despite the hyper-accelerated cycles of contemporary journalism (**Usher**, 2018), interviewees acknowledge that the complexity of some fact-checks leads to a slower pace when carrying out this task. As a result, certain verifications need several days to be completed.

The studied projects are very aware of the importance of being visible and keeping their content active. Therefore, they disseminate their fact-checks not only through their websites and social media accounts but also via newspapers, magazines, and television and radio broadcasts. This reality not only reveals that these organizations try to reach a broader audience and achieve greater impact but also demonstrates that mainstream media have a growing interest

in fact-checking (**Ufarte-Ruiz**; **Anzera**; **Murcia-Verdú**, 2020), especially during major events (**López-Pan**; **Rodríguez-Rodríguez**, 2020). All the examined outlets are widely open to audience participation through email, forms on websites, and social media. Citizens can even provide corrections to mistakes that have been published in fact-checking articles. The studied fact-checking

> ❝ The major challenges shared across fact-checkers bear a close resemblance to the three old crises of journalism – economic, professional and confidence– faced by the polarized pluralist countries ❞

services understand the relevance of overcoming the "total disconnection with the audience" (Clara Jiménez, *Maldita. es*) that has pervaded traditional journalism while acknowledging that the participation of citizens is an essential component of building and regaining trust with the public (**Nicey**, 2020).

Regarding the internal challenges faced by fact-checking services, the interviewees acknowledge that the scarcity of resources has forced them to find new revenue streams, including educational activities (**Kuś**; **Barczyszyn-Madziarz**, 2020). Externally, accessing public information and increased competition from technology companies appear to be major concerns for fact-checking services, along with the need to enhance their impact among citizens, journalists, and politicians. These factors have led to a rethinking of fact-checking operations, in which finding viable business models (Vincent Couronne, *Les Surligneurs*) and strengthening media literacy activities are issues of heightened importance.

Interestingly, the aforementioned concerns bear a close resemblance to the three old crises of journalism –economic, professional, and confidence– faced in Polarized Pluralist countries (**Nielsen**, 2016). These challenges are widely shared across different journalistic cultures (**Amazeen**, 2020; **Humprecht**, 2020; **Lowrey**, 2017; **Singer**, 2021). The studied outlets try to respond to these challenges by denouncing these problems and promoting transparency. They also highlight the importance of fact-checking in the short and long term, a practice linked to traditional journalism, as a counter-offensive to false and misleading information. According to the interviewees, reclaiming the core values of journalism (**Graves**; **Nyhan**; **Reifler**, 2016) and going back to the roots of the profession is, in fact, what fact-checking is trying to do.

Despite its limitations, this qualitative study offers true insights into fact-checking practice in the Mediterranean context (France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain). Findings reveal the professionalization of fact-checking in this geographical area, demonstrating the clear commitment of their organizations to transparency and openness within a strong public service motivation. These findings, however, should be expanded in the future with the perspectives of other platforms operating in these countries. Further research should include fact-checking interventions in Greece, where few studies have been conducted (**Lamprou** *et al.*, 2021), and compare initiatives operating in the Polarized Pluralist Model with those from democratic corporatist and liberal systems. Following the approach of the present study, additional in-depth interviews with decision-makers would be valuable to obtain a richer insight into the distinctive practices and strategies developed by fact-checkers in different countries and regions.

In the future, the expanding partnerships between fact-checking platforms and technological giants such as *Facebook* or *Google* (**Graves**; **Anderson**, 2020) should be examined, along with the evolution of incipient forms of automated fact-checking and the importance of human experts during the verification process (**Nakov** *et al*., 2021). The alliances between newsrooms and academia and the development of media literacy activities should also be scrutinized to ascertain the educational value of fact-checking among citizens and journalists (**Amazeen**, 2020; **Moreno-Gil**; **Ramon-Vegas**; **Rodríguez-Martínez**, 2021). Building on previous work (**Brandtzaeg**; **Følstad**; **Chaparro-Domínguez**, 2018; **Figueira**; **Santos**, 2019), new studies should also investigate the involvement of audiences, and their perspectives and expectations regarding disinformation and verification.

Finally, based on the findings of this research, fact-checking platforms could be considered as self-regulatory entities with the mission of promoting public participation and transparency. These three characteristics correlate with the essential components of media accountability instruments (**Mauri-Ríos**; **Ramon-Vegas**, 2015). Future studies should further conceptualize fact-checking platforms as innovative media accountability instruments and interrogate the ways in which fact-checking organizations themselves are accountable for their professional practice to society at large (**Rojas-Torrijos**; **Ramon-Vegas**, 2017).

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7. Annex

Interview scripts

1. Description of projects' origins, staff, and structure

- How did the project start?
- Did any references inspire the project?
- Do you have any contact with any other fact-checking initiatives?
- How many people are currently part of the fact-checking team?
- Which role/specialization do they have within the team? What is their professional background?

2. Agenda, volume, and frequency of verifications

- What criteria do you follow when selecting content to verify?
- Is there any topic specialization?
- Generally speaking, are claims from institutional sources more important to you?
- How many checks are made per week/month? What is the daily/weekly frequency?
- How many checks does each person carry out?

3. Fact-checking procedures, routines, and resources

- Could you list and describe the steps that are followed to complete a verification?
- What type of sources do you consult? In what order?
- Please, specify -in order- the top 5-10 most used sources
- How many people take part in each check and what are their roles?
- What kind of software and/or digital tools are normally used? Do you use your own software?
- Who uses these tools? Is it a computer expert or any fact-checker by his/her own?
- Do you set a maximum period (hours/days) for each verification?
- How many filters does the verification pass before being published?
- What categories do you use to classify the verifications?
- Could you specify -in order- the most repeated ones?
- What is the relationship with the sources you have checked? Have you ever received any complaints from them after a verification?

4. Dissemination of fact-checks

- How and where do you publish the results of your checks?
- Do you specify a correction policy? Have you ever received any correction request?

5. Role of the public

- Do you allow audience participation? What are the channels/ways you offer?
- Which are the most used by the audience?
- How many verifications come from their requests?

6. Editors' opinions on the challenges and impact of fact-checking platforms'

- What are the main problems and challenges you find when doing your job (internal and external)?
- How do you solve these problems and challenges?
- In your opinion, what's the future of journalism? What's the current and future role of fact-checking in it?