

FAKE NEWS: WHERE JOURNALISTS AND AUDIENCES MEET (AND WHERE THEY DON'T)

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ABSTRACT. This article gives voice to two protagonists of the disinformation phenomenon: audiences and journalists. A two-objective comparative analysis is presented: on the one hand, to explore the audiences' role in stimulating the disinformation phenomenon in Costa Rica and characterize the reception dynamics and interaction that they establish with fake news within the country; on the other hand, to give journalists a voice to compare and contrast their perceptions with their audiences' perceptions. A qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews with a small and non-representative sample of Costa Rican journalists holding leadership positions at some of the country's most important media outlets was used. Also, six discussion groups with audiences were held. This article performs a comparative analysis of what journalists and participating audiences think about the disinformation phenomenon, the term "fake

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news,” the responsibilities in the fight against this problem and the possible solutions. The results suggest that, according to journalists, misinformative content circulates on social media and does not come from the traditional media they represent. In contrast, audiences present an antagonistic position since they tend to associate disinformation with the traditional media. However, they also consider traditional media as a source of verification of false content circulating on social media.

KEYWORDS: Audiences / fake news / journalism / social media / fact-checkers

NOTICIAS FALSAS: DÓNDE SE ENCUENTRAN PERIODISTAS Y AUDIENCIAS (Y DÓNDE NO)

RESUMEN. Este artículo les da voz a dos protagonistas del fenómeno de la desinformación: las audiencias y los periodistas. Se presenta un análisis comparativo que tiene dos objetivos: por un lado, explorar el papel de las audiencias en la dinamización del fenómeno de la desinformación en Costa Rica y caracterizar las dinámicas que las mismas establecen con las noticias falsas que se difunden en el país y, por otro lado, darles voz a periodistas para contraponer y comparar sus percepciones con las de sus audiencias. Se aplicó una metodología cualitativa basada en entrevistas semiestructuradas a una muestra pequeña y no representativa de periodistas costarricenses en puestos de mando de algunos de los principales medios del país y se realizaron seis grupos de discusión con audiencias. El artículo hace un análisis comparativo sobre lo que piensan los profesionales en periodismo y las audiencias participantes sobre el fenómeno de la desinformación, la idea de noticias falsas, las responsabilidades en la lucha contra esta problemática y cuáles soluciones ven viables. Los resultados sugieren que, para los periodistas, los contenidos desinformativos son los que circulan en redes sociales y no son contenidos de los medios tradicionales que representan; en cambio, en las audiencias se evidencia una postura antagónica, pues, por un lado, tienden a asociar la desinformación con la labor de los medios tradicionales; no obstante, por otro lado, también los mencionan como fuente de verificación frente a los contenidos falsos que circulan en redes sociales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: audiencias / noticias falsas / periodismo / redes sociales

NOTÍCIAS FALSAS: ONDE JORNALISTAS E PÚBLICO SE ENCONTRAM (E ONDE NÃO)

RESUMO. Este artigo dá voz a dois protagonistas do fenômeno da desinformação: audiências e jornalistas. Apresenta-se uma análise comparativa a partir de dois objetivos: primeiro, explorar o papel do público no estímulo ao fenômeno da desinformação na Costa Rica e caracterizar a dinâmica de recepção e interação estabelecidas através das notícias falsas no país; segundo, possibilitar, aos jornalistas,

uma voz que compare e contraste as percepções deles e do público. Dessa forma, foi aplicada uma metodologia qualitativa, a partir de entrevistas semiestruturadas com jornalistas em cargos de chefia de alguns dos principais meios de comunicação do país. Também foram realizados grupos de discussão com o público. Em vista disso, recuperamos o que jornalistas e público participantes pensam sobre o fenômeno da desinformação, o termo “notícias falsas”, as responsabilidades no combate a esse problema e as possíveis soluções. Os resultados sugerem que, para os jornalistas, o conteúdo desinformativo é aquele que circula nas redes sociais e não provém dos meios de comunicação hegemônicos que representam. Por outro lado, as audiências apresentam uma posição antagônica, pois tendem a associar a desinformação com os meios de comunicação tradicionais. No entanto, eles também mencionam a mídia tradicional como uma fonte de verificação contra o conteúdo falso que circula nas redes sociais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: audiências / notícias falsas / jornalismo / mídia social / checagem de fatos

Apoyos

El artículo se deriva del proyecto “#Fake News: Una indagación interdisciplinaria a la circulación de noticias falsas en Costa Rica”, adscrito con el código C0336 a la Vicerrectoría de Investigación de la Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) y financiado por el Fondo para la Educación Superior (FES) y el Consejo Nacional de Rectores (CONARE) de Costa Rica, en la convocatoria 2019.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s, on the Internet's early days—when the media suddenly lost the monopoly of reporting the news—the pessimistic debates and forecasts about the future of journalism multiplied. If anyone could report and publish content and, in turn, also obtain all kinds of content and information, what were journalists needed for?

At that time, the concerns seemed legitimate; today, more than 25 years later, the pendulum seems to have moved to the other extreme and the debate revolves around the need for journalism in the face of information oversupply, especially in the face of the now well-known “disinformation phenomenon”.

Indeed, in a context of disinformation and fake news, citizens around the world (Brenan & Stubbs, 2020; Sánchez & Fuente, 2020) turn to professional journalism as a guarantor of truthful and reliable information. For Sánchez and Fuente (2020)

citizens are more than ever in need of a healthy diet of reliable and quality information. The multiplication of disseminating sources of information with different and very diverse origins, interests and commitment to the truth makes the existence of professional mediation especially necessary to filter the relevant from the inconsequential, verify each piece of information and give meaning to the specific news. That is the social function of journalism. (p. 14)

Most of the studies about the disinformation phenomenon have focused on analyzing the contents, causes and ways of spreading fake news, while there have been comparatively fewer studies of two of this problem's protagonists: journalists and audiences (Lecheler & Egelhofer, 2020).

Despite this situation, research on the topic agrees in pointing out that the academic attention and media coverage that disinformation receives are detrimental to the relationship between the media and their audiences. The topic overexposure creates a distorted perspective of the proportion of false content to which people are *really* exposed. This makes citizens believe they are subject to constant and deliberate manipulation, further undermining the already eroded trust in traditional media (Lecheler & Egelhofer, 2020).

This, in turn, suggests that the efforts to mitigate the disinformation effects in society and democratic systems do not end with the study of the production of misleading or fake content. It is also necessary to listen to journalists and their audiences in order to understand, on the one hand, what journalists understand by disinformation and how they deal with this problem and, on the other hand, to identify the exposure patterns, consumption and even resistance that audiences apply in relation to misinformative content.

Therefore, this article has two objectives: first, to explore the audience's role in stimulating the disinformation phenomenon in Costa Rica and characterize the reception

dynamics and interaction that they establish with fake news within the country; second, to give journalists—who have become one of this story's protagonists—a voice to be able to compare and contrast their perceptions with their audiences' perceptions.

Incorporating journalists' view into the study is justified because even though, as a group, they have inadvertently become part of the disinformation phenomenon, their role has not been sufficiently explored. Furthermore, the study of audiences in relation to the disinformation phenomenon is justified because the impact of disinformation on the micro-social level of an individual and their group has been little explored (Lazer et al., 2018). In other words, the impact of disinformation on people is often assumed without taking into account their capabilities or the variables that could mitigate or intensify said impact. Even if the distorting manipulation of fake news were effective for a particular individual or group, it would be necessary to further study the factors that are involved within this process.

Based on the above, a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews with journalists holding leadership positions (directors, editors or personnel in charge of key areas) at some of the country's most important media outlets was used. Additionally, focus groups with audiences including people of different ages and geographical origin were organized. This methodology made it possible to conduct a situated analysis of the disinformation problem in Costa Rica from journalists' and audiences' points of view. This article recovers what journalism professionals and participating audiences think about the disinformation phenomenon, the term "fake news," the responsibilities in the fight against this problem and the solutions they take into account.

The results suggest that, according to journalists, misleading and fake content is found on social media and does not come from the traditional media they represent. In contrast, audiences present an antagonistic position. Although they associate disinformation with the traditional media, they also use legitimate media outlets as a source of verification of misleading and fake content that circulates on social media. Their answers lead to what has already been pointed out by some authors: The traditional media crisis is not due to an abundance of fake news but to a lack of credibility and trust towards the real news spread by the traditional media (Nelson & Taneja, 2018). Based on these results, it is possible to elucidate the impact that disinformation has on journalists, the discussion group participants and their social group.

As stated, there is relatively few published research on both these topics, and most of it focuses on countries in the Northern Hemisphere. Therefore, the data this article analyzes, representing how disinformation is perceived by journalists and audiences in the South, presents a much-needed perspective that contributes to enrich the literature on this important subject.

Referential Framework: Disinformation in the Digital Age: What's New?

Broadly speaking, fake news is defined as news articles whose content turns out to be fictional once verified. Moreover, online fake news is intended to deceive, but with the distinction that it is spread through the Internet or social media (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). The disinformation or false content that circulates through digital media does not always do so in the form of (apparent) news but can also be spread through WhatsApp chains or other formats. In any case, fake news or misleading online content is also distinguished as a type of publication produced for the purpose of going viral (Klein & Wueller, 2017).

At first glance, the task of defining fake news might seem simple. However, some authors argue that the term has been used too laxly and elastically, which demands an exercise of greater conceptual precision. Four different definitions of fake news gathered by Alemanno (2018) show this problem: (1) The European Commission defines it as "intentional disinformation spread via online social platforms, broadcast news media or traditional print". (2) A report by Facebook describes the term as "a catch-all phrase to refer to everything from news articles that are factually incorrect to opinion pieces, parodies and sarcasm, hoaxes, rumors, memes, online abuse, and factual misstatements by public figures that are reported in otherwise accurate news pieces". (3) The BBC uses the definition "false information deliberately circulated on hoax news sites to misinform, usually for political or commercial purposes" and distinguishes it from false news. (4) The Guardian newspaper speaks of "fictions deliberately fabricated and presented as non-fiction with the intent to mislead recipients into treating fiction as fact or into doubting verifiable fact".

For other authors, defining fake news lacks all logic since the term is, in itself, an oxymoron: the term "news" is based on the truth and pursues a series of normative ideals such as factuality, objectivity and neutrality, what is the opposite of fake news (Tandoc et al., 2018).

In response to these conceptual challenges, Mourão and Robertson (2019) propose a comprehensive and relational definition of fake news. Their proposal is comprehensive because it invites us to think of fake news as a discursive integration that combines different genres and elements of true news—and facticity—with a series of elements that are incompatible with the normative journalistic model, such as disinformation, sensationalism, informative bias and clickbait (a content whose main purpose, more than informing, is to attract clicks to a certain website). And it is relational because, from their point of view, fake news can only be defined in relation to real news through a comparative exercise and always in relation to the context.

The disinformation variant that we know today differs from other past forms for technological, economic and political reasons (Lecheler & Egelhofer, 2020). From a technological point of view, the Internet and social media make it possible to produce

content immediately and, in turn, involve audiences in the production, diffusion and dissemination of both truthful and misleading content (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Grinberg et al., 2019; Martens et al., 2018; Vosoughi et al., 2018). In the contemporary media ecology context, social media—especially Facebook—constitutes a “fertile ground for sowing disinformation” (Shao et al., 2018, p. 2).

This happens to a certain extent due to a series of economic factors. The low production costs offered by the Internet have made it easier for new content generators to enter the scene, undermining the old news oligopolies' business models (Lazer et al., 2018). This process, in turn, has impacted traditional journalism practices and routines, as the new digital media, driven by the so-called “economy of emotions” and clickbaits, observes traditional journalistic standards of objectivity and balance with less rigor (Bakir & McStay, 2018). This makes it cheaper to produce misinformative content that generates profits from visits to this type of website, more interested in engagement than in the dissemination of truthful and reliable information (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

In the context of these new content production dynamics, the classic mechanisms for selecting and publishing information (represented by the figure of a gatekeeper) have been undermined (Lecheler & Egelhofer, 2020). Thus, the task of evaluating information credibility now relies heavily upon audiences, something that can be overwhelming and confusing even for the so-called “digital natives” (Metzger et al., 2003).

All of this, coupled with highly sophisticated technologies such as deepfakes, generate a distorted version of reality that enhances the dissemination of propaganda, fake news and disinformation (Salgado, 2021).

These technological and economic conditions find support in a series of political and social factors, including the lack of trust in social institutions (such as the media and the government), the crisis of the written press, and the increasingly fragmented and polarized democratic regimes due to inequality and the emergence of populism in the global political arena.

The current context of consumption of misinformative content should be understood as a two-dimensional phenomenon: (1) the actual consumption of and exposure to disinformation versus (2) the consumption and exposure perceived by the audiences. Regarding the latter, despite the fact that the data (Nelson & Taneja, 2018; Fletcher et al., 2018) shows the opposite, the social perception of the impact of disinformation in society remains “extremely high” (Manor, 2019). This perception feeds back the belief that we are experiencing a global “disinformation crisis” which, in turn, increases citizen and academic concerns, as well as the actions to curb its potential consequences. The literature consulted neither denies nor minimizes the potential effects of disinformation, but it does warn that its impact could be magnified, which could be even more damaging at a democratic level than

fake news per se, while the distorted perception of the impact of disinformation can erode citizens' trust in the traditional media (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019).

All of this is detrimental for different reasons: first, because it generates mistrust towards democratic and informational institutions and, second, because it increases citizens' anxiety and fear at the possibility of being constantly deceived and manipulated (Lecheler & Egelhofer, 2020).

The complex disinformation phenomenon has also been studied from the journalistic point of view. Unwittingly, professional journalists are at the center of the debate on this phenomenon. Although there are articles with systematic literature reviews about disinformation and fake news (Blanco et al., 2019; Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019; Parra-Valero & Oliveira, 2018; Carazo-Barrantes et al., 2021), these reviews are not completely focused on the relationship between this problem and journalism. Nonetheless, the academia has studied the role of journalism in this area from different angles.

Much has been written about the role of journalism, its usefulness and necessity in the new digital context (Alonso, 2017; Carlson, 2018a, 2018b; Figueras-Maz et al., 2012; Tong, 2018). More than a decade ago, renowned journalists Kovach and Rosenstiel (2012) wrote a book on journalism and the truth in "the era of information overload," arguing that "journalism has not become obsolete: it is becoming more complex" (Sánchez & Fuente, 2020, p. 9).

Due to the importance of digital context, a large number of authors have focused on its study and its impact on the professional practice of journalism. Rodríguez-Pérez (2019) puts it like this:

The spread of gossip, lies and false information is inherent to human beings; what has changed in recent years is the speed of transmission and the ease of generating and spreading them given the characteristics of the Internet (information instantaneity, interactivity, "viralization" and globalization) that multiply the possibilities of being trapped in the disinformation network. (p. 68)

Hence, there is a trend that focuses on social media effects on the profession and the quality of journalism (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Campos-Freire et al., 2016; Hedman, 2015; Marchi, 2012; Metag & Rauchfleisch, 2017; Suárez-Villegas & Cruz-Álvarez, 2016).

Information verification services or fact-checkers are another large area of study (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017; Echevarría, 2016; Lotero-Echeverri et al., 2018; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2019). Terol-Bolinches and Alonso-López (2020) explain that the origins of this practice predate the advent of the Internet. They mention as example American magazines such as *Time*, which already applied an information verification process before publishing the news. However, at present, this practice refers to the various information verification systems or fact-checking from journalism, the academia or

different government entities. Therefore, it is not the case that one practice replaced the other since they are not mutually exclusive. Today, there are two versions of journalistic verification practices: the traditional one, carried out before publication by journalists in newsrooms, and the new verification service, which monitors and denies false information that has already been published. For Rodríguez Pérez (2019), the new service expansion “arises from a triple need: to verify speeches, evidence deception and lies, and improve the quality of public debate” (p. 69).

Although the Central American region is no exception to the problem of disinformation, very little has been written and researched on the subject and even less with an emphasis on journalism and the audiences including their voices on the subject. In this way, this article aims to be a first step to fill that gap.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews with journalists holding leadership positions at some of Costa Rica's main media outlets was used. Additionally, discussion groups with audiences were held with people from different ages, occupations and geographic origin. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, we opted for a semi-structured methodological design. This approach is suitable for complex social phenomena—like disinformation—and entails a “loosely structured, emergent, inductively grounded approach for gathering data” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 36). Therefore, the interviews and focus groups were semi-structured in design and the data was coded manually by using the categories that emerged from the subject's own discourses, narratives and experiences.

In regard to the audiences, six discussion groups were held between March 11 and 24, 2021 through the Zoom platform (due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions). Each group held a session that lasted one hour.

The discussion groups were articulated from a group conversation conducted in a type of collective work assigned by a foreign agent (Canales & Peinado, 1994). This technique is considered appropriate for communication studies because it allows the creation of a communication context. In turn, it also gives the possibility of exploring how the subject's social representations are constructed through group interaction (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996).

The groups were divided by age and by geographical area. Two groups of students were organized: one with students from the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM, for its acronym in Spanish) and another one with students from coastal provinces (Puntarenas, Guanacaste and Limón). Similarly, GAM and coastal provinces professionals were divided in age groups (25-34 years old; 35-40 years old and older than 40 years old). In all cases,

to respect the confidentiality of the participants, a pseudonym was used to report the discussion results.

The participants received an invitation on social media from the University of Costa Rica's Center for Communication Research (CICOM, for its acronym in Spanish) to talk about news and disinformation in Costa Rica". In other words, these are people who felt motivated (some even worried) by the disinformation phenomenon, which must be taken into account when thinking about their responses.

For the study of journalism professionals, interviews with journalists from six national media outlets based in the capital city (San José) were carried out between February 16 and March 16, 2021. The participating media outlets were *Amelia Rueda*, *delfino.cr*, *observador.cr*, *La Nación*, *Sistema Nacional de Radio y Televisión (SINART*, for its acronym in Spanish) and *Teletica.com*. These represent various formats, including radio, television and print and digital newspapers. All of the media outlets, except for *SINART*, are commercial and privately owned; *SINART* is state-owned. The individual interviews were carried out virtually through the Zoom platform, a measure adapted to the restrictions that arose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

The conversations were recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed in a comprehensive manner. All participants agreed to be cited in academic articles. A thematic analysis of the interviews and focus groups was conducted on the following four topics: 1. How they define fake news and the disinformation phenomenon, 2. How they deal with it, 3. Verification as journalistic value and fact-checking services, and 4. Audiences' role in the face of possible solutions. The analysis focused on disaggregating the interviews and focus group conversations into thematic experimental components, using the language of ideas that are repeated (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003), and the data was collected until theoretical saturation was reached. These patterns were identified from a 'focused' coding of responses provided by journalists and audiences (Saldaña, 2009). The results below show the main patterns identified through said analysis.

RESULTS

Perception of Disinformation

To begin with, it is of utmost importance to understand what the participants understand by "fake news," since this topic's interpretation may change depending on their conceptualization.

Without any reference to academic debates about what disinformation really is and what is meant by misinformative content and fake news, the focus group participants seemed to have a clear idea on what those concepts mean. While some spoke of

sensationalism, others pointed to the media's political and economic interests. In any case, when asked about their definition of misinformative content, the majority referred to the media and not to rumors, chains or contents that go viral without being clear about their source.

For Juan, a 54-year-old teacher, for example, there is disinformation that has to do with mistakes, but there is also disinformation that has to do with the media or the person sharing the content intentionally lying about a result. "That is the disinformation that seems most dangerous to me. Almost every time we find a bad intention, we must follow the money, in other words, the interests. The disinformation that should interest us is the one that has a biased intention before its creation". He also warned that "the most dangerous lie is the one that contains a percentage of truth, because it is the one that is most credible". Luis, a 50-year-old social worker, went even further by denouncing that "disinformation is a very good business; inventing in itself is a business".

Walter, a 30-year-old librarian, referred to misleading content that is the product of omission on the part of content generators with the following definition: "Disinformation occurs when a single point of view is raised, magnifying it, without including the other side; or when they omit important parts". Tania, a 19-year-old student, spoke of "very exaggerated or extravagant news," while Sofía, a 25-year-old student, referred to "headlines with distorted information so that you click on them only to find the news doesn't even have to do with the title". For his part, Gabriel, a 20-year-old student, underlined the polarization that derives from misleading content.

Antonia, a 30-year-old psychologist and independent worker, emphasized another problem: the one related to disinformation and the clickbait model (Munger, 2020; Pangrazio, 2018). "The media is interested in generating engagement on their page; it doesn't care much about informing. The likes, the reactions are what the media is most interested in. The more engagement, the more reactions, the more money it generates. Disinformation's motivation is to generate movement in their pages. Communication has become an object of marketing," she complained.

Distrust towards media outlets came to light when talking about what the participants understood by misleading content. For Carlos, a press cameraman, "there is no truthful, transparent, reliable media outlet by itself. It depends on the case. A media outlet can be reliable today on an environmental issue but tomorrow, on a political issue, it can be totally biased". Catalina, a 37-year-old engineer, agrees; for her, the news media that has been historically established is not necessarily the most credible: "What information do I believe? None. I doubt all of them," she sentenced.

Regarding the motivation to participate in a virtual discussion group, the citizens' concerns regarding fake news and the disinformation phenomenon are evident. When asked about what motivated them to participate in the discussion groups, the acknowledgment that

it is a current, widespread and disturbing problem was stated in all groups. Some people spoke of disinformation as a “political tool” used by political groups to manipulate and achieve certain interests. For example, Antonia, a 30-year-old psychologist, said, “disinformation is a political tool, not only in Costa Rica but also worldwide”. For her, disinformation has been used to put up many barriers against human rights, feminism and other struggles. Other people, like Lorena, a 46-year-old administrator, focused more on the other side of the coin: the audience. Lorena lamented that “people do not inform themselves; they do not read”. For her, there is a lot of false information on social media that affects citizen’s opinion, especially in relation to government issues.

The concern in their voices was evident: “an uninformed nation is a manipulated nation,” warned Juan, a 54-year-old teacher. Harry, a 30-year-old computer technician, denounced it as “one of the greatest dangers that society has nowadays”. Hannah, a 44-year-old consultant, said that “disinformation is harmful because citizens don’t always count with the tools to unravel lies from truth. You can get lost trying to get to the truth. It leaves doubts in the collective unconscious, it leaves conspiracy theories”.

Among the people who participated in the discussion groups, several stayed informed by looking for news in alternative sources such as independent journalists, mainstream institutions (such as universities) and specialized newsletters in their areas of interest. Walter, a 30-year-old librarian, explained that he prefers “to follow independent journalists who show more of their own criteria, who do not need to respond to special interests and, therefore, can express themselves more freely”. For him, the traditional press misinforms and misrepresents information. For Rosa, a 37-year-old cashier, the advantage of receiving information through newsletters is that she can choose what interests her, along with searching and controlling what she sees.

Several of the participants agree with Lorena, a 46-year-old administrator, who explained that she does keep up with the news (because it is important to her that people remain informed) but she eliminated many media that seemed “toxic” to her. In addition to “toxic,” other words that the participants used to describe traditional media were “tabloid,” “repetitive,” “tiring” and “negative approaches”. Marianella, a 41-year-old pharmacist, even called them “media of collective disinformation”. She said, “I am tired of the mass disinformation media in this country. I would give anything for the veracity so that things are not taken out of context, which is what I find most tiring of news media; few are objective, as they should be”.

When referring to misinformative content, some participants focused on the audiences and not on the media. The problem, they argued, lies in a lack of critical thinking and in poor reading comprehension. Maria, a 31-year-old graphic designer, said that disinformation is fueled by a lack of critical thinking: “We don’t read; we only read the headline. There is laziness and lack of reading comprehension. At other times,

the problem is because people comment out of hatred, without having read the article, comment on things the article does not even say. Now you can't trust as much, you can't believe anyone". Rosa, a 37-year-old cashier, agreed. For her, "people who do not have the curiosity or the malice to read between the lines end up consuming the superficial, which is not important. The media communicates the trivial and people, since they do not want to do research on their own, end up consuming the superficial. People should detach themselves from media trivialities and research on their own. It's disappointing. If a person wants to be well informed, they have to do it by their own means ... The problem is that very few consumers are curious to research what was left out". In her opinion, "if everyone researched, people would be well informed".

Gabriel, a 20-year-old student, is one of the few participants in the discussion groups who distanced himself from traditional media when the group spoke of the definition of misinformative content and rather pointed to "assumptions, opinions, conspiracies that appear as information and that make people modify their opinions or their points of view for something unreal or without proof, but that in the end many people accept as real because it suits them or it relates to things closer to their context". That is, as Joseph Klapper (1957) pointed out in the last century, there is a process of selective exposure and perception regarding content with which we agree and that makes audiences sometimes not care whether it is totally or partially false.

All this is related, of course, to the power of algorithms in digital spaces (Beer, 2017; Pariser, 2011), something that did not go unnoticed by Luis, a 50-year-old social worker, who explained it like this: "Algorithms have to do with everything that we have previously consumed. I will receive information that is biased by these algorithms. Information manipulation brings serious consequences for society. This reminds me of the wolf's and shepherd's story ... It is a citizen's duty to filter the information, compare it and see if their sources are not the most appropriate, try to nourish themselves better".

While the audiences mostly relate the concept of disinformation to traditional media, journalists believe the phenomenon is located far from the media in which they work. Nonetheless, they do acknowledge that it has impacted professional practices within the press rooms. The adjectives used by the interviewed journalists to characterize this phenomenon, in general terms, concurred: they spoke of "false," "distorted," "imprecise" or "decontextualized".

Luis Ramírez, from *Amelia Rueda*, specifically mentioned social media as the main means of spreading fake news. This element of virtuality could justify the comparison made by Andrea Mora from *delfino.cr* when stating that "it is like a plague".

They also spoke of the objective with which disinformation is spread. Kattia Bermúdez, digital editor of *nacion.com*, pointed out that fake news' purpose is "to provoke a reaction with political or specific objectives". This effect is achieved through deception

that Luis Ramírez described as "the purpose of deceiving or disorienting the audience based on totally false facts or half-truths". Rodolfo González, director of *teletica.com*, however, questioned the term itself. González disagrees with calling this phenomenon fake news since, for him, "if it is fake, it is not news".

The objective of deceiving is linked to specific issues, such as the one mentioned by Kattia Bermúdez when pointing towards political intentions, something that is also mentioned by the audiences but, in their case, without leaving out the legitimate media.

Sources Are Key in Making Content Credible

Journalists mentioned three variables that make them suspect that a news item is false: the format, the content and the source of distribution. Fake news is not limited to a specific format, so the type of formats associated with this phenomenon was addressed in the interviews. Although some of the journalists mentioned specific formats, such as the case of Ernesto Rivera from *SINART* who addressed the meme, Kattia Bermúdez from *nacion.com* warned that fake news can sneak into "any content, any format, any piece distributed".

They also discussed what fake news content includes or not. For Andrea Mora from *delfino.cr*, content of this type corresponds to "whichever is not well researched and verified from beginning to end". Berlioth Herrera from *observador.cr* and Ernesto Rivera from *SINART* maintain that fake news is false when it comes from "unreliable sources" or is based on "rumors".

Hand in hand with the issue of sources arises the method of distribution or the platforms on which this type of content is published. Luis Ramírez from *Amelia Rueda* mentioned examples such as "publications on social media, news on strange sites, statements from some sources that publish fake news or replicate it". The latter alluding to the lack of data verification.

For their part, focus groups' participants seemed to have a very keen awareness of which are some clues that must be analyzed to know for certain if a story is truthful. Both groups of students, from the coastal provinces and the metropolitan area, indicated that, in order to verify whether a content is fake or not, it is necessary to analyze not only how the news is presented but also who says it. For them, it is not enough for the information to have sources, but it must present different positions, what they call "the two sides of the story". In addition, the sources must be corroborable, that is, one must look if they can be found elsewhere.

Many other participants in the focus groups agreed with the students. Carlos, a 36-year-old press cameraman, was emphatic in claiming that "the media should include different voices and different positions; plurality gives confidence; if there are different voices, at least one can dare to discern". Catalina, a 37-year-old engineer, assured that

she doubts all information but that "it is true that the diversity of sources is important; with a single source information bias increases".

Mateo, a 32-year-old freelance musician, added that it is also necessary to identify the story's framing or editorial line. He insisted that you have to ask yourself "what is the editorial line, what is the intention: do they want to inform me or are they just giving me the writer's personal opinion? Does the story aim to polarize?" For Harry, a 30-year-old computer technician, you also have to doubt news that cites anonymous sources. "For me that's like the media saying: 'we are making this up'," he warned.

It is interesting and contradictory that although most of the people with whom we spoke turned out to be very critical of traditional media, when asked about their strategies to find out whether content or information is reliable, some of them pointed precisely to the media. Valeria, a 28-year-old teacher, spoke of "consolidated media" and Gabriel, a 20-year-old student, like his fellow GAM students, also referred to the trust generated by the media: "If I see it in the media, I will believe it more. Although I know that there is always a certain ideology and that no message is neutral, in the case of the established media, I can believe to a greater extent".

Probably this trust generated by the work of the "consolidated" media, as Valeria said, can be analyzed in contrast to content that arrives through social media platforms and, especially, WhatsApp, a platform that seems to generate widespread suspicion. The participants insisted they do not believe the information that comes to them through WhatsApp until they verify it by looking it up in one or more reliable sources.

Verification as Journalistic Value and Verification Services

Verification is a recurring theme when talking about fake news. Although audiences understand verification as the effort that each person must make to corroborate the veracity of the content they receive or consume, for journalism professionals, verification is something that must happen before the media publishes a news item. Berlioth Herrera from *observador.cr* put it like this: "Until all our content is ready, verified from head to toe, it does not go out". That is, it goes through good journalistic practices and routines.

There is no doubt that the fake news phenomenon has not only impacted public opinion but also newsroom dynamics regarding their agenda-building practices. Representatives of such varied media outlets as *SINART*, *Amelia Rueda*, *delfino.cr* and *observador.cr* agreed that the disinformation phenomenon explosion in the digital age has forced the traditional fact-checking practices and source review to be reinforced.

Ernesto Rivera, Kattia Bermúdez and Luis Ramírez agreed that fake news has generated a great impact within the media. Bermúdez explained that "it has become one of the essential agenda items because it is a never-ending issue: when one fake content

is denied, five emerge; it is part of the daily journalistic agenda. This is sad because it entails investing resources and time fighting falsehoods, which means that, depending on the newsroom's size, you have to devote resources to this instead of to in-depth reports".

Rodolfo González, from *teletica.com*, has the opposite position: in his medium, they have a policy not to deny fake news. He notes that "it is not on my agenda to do so for several reasons. The first is the confirmation bias: no matter how many resources and effort I invest in the denial, people will not believe it [the denial]. The second reason is that I am not the one who is saying something false; therefore, it is not my duty to clarify what everyone is saying. Third, if I spend valuable time and resources clarifying what everyone says, what do I generate in the end as my own content, my own agenda? So I end up with a page dedicated to denying what others say and they will not believe me anyway. ... People who read fake news read a paragraph. And that's it. These people are not going to read three pages of clarifications or denials".

In addition to fact-checking, another element to consider is the way in which the information is processed and presented by the media. Andrea Mora from *delfino.cr* explained that in their outlet every detail is taken care of so that news content is not misinterpreted once it is published. Referring to a specific case as an example, she explained, "It came out very late because it was absolutely and thoroughly reviewed; we wanted to make sure that what we were saying would not be misinterpreted".

In their efforts to combat fake information, the interviewed outlets have followed different strategies: ignore the fact check. Kattia Bermúdez from *nacion.com* explained that "there is a section in charge of monitoring fake news and, depending on the impact that it may have, we decide whether to deny or clarify it or not; everything is centered around *No Coma Cuento* [the fact-checker section of *La Nación*]".

On the audiences' side, the verification practices mentioned by participants were varied. Carlos, a press cameraman, explained that he makes a comparison between the different media: "You receive information from three media outlets, with three different points of view; then, it is up to you to discern and draw your own conclusions". Along the same lines, Juan, a 54-year-old professor, explained that his practice is to "look for different versions of a topic that interests me, look for reliable sources and see what interests they lean towards. I like research and I take the time to contrast various media outlets and also listen to people's opinions on social media". Valeria, a 28-year-old teacher, shared that she only verifies and researches further when the news seems incredible to her and it is a topic that interests her.

On the subject of verification, we asked the participants if they used the fact-checking services available in Costa Rica. The general trend is that they are not widely used. Saúl, a 26-year-old student, said that he has used Costa Rican services but pointed out that, in general, he goes to comments on social media as a verification mechanism:

"When something happens and it is new, on social media, in the comments section, there is always someone who explains what happened and this generates certain criteria to go find more information".

Gabriel, a 20-year-old student, shared other verification strategies that do not go through the screening services: "if I have any questions, I Google the news story's title and check out the first links to see if they are from legitimate media outlets. I don't tend to check if I already suspect it's disinformation. If I don't see it in all the media, I suspect".

Walter, a 30-year-old librarian, not only agrees that he does not usually use this type of service but he goes further in criticizing it. For him, not only is the fact-checking service itself unreliable but he also points out one of the dilemmas that has been documented in the literature: the problem that what is not verified by the service can be assumed to be true by audiences. In Walter's words: "They almost appropriate the truth: what they check as false is false and what they don't fact-check may be true. But this, we all know, is not necessarily so".

Audiences' Role Regarding Some Possible Solutions

Solutions against the pernicious disinformation phenomenon are neither comprehensive nor simple. Some of the journalists consulted are of the opinion that fact-checkers constitute a useful and necessary resource. Most agreed on the importance of media literacy and audience education, something that has been widely discussed in the literature (França et al., 2019; McGrew et al., 2018; Middaugh, 2018, 2019; Musgrove et al., 2018; Pérez Tornero et al., 2018; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2019; Tandoc et al., 2018).

Indeed, on the role that audiences unquestionably have in cutting off fake news' viral circulation, the journalism professionals consulted acknowledged that the media they represent have not carried out audience research on this problem. Little efforts have been made at *SINART* and *teletica.com* to inform their consumers on how to detect and avoid spreading fake news. Kattia Bermúdez from *La Nación* explained that they have ventured into the issue through the outlet's data verification effort: "With *No Coma Cuento*, through different platforms, we have the possibility of interacting with our audiences; we ask people for feedback, we have credibility, and we have channels for them to report fake news ... and we can also measure it with metrics".

Kattia Bermúdez also mentioned the role that another actor, the academia, can play in the fight against disinformation. "It is important that human and social behavior be studied and that further research on how a phenomenon like this impacts social dynamics is done. Future professionals need to be trained to combat disinformation from many channels and in many ways. This is a fight that must be carried out on different fronts, not only in schools of journalism but also in schools of education, for example. It is not just about denying fake news but eradicating the phenomenon".

The journalists' position can be contrasted with findings from audience focus groups that evoke the so-called Third Person Effect (Davidson, 1983). While the discussion group participants claimed they verify news content they receive, especially through WhatsApp, at the same time, they insisted that disinformation stems from the fact that third parties ("the others") "do not stop to think if what they receive via WhatsApp is real or not and they do not corroborate it," in Andrea's words, a 21-year-old student. Participants who pointed to "the others" as the problem's source mentioned, above all, older adults and people with low levels of education. For example, Tania, a 19-year-old student, was one of the participants who indicated that "disinformation is a problem not only among youth but also among older adults. Because many times on WhatsApp they share information that is not true (for example, about COVID-19 and vaccines) without stopping to verify the source; simply, they believe what they receive".

However, there was a discussion about this issue in one of the groups, where some participants, such as Juan, a 54-year-old teacher, believed that the educational level was not necessarily what explained people believing in totally or partially false content: "Poor training in the subject of research is not the same as education; an academic degree does not ensure research capabilities," he argued. Antonia, a 30-year-old psychologist, agreed with Juan: "I differ that it has to do with the level of education because I have come across people, even with PhDs, who are very set in their ways or who say 'I saw this on Facebook, so it's true'". In her opinion, there is no specific population that has a tendency to believe more in fake news.

Along the same lines, Hannah, a 44-year-old consultant, emphasized the issue of values more than that of education. For her, "It starts with the assumption that with education we cannot be ignorant, but the scale of values is also an important issue". She explained that there are people who decide to share information without worrying if it is false or not, or knowing that it is, because it agrees with their values. It is a behavior that has been documented in the literature (Guess et al., 2019; Lawson & Kakkar, 2020). Juan, a 54-year-old teacher, took Hannah's argument a step further when he stated that "the bad guys in the movie are not the people who are disinformed due to lack of preparation". For him, "the disinformation that must be faced is that which comes from a bad intention".

DISCUSSION

There is a marked contrast in what the two participating groups referred to when asked about fake news. The audiences point to the media (more in the line of the European Commission's definition discussed at the beginning of this article) but for the participating journalists, fake news is related to social media and to content that is purposely misleading. When they think of misinformative content, they think of one that circulates on social media in the form of memes, chains, rumors and content that pretends to

be legitimate news but are rather intentional hoaxes. The journalists' viewpoint is more closely related to the other definitions of fake news discussed previously: Facebook's, the BBC's and The Guardian's.

It is interesting that, although journalists put disinformation and fake news in places far from the media and its professional practices, the phenomenon has definitely impacted journalistic routines in newsrooms. Thus, while for audiences the exercise of verifying the content they consume involves doubting what reaches them, for professional journalists' verification means, above all, taking care that the content they produce is verified, double-checked, confirmed... that is, the traditional journalistic practices of consultation and confirmation have been reinforced with various and diverse sources. However, according to what those who participated in this study explained, that care now goes even further and journalism professionals are also aware of the possible malicious use that may be given to the information they produce; i.e., they take care that their texts are very clear and there is no room for misinterpretation.

Another way in which the phenomenon has impacted newsrooms is its incidence in each outlet's news agenda. Although Vargo et al. (2018) found that, in 2016, in the United States, fake news did not have a special impact on media agendas, in Costa Rica, inquiries to journalists reflect a dilemma against which each media outlet must take a position: Let fake news leak onto the news agenda or prevent it to defend its own agenda. As seen in the results, some news outlets consider it important to investigate and deny the false content that circulates on social media and even have specialized platforms to do said task, such as the *No Coma Cuento* section of *La Nación*. However, they do recognize that it is an investment of time, effort and other limited resources that are not being used for investigative journalism or at least in stories of greater depth. This happens at a time when the traditional media business model's crisis is known and notorious (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012), a crisis that has deepened because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other media outlets, on the other hand, indicate that it is pointless to invest time and resources fighting against the disinformation that circulates on social media and have a policy not to publish denials for this type of false content. There is no unequivocal answer to the question of which of the two approaches is correct or even preferable. Both have their advantages and disadvantages. Undoubtedly, the public needs reliable information that refutes rumors and false content that circulate on social media, although, as has been established in the literature, the denials are not as widely read as the original false content (Vosoughi et al., 2018). However, it is also true that this practice could allow false content to have an agenda-setting effect on media agendas.

The issue of verification services, to which journalists around the world have given so much importance as a solution to the problem of disinformation (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017; Echevarría, 2016; Lotero-Echeverri et al., 2018; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2019) and which those who were consulted in the Costa Rican context also point out in

the framework of solutions, should be reevaluated. It is not about questioning the value of their operations and functionality but rather indicating the need to analyze them in the light of what audiences say about their use and usefulness.

Indeed, the audiences (represented by those who participated in the discussion groups) primarily associate disinformation with traditional media and, to a lesser extent, with social media and/or WhatsApp chains. This perception is in dialogue with the idea, shared by several of the participants, that the quality of information offered by Costa Rican media is deficient, which is why they choose to obtain information through alternative media. Therefore, the positions expressed by the participating audiences suggest that disinformation in Costa Rica is associated more with a certain form of journalism characterized by inconsistency (one day it is good and another it is not), the decontextualization of the facts or the lack of objectivity, than with the deliberate creation of false content. It seems, then, that what audiences actually demand is a higher quality journalism, meaning a plurality of voices and points of view when reporting on a particular event. They also demand greater media independence and impartiality, since the general perception is that they operate in collusion with other entities (government, private companies, advertisers, etc.). These audiences' demands strongly relate to the need for quality journalism in the digital age that has been discussed in the literature (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Campos-Freire et al., 2016; Hedman, 2015; Marchi, 2012; Metag & Rauchfleisch, 2017; Suárez-Villegas & Cruz-Álvarez, 2016).

On the other hand, disinformation is also associated with political and economic ends. This is because, for some of the participants, disinformation operates as a "political tool" that has been used to manipulate public opinion on issues of social interest such as access to and enjoyment of certain human rights. Likewise, they point out that it is clear that disinformation also works as a business due to the gains derived from clickbait, likes and visitation, as pointed out by Bakir and McStay (2018). Both positions suggest that, for the participants, disinformation is a phenomenon that is not confined to the media but can also be spread by other institutions for persuasive purposes or to achieve economic gain.

The consumption, exposure and dissemination of misinformative content can also be nuanced depending on the socialization groups. A striking aspect is the allusion to the "aunts," characterized by the participants as those people who could be more inclined to share misinformative content in the WhatsApp family chat. This appreciation, recurrent in at least two of the discussion groups, suggests the existence of an age and gender bias, in the sense that the participants tend to think that these women have fewer tools to distinguish between truthful and false content. Along the same lines, the participants indicate that the problem of disinformation is the responsibility of "the others," specifically, of older people, with low educational level and/or lack of critical thinking, who contribute to the dissemination of misleading content. Another group of participants argues that the

education level is not always a factor since they claim to know people “with PhDs” who also share misinformative content.

From our point of view, these positions evoke the third-person effect (TPE) of media coverage hypothesis. This hypothesis, first described by Davidson (1983), suggests that people tend to overestimate the media's influence on other's behaviors, attitudes and beliefs while minimizing this effect on themselves and their peers. That is, people, when exposed to a persuasive message, believe that the persuasive effect will be greater on other members of the audience than on themselves and/or the social group to which they belong (Davison, 1983). Although the TPE hypothesis was formulated on the basis of truthful news and in the heyday of traditional media, the participants' responses about how false content influenced others evoked the principles of this hypothesis. Therefore, they concur with the results obtained by other research and also confirm that TPE correlates with social distance since the greater the perceived social distance with respect to the other is, the greater the perceived and expected TPE will be (Jang & Kim, 2017).

All of this, coupled with the fact that the majority prefer to be informed through social media and alternative media's digital platforms, shows changes in Costa Rican audiences' media consumption trends, especially when it comes to younger people. On the other hand, it is possible to perceive, among some of the participants, a kind of information saturation that leads them to be more selective with the quantity and quality of the information they consume, since they consider that what the media offer can become “toxic,” “excessive” and “repetitive”. In this sense, the preference for regional media also suggests that the traditional media system in Costa Rica continues to be centered in the capital city. One of the participant's statement who points out that, in informational terms, “there are two Costa Ricas” invites us to think about the possibility of articulating a media and informative discourse that manages to integrate and represent these communities through content that goes beyond the news events, tourism or recreation.

These preferences are also based on a disdain for traditional media, which participants accuse of patronage and partiality, as opposed to alternative media, which—from their point of view—have no ulterior motives when it comes to reporting. They also demand a greater plurality of voices and perspectives from the traditional media. From this perception, we can see that, although the Internet has been linked to the emergence of journalism with low-quality standards, it also facilitates the emergence of other informative proposals that can operate with a certain margin of freedom thanks to the low production costs offered by digital communication.

Regarding one of the questions that this article raises, namely, what role do audiences play in the spread of disinformation, it is possible to sketch an answer in two dimensions. The first has to do with the self-perception that participants have of themselves as audiences. From this perspective, they describe themselves as interested and concerned

about the effects of disinformation in the Costa Rican society, a concern that motivates a responsible use of information and what they share—practically nothing—in their networks. The fact that they have agreed to participate in virtual discussion groups on the subject—even on weekends—shows that this position is real. The second dimension has to do with the responsibility attributed to others as an audience. As has been discussed, in this area they do show more critical positions because they argue that the disinformation problem of dissemination is the responsibility of others.

We do know that reality is more of a gray scale than the sum of positions so clearly differentiated, thus it is likely that the audiences' relationship with disinformation is more nuanced in their daily life.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the fact that, undoubtedly—whether they like it or not—journalism professionals have a leading role in the information ecosystem and, for the purposes of one of the arguments of this article, in the disinformation ecosystem, this important relationship has not received the academic attention it deserves. For this reason, even though we worked with a small and non-representative sample of Costa Rican journalists, making their voices visible is essential in any discussion about the disinformation phenomenon. Similarly, the social and academic attention that the disinformation phenomenon receives is disproportionate in relation to the study of fake news' real and perceived consumption by audiences. As a result of this imbalance, there is still little information on the impact of disinformation at the individual and (micro) group level, and it is then difficult to quantify with certainty the real presence of disinformation in people's media diet (Lazer et al. 2018; Lecheler & Egelhofer, 2020).

In this article, the comparative analysis of journalism professionals' position with that of the audiences represented in the focus groups is particularly interesting. Faced with the audiences' critical stance towards the traditional media, "which they accuse of patronage and partiality" and demand "a greater plurality of voices and perspectives," it is clear that the media must go beyond the reinforcement of journalistic practices of source consultation and verification to meet their audience's claims and guarantee the veracity of the data. Journalists must not only broaden the spectrum of voices and perspectives but also explore and delve into the reasons why audiences accuse them of clientelism and bias in order to take corrective action.

These measures could involve seeking greater impartiality in the stories produced by the media; at least, seeking the well-known "fairness" in each story, i.e., presenting at least the two positions that most news topics have. Also, the media could choose to be more transparent, open and revealing about their editorial lines and positions on the different issues and problems they report on.

Strong criticism of the media and the work of journalism professionals is documented in the audiences' perceptions. In this regard, the results of this article's analysis suggest that the participants feel that traditional media manipulate information due to pressure from other social groups. The effect of this perception on the social fabric is clear: distrust in institutions, not only media but also political, because (for the participants) disinformation is used as a "political tool" whose effect affects the fight for human rights. We believe it is necessary to delve deeper into this issue since it shows the existence of a binary thinking that antagonizes audiences (perceived as the "people" or "citizenship") and institutions ("elites"), which needs to be studied because the evidence suggests that these polarized positions pave the way for the emergence of and adherence to populist political projects.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, in a context of information oversupply in which disinformation content circulates virally, the credibility and legitimacy of the traditional media and journalists have a value today that was not seen in the 1990s, with the advent of the Internet. This is vital not only for the survival of the media but also for the democratic system itself. The good news is that we found evidence that that seed of credibility and legitimacy is there and can be (should be!) cultivated by professional journalists themselves.

The audiences, despite criticism, paradoxically point to traditional media and professional journalists as the sources they turn to when they need to verify information. The participants seem to be aware that, in the contemporary media environment, the responsibility of verifying the veracity of information falls on themselves. While it is true that they are not very assiduous in using fact-checking initiatives, they undertake searches on their own or even share content with people close to them to corroborate its authenticity. In this process, paradoxically, they use the traditional media of which they distrust. As they say in theory, the process of constantly checking the credibility of information can be overwhelming for audiences (Metzger et al., 2003). In fact, some of the responses suggest a certain longing for the traditional gatekeeper figure. Therefore, it is necessary to research the effects that this could be having on information consumption; in other words, could this type of demand lead people to restrict their information consumption as a result of saturation and fatigue?

The fact that the participants criticize the traditional media for not being impartial, objective or pluralistic, and have therefore partially withdrawn their trust suggests a fissure in the "pragmatic fiduciary contract" that the media establish with their audiences. Rodrigo Alsina (2005) explains that, for the journalistic discourse to be valid, it is necessary for people to "trust" its veracity and that this is only possible if a "pragmatic fiduciary contract" is established between people and the media. Under the terms of this contract, it is understood that the objectivity attributed to the media is not something absolute but "a proposal to read the communicative flow" (Rodrigo Alsina, 2005, p. 61).

If the audience decides to break this contract, the journalistic discourse will lose its validity. As we have stated, the participants' responses show a breach in that contract, which would have been caused not so much by the virality attributed to fake news but by a loss of trust due to the lack of high-quality information perceived by participants. This criticism, in turn, shows that they demand a public sphere model where the media adhere to the traditional ideal of being guarantors of objectivity and truth, which shows that it is still possible to suture and amend the contract that the national media have with their audiences.

It seems, therefore, that the audiences consulted agree with Kovach and Rosenstiel (2012) who, in their classic book on the elements of journalism, state that "journalism offers something unique to a society: independent, truthful, accurate and fair information that every citizen needs to be free" (p. 3). In this classic journalism text, it is interesting to note that two of the nine essential elements of journalism are *truth* and *verification*. "The first obligation of journalism is the truth. ... Its essence is the discipline of verification" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2012, p. 5). Thus, faced with the audiences' demands and their clamor for higher quality journalism, professional journalists must return to their roots, the importance of which they already recognize as seen in this chapter: *truth* and *verification*.

Finally, the comparative reading of journalists' and audiences' voices also reveals another valuable point of tension in the discussion on the phenomenon of disinformation: something as basic as its conceptualization and starting point. If, on one side (journalists) and on the other (audiences), the problem is being understood differently, it is necessary to delve into the reasons why this is so and to look for ways to build bridges that allow sharing common starting points to find joint solutions. It seems, at least for the Costa Rican case, that the academia is the one called upon to build those bridges; however, the effort to deepen the dialogue with their audiences is something that must be urgently incorporated into the agenda of media companies and the professional journalists working for them.

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