



### **Authorities, stop distorting facts**

Two battles are being fought in Brazil at the same time: one, in the field of medicine, against the expansion of the coronavirus, and another against the mis/disinformation produced by it. While on the front line of the former there are thousands of hard-working health professionals, on the latter stands an army comprised of a small but dedicated group of fact-checkers. Without the explicit support and commitment of the authorities to the truth, the country risks losing the war against rumors about COVID-19.

Since Feb. 26, when the country registered the first case of coronavirus, Brazilian fact-checkers have identified more than 100 falsehoods about the pandemic - more than three per day.

According to the [international database of fact-checks about the coronavirus](#) maintained by the International Fact-Checking Network, Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter are the most used channels to distribute mis/disinformation in Brazil, but the complete list is far longer.

What ails fact-checkers is seeing Brazilian authorities, thanks to the influence of their positions, contributing significantly to the growth of disinformation. Since the beginning of the pandemic, politicians have produced, endorsed and shared misinformation about vaccines, social distancing and the origin of the new coronavirus. They also have used outdated data and created an environment of economic distrust in which digital scams are flourishing.

By giving voice, space, pixels, images and characters to falsehoods, the authorities are putting the lives of Brazilians at risk. Real-time monitoring by fact-checkers shows that

by making or sharing a false statement, authorities have subverted accurate information and inflated non-expert opinions.

Hydroxychloroquine is an example. By treating early-stage studies of the drug as definitive, politicians have falsely touted it as a cure for COVID-19. So it didn't take long for the drug to disappear from pharmacies, harming those who, in fact, need it for conditions like lupus or malaria. At the same time, frightened Brazilians were exposed to side effects while searching for a magic pill to fight coronavirus.

It is urgent, therefore, that the authorities take responsibility when talking about the pandemic. It is time they make sure that the information they present to the public has a scientific basis, is current and refers to the specific region of Brazil they are talking about. It's time to cease distorted speeches with limited context or basis in science. The noise produced by those has already shown dramatic consequences.

In Iran, more than 40 people died of poisoning after drinking pure alcohol to cure the coronavirus. In the UK, cell phone towers were burned by those who believe COVID-19 comes from the 5G mobile system. In Brazil, social isolation has lost adherence after being attacked by authorities who disregard what is adopted around the world.

Transparent information about COVID-19 is non-negotiable. Citizens make daily decisions based on this data, so the information must be up-to-date, reliable and accessible to everyone.

Fact-checkers in Brazil are in permanent contact with the largest technology platforms and social networks in a joint effort against disinformation. They will continue to publicly denounce irresponsible behavior in disseminating or amplifying false information about the coronavirus and COVID-19. Whether they come from authorities or not.

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