Chequeado as a referee:

Analysis of the impact of fact-checking in Argentina during an election year

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Index

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1. Introduction

Fact-checking organizations were born in the United States 13 years ago (Pomares y Guzmán, 2015), and since then they have expanded all over the world. Founded in 2010, Chequeado was the first fact-checking organization in Argentina. As fact-checking popularity expanded, questions regarding its impact on three different groups of actors started to emerge (political leaders, journalists and citizens) (Pomares y Guzmán, 2015).

The aim of this paper is to examine Chequeado's impact on journalists, media, and citizens throughout an election campaign year, using a combination of methods: a survey taken by journalists, a media content analysis of Argentinean news sites, and two focus groups of citizens.

Regarding the press, literature indicates that there has been a growth of fact-checking's presence here (Amazeen, 2013; Graves, 2013; Graves, Nyhan & Reifler, 2015), but there is no conclusive evidence of fact-checking increasing public's trust in the media (Amazeen, Thorson, Muddiman & Graves, 2015). Besides, a study of the American Press Institute (2015) shows that there is still a high level of confusion among journalists regarding what fact-checking is. This paper aims to examine not only journalists' perceptions on fact-checking in general and Chequeado in particular, but also the presence of Chequeado within the media.

In relation to citizenry, previous reports focus mainly, by means of experimentation, on the interaction between party-political preferences and the tendency to accept or reject checks that are contrary to or coherent with such preferences. However, as Pomares and Guzmán (2015) note, the possibility of isolating fact-checking's impact from the other elements that form political knowledge and party preference is unclear. As a result, this paper conducted two focus groups to investigate the level of knowledge, as well as various opinions about fact-checking and Chequeado.

With regard to political leaders, previous investigations suggest that fact-checking increases the reputational cost of making misleading statements (Pomares y Guzmán, 2015). Even though this paper did not work directly with political leaders, it included the question regarding reputational cost, both in the journalists' survey and the focus groups with citizens.

In the following sections, the findings of the three studies are explained (survey, media content analysis and focus groups). The findings are subject to debate and some guidelines are proposed to increase the impact of fact-checking on the media and the citizens.

2. Chequeado and Journalists

Survey: Conducting and Sampling

A survey was conducted to analyze Chequeado's reach to journalists, and thus gather extensive information about the interest group in a simultaneous manner through a standard questionnaire (Wrench, et al, 2008). Several studies have utilized this method of gathering information about work practices and journalists' opinions (Singer, 2009; Weiss, 2014). An invitation to participate on the survey was emailed to journalists subscribed to FOPEA's newsletter (Foro de Periodismo Argentino) (N=400).[7] On the email, a link lead them to the online survey[8]. The survey consisted of 26 questions about working habits in general, and fact-checking and Chequeado in particular. The email was sent on three different occasions[9], and 46 participants answered all the questions. The response rate (12%) was among the average for Web surveys (Shih & Fan, 2008).

Out of all the journalists surveyed, ten worked in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (AMBA), seven in the Province of Buenos Aires and the rest in various other provinces (Catamarca, Córdoba, Corrientes, Entre Ríos, Jujuy, La Rioja, Mendoza, Misiones, Santa Cruz, Santa Fe, Tierra del Fuego y Tucumán). The survey respondents were on average 41 years old

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[7] This recruitment method creates problems when sampling, since journalists that do not receive FOPEA's newsletter do not have the chance to participate. Sampling errors are more common in Web surveys (Couper, 2000). In order to avoid them, a sample of email addresses from journalists could have been collected through phone calls to editorial offices across the country, but this procedure was too expensive for this study.

[8] Using SurveyMonkey.

[9] 12/15/2015; 12/19/2015 and 12/29/2015

(SD = 11). The youngest one was 24 years old and the oldest one, 64. 35% were women and 65% were men. There were journalists that worked in print media (44%), radio (39%), television (7%) and the Internet (59%).[10] In regards to their educational level, 6 of the 46 did not finish their community or university studies, 5 graduated from Community College, 16 held Bachelor's Degrees, 12 held Graduate Degrees and 7 preferred not to answer. I.e, the survey, although rather small, included journalists from all over the country, from different news outlets, ages and educational levels. Even though the size of the survey would not justify the use of percentages for analysis, they will be utilized in some cases to facilitate comparison between groups.

Knowledge about fact-checking and Chequeado

Out of the 46 respondents, half (23) knew a fact-checking organization. For those who knew the concept of fact-checking, Chequeado was the only example they could give (in most cases). When asked to mention which fact-checking organizations they knew, 21 of the 23 respondents mentioned Chequeado (among others), and 19 mentioned Chequeado alone. **In Argentina, Chequeado is a synonym of fact-checking,** as one can also see from the paper of the focus groups. Knowledge about Chequeado was not equally distributed among AMBA journalists and those from other provinces (Table 1). On the other hand, 40% of the young journalists knew Chequeado, in opposition to the 58% of journalists who were 40 years old or older.

Table 1: Knowledge about Chequeado depending on place of residence

	AMBA (N=10)	Other Provinces (N=36)

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[10] Options are not exclusive.

Knew Chequeado	70%	38.89%
Did not know Chequeado	30%	61.11%

Table 2: Knowledge about Chequeado regarding age

	<40 (N=20)	>40 (N=19)
Knew Chequeado	40%	57.89%
Did not know Chequeado	60%	42.11%

Using Chequeado as a source

Chart 1: Have you used Chequeado over the last year to cover the presidential campaign?
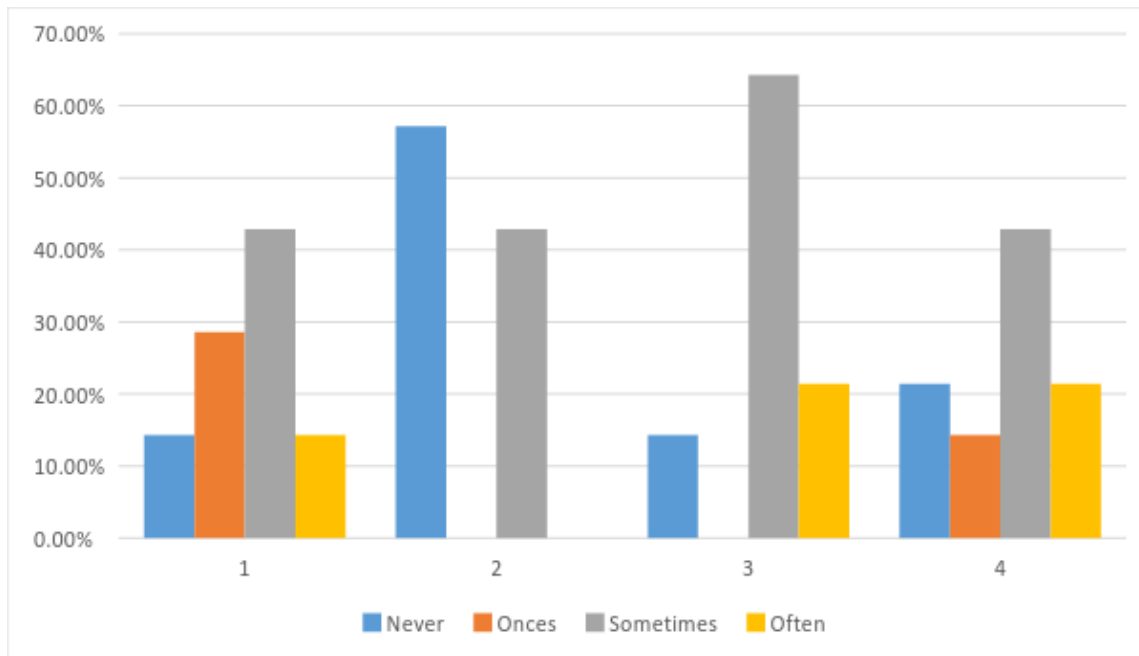
Most journalists that knew Chequeado used it as a source at least once during the previous year. Out of the 21 journalists who knew Chequeado, 18 used it at least once in 2015, although its use was more extensive in the other provinces: almost two thirds used it "several times", in opposition to less than half in the AMBA. When using Chequeado to cover the campaign, this tendency was more marked: more than half of the journalists from the AMBA did not use Chequeado for the campaign; while only a fifth of the journalists from other provinces did not. Among the people who did use it, over half (57%) did it to verify what the candidates were saying during the debates, followed by verifying what the candidates were saying in general (48%).   However, only 5 out of the 18 journalists who used Chequeado stated that they quoted it directly on their work. Chequeado's website was the number one source to access fact-checks (66%); Chequeado's accounts on social media were the second one (48%) and newspaper La Nación, the third one (24%).[11]

Opinion about Chequeado

Chart 2: Please mark if you agree, disagree, or do not agree nor disagree with the following statements:

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[11] Options are not exclusive.
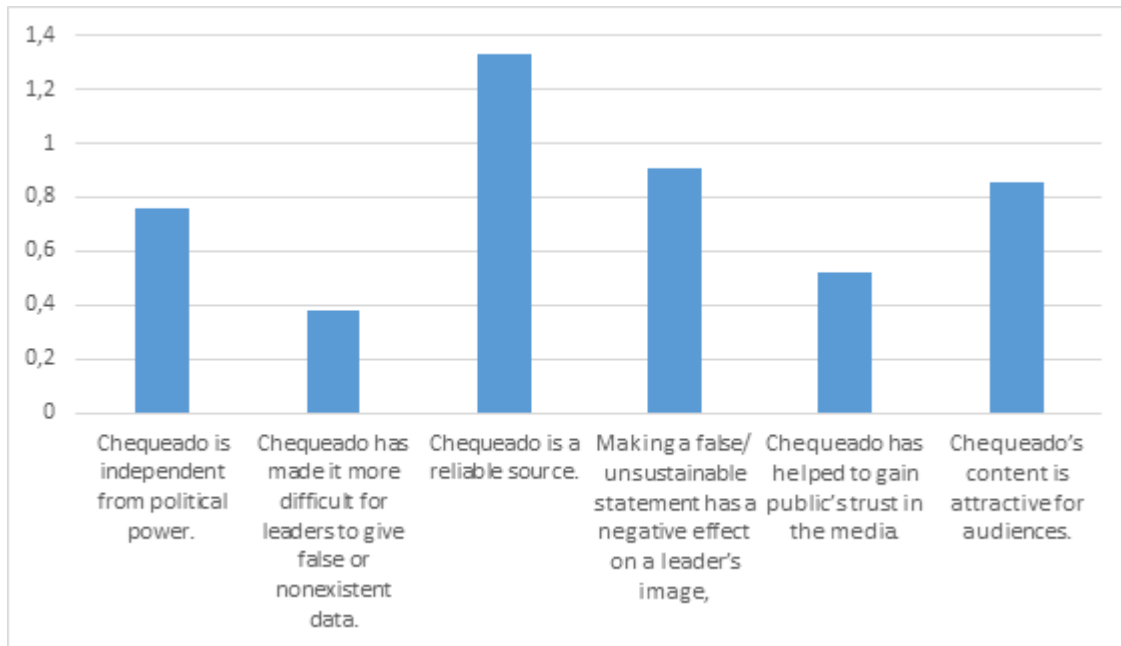
Most of the surveyed journalists considered Chequeado a reliable source. On a Likert scale from -2 to 2, where 0 is "neither agree nor disagree", 2 is "strongly agree" and -2 is "strongly disagree", the average among the surveyed said that they "agreed" and "strongly agreed" on Chequeado being a reliable source. The average was closer to "agree" for the statements "Chequeado is independent from political power," "Making a false/unsustainable statement has a negative effect on a leader's image ," "Chequeado has helped to gain public's trust in the media," and "Chequeado's content is attractive for audiences." However, the average did neither disagree nor agree with the statement "Chequeado has made it harder for leaders to give false or nonexistent data." (Chart 2)

Most respondents believed that the checked leaders' ideological-partisan plurality was high (Chart 3). Regarding this matter, they agreed with the focus groups' participants, even though the latter believed that this plurality was not necessarily a positive aspect.

Chart 3: According to your experience reading Chequeado's fact-checkings, on a scale from 0 to 4, how would you rate ideological-partisan plurality of those leaders that are checked?
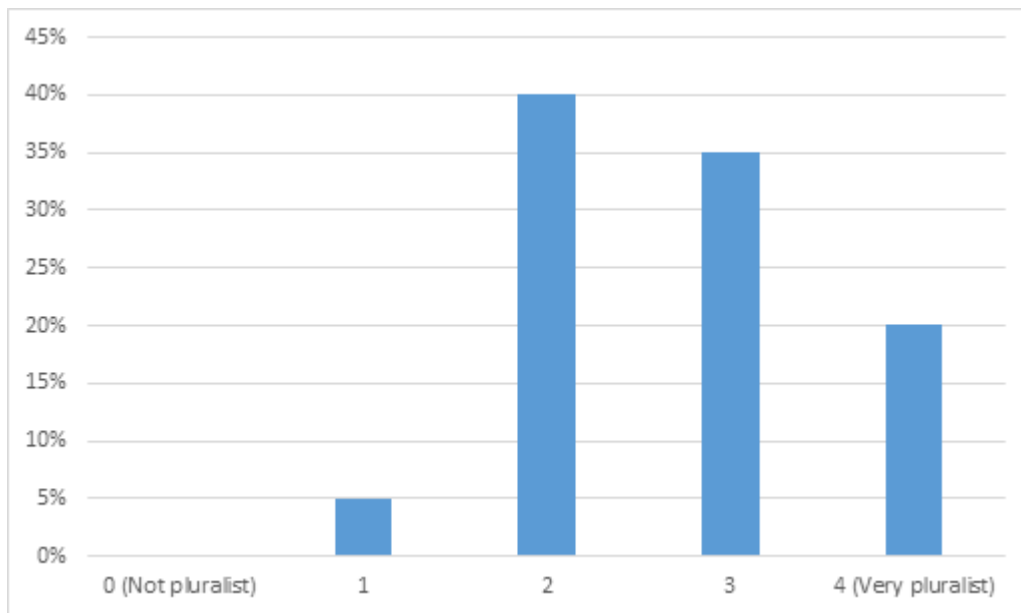
Perception of Chequeado's influence

On a scale from 0 to 4, where 0 is no influence at all and 4 is strong influence, the respondent stated that Chequeado had more influence over graphic, radio, and Internet and television journalists (in that order), followed by the candidates, and the citizens in the last place (Chart 4). I.e, Chequeado was perceived as more influent over journalists than over candidates and citizens.

Chart 4: According to your experience as a journalists on your work area, on a scale from 0 to 4, how much influence do you believe Chequeado has over the following figures
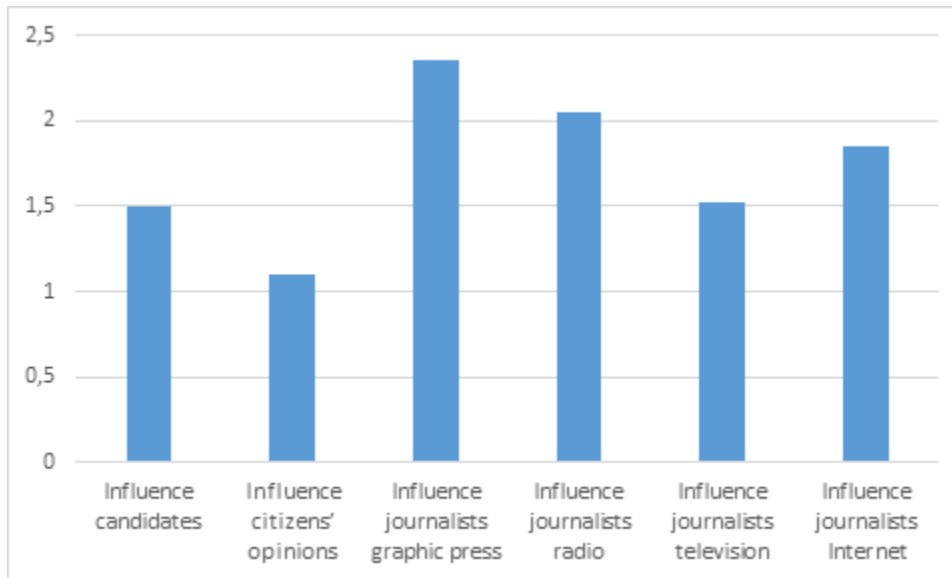
SUMMARY

Half the journalists knew Chequeado, but this knowledge was not distributed equally: more journalists from the AMBA knew Chequeado than those from other provinces. However, among those who did know Chequeado, journalists from other provinces used it more than those from the AMBA. Most surveyed valued Chequeado's reliability and independence positively, but it was unclear whether Chequeado's presence made it more difficult for leaders to provide false data. On the other hand, Chequeado was believed to have more influence over journalists than over politicians and citizens.

3. Chequeado in the Media

To measure Chequeado's impact on the news, this paper utilizes media content analysis, i.e, quantitative, replicable and systematic description of media content (Krippendorf, 2004). To begin with, a search was conducted between March 1st and November 30th, 2015 on 11 news sites, which included some of the most visited ones in Argentina, with different partisan and ideological approaches (Clarin.com, Lanacion.com.ar, tn.com.ar, Pagina/12, Infonews.com, Infobae.com), and other provincial sites (La Voz del Interior [Córdoba], Los Andes [Mendoza], Diario Río Negro, El Litoral [Santa Fe], Norte [Chaco]). The search was made on each media outlet search engine, utilizing several different terms on each opportunity, such as "Chequeado," "fact-checking," "checking," and "Chequeado.com", to cover all options in which Chequeado might have been mentioned. The articles' content was analyzed by two investigation assistants trained for the task, according to a codebook agreed among the authors. The agreement between encoders was an average of 79.33% among all categories.

Presence

Table 3: Number of articles that mentioned Chequeado on Clarín, La Nación, Página/12, Infonews, Infobae, la Voz, Los Andes, Río Negro and El Litoral

	%	N
Clarín	10.23%	9
La Nación	62.50%	55
Página 12	1.14%	1
Infonews	3.41%	3
Infobae	1.00%	1
La Voz	11.36%	10
Los Andes	3.41%	3
Río Negro	1.14%	1
El Litoral	5.68%	5

The work of Chequeado appeared at least once (Table 3) on 9 of the 11 sites of the sampling (on all of them except TN and Norte). On that period of time, 88 articles that mentioned Chequeado were published on those 9 sites. If we do not take La Nación into consideration (an outlier, since there is an agreement between La Nación and Chequeado— Chequeado publishes a column there every week), the average per site was of 3 articles. Even though it was impossible to quantify the total number of articles published by those sites during the nine months included in the sampling, the fact that there were less than 10 articles per site shows that Chequeado's presence on the online media was not strong. It appears that there were no differences between media from the AMBA and media from other provinces. "La voz del Interior," published in Córdoba, was the second site that mentioned Chequeado the most, after La Nación.

If the presence of articles according to the time of the year (Chart 5) is examined, the inclusion of fact-checking seems to go hand in hand with the political calendar: there were more fact-checks on March, during the opening of the Congress Ordinary Sessions (the President's State of the Union address offers plenty of fact-checking opportunities), but the number diminished until August (when the Open, Simultanous and Compulsary Primary elections—PASO—were held) until it reached its peach in October, during the first round of the presidential election. On this matter, it is possible that Chequeado's presence on the media attracted the citizenship's attention.

Chart 5: How many articles mentioned Chequeado per month
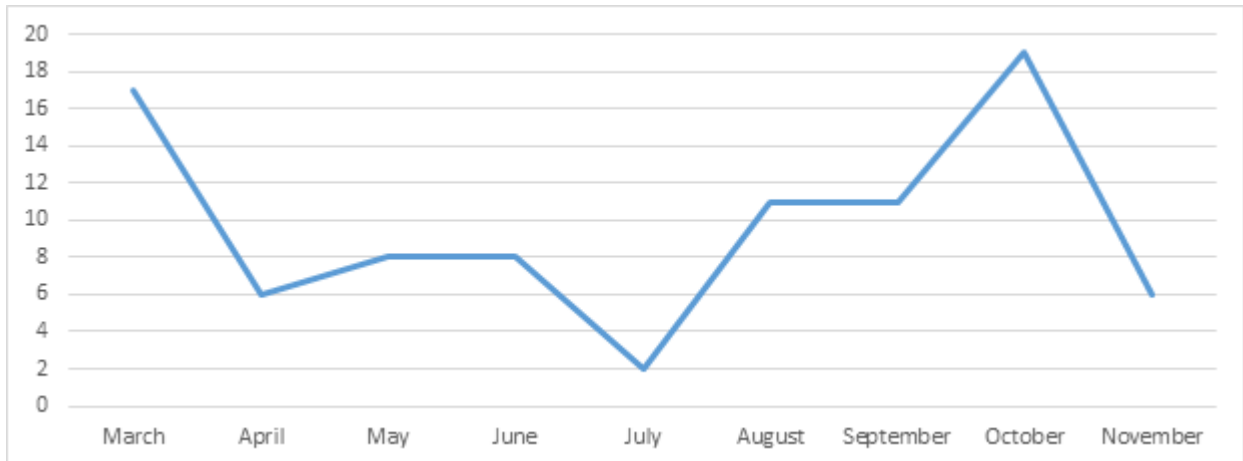
86% of the articles that mentioned Chequeado were informative, against 5% of soft news or chronicles, 6% of editorials and 3% of "others." Articles had an average of 660 words, with a standard deviation of 432 words. Out of all 88 articles that mentioned Chequeado, 59%

(N=52) verified or fact-checked data (Table 4), and among those, 92% respected Chequeado's[12] presentation and did not express an opinion on the matter. All the articles that verified or analyzed data dedicated more than 50% of the article to Chequeado's information. The only exception were the fact-check articles of El Litoral, which dedicated less than 25% to Chequeado's data. In La Nación, Chequeado was displayed over 71% of the cases as the author of the article,[13] while in most of the sites half of the articles (on average) mentioned Chequeado as the direct source.

Table 4: The article analyzed or verified data

	verified data	N
Clarín	11%	1
La Nación	69%	38
Página 12	100%	1
Infonews	0%	0
Infobae	100%	1
La Voz	60%	6
Los Andes	33%	1
Río Negro	100%	1
El Litoral	60%	3
Total	59%	52

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[12] Articles that mentioned Chequeado but did not include a fact-checking referred to checking events, awards given to Chequeado, or mentioned statements that politicians had made of Chequeado.

[13] As a result of the agreement between Chequeado and La Nación.

Checks

95% of the checks published on the sampling's media were about politicians and civil servants. Checks to media, NGOs or businessmen were not published on the analyzed sites. Among the articles that included checks to politicians and civil servants, 58% would verify a speech given by a representative of the Victory Front (Frente para la Victoria, FpV), 23% by a representative of Pro or Let's Change (Cambiemos), and 7% of a representative of the Renewal Front (Frente Renovador). Of all the fact-checking articles that included Chequeado's ratings regarding public speech(N=42), a third were labeled "False," followed by "True" and "Misleading" (14.29% each) (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Percentage of public speech qualifications on the articles that included Chequeado's ratings
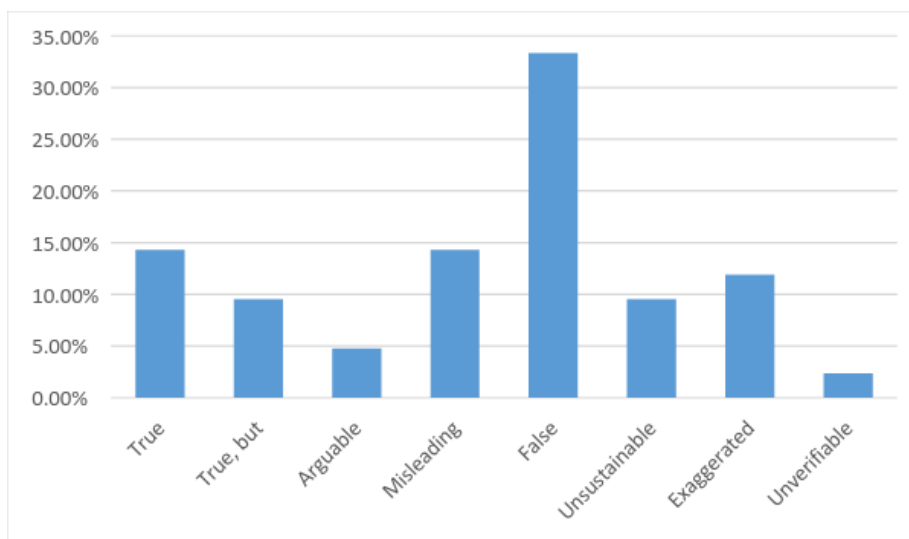
Media only published 10 or more checks of two parties (FPV and Pro/Let's Change). For the FpV, 46% of the statements were qualified as "False", in opposition to 30% of Pro. On the other hand, 16.67% of the FpV's claims were labeled "True", opposed to none of Pro. The most frequent category for the Pro party was "True, but", as 40% of the articles were qualified this way (Chart 7):

Chart 7: Qualifications according to each party
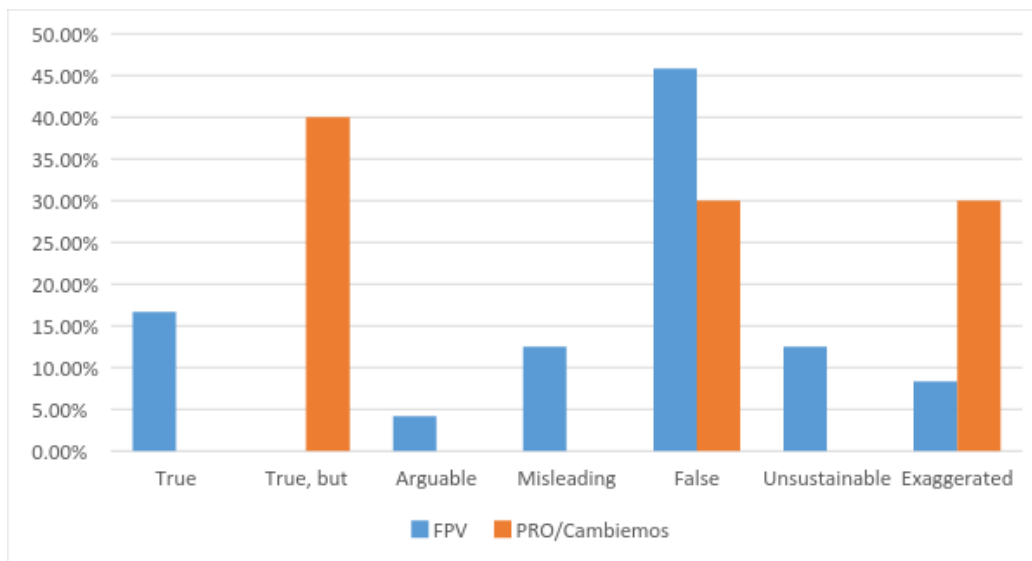
Expanding Chequeado's reach

None of Chequeado's journalists were mentioned in most of the articles (79.31%), although a link to Chequeado's website was featured in 56% of the cases, for the readers to deepen the analysis, read other checks and get to know the organization. This percentage fell a little when we did not include La Nación, but it still reached almost half of the cases (47%). 61% of the articles that analyzed or verified data included a link to Chequeado's website, compared to the 50% that did not (Table 5)-

Another way of measuring Chequeado's presence on the public agenda is through the frequency in which the articles were spread on social media. 45% of the articles were shared by the sites' users at least once, with an average of 373 posts per article on social media. Chequeado's presence on public debate could also be measured through readers' comments, posted on the same articles. 40% of the articles that mentioned Chequeado had at least one comment, with an average of 134 comments per article.

However, the articles that seemed to invite public debate were not the ones that analyzed or verified data; the articles that mentioned Chequeado but did not fact-check information were shared over twice the time that the ones that did, and received almost three times more comments (Table 5).

Table 5: Presence of links directing to Chequeado, and average of posts on social media and comments, depending on whether the article analyzed/verified data or not

	Analyzed or verified data	Did not analyze or verify data
There were links to Chequeado	50%	61%
Average of times it was shared on social media	231 (SD 415)	546 (SD 1024)
Average of comments	78 (SD 146)	216 (SD 439)

SUMMARY

Media content analysis indicates that Chequeado's presence on Argentina's most important online media was minor, specially if we do not include La Nación in the sampling, because it has an agreement with the organization to publish its content. It appears that there

were no differences between media from the AMBA and media from other provinces. Even though the presence was not major, most articles that mentioned Chequeado included fact-checking, which is the organization's main goal. In addition to this, media did not usually give their opinion about Chequeado's analysis, i.e, it was presented as legitimate.

Although Chequeado verifies all public speech, almost all checks published on the media were to civil servants and politicians, specially from the FpV. This does make sense, since during the period of data capture, the FpV was the ruling party in both the Province of Buenos Aires and Argentina. Checks to media, NGOs or businessmen were not published on any site. This tendency seems to agree with the theory that suggests that, in Argentina, media works as the Government's "guard dog", but not as most companies' or other media's (Waisbord, 2010).

Most articles published a link to Chequeado.com, which could lead to more citizens getting to know the organization and its entire work. However, the most shared and commented articles were not the ones that included fact-checking. There might be a logic to this: Maybe, as one of the focus groups' participants suggested, data worked to settle arguments.

4. Chequeado and Citizenry

Focus groups: Participants and Organization

Focus groups with citizens were organized on Tuesday, 15 of December and Thursday, 17 of December. There were six participants on each group. Both focus groups lasted one hour and a half (approx.), and six men and six women between the ages of 19 and 53 took part of the process (an average age of 26). One of the authors of this paper moderated both conversations.

The goal of the focus groups is to understand how and why citizens access Chequeado, and what use they give to the information they find on the site. Focus groups encourage conversation to focus on one issue only—in this case, citizens' access practices to and perceptions of Chequeado—and generate extensive information about that issue in a short amount of time (Fallon & Brown, 2002), They have a long history in consumption investigations in general, and media consumption in particular (Morgan, 1996).

Most participants knew the concept of "fact-checking", though with different degrees of precision. For example: Valeria, 46, explained, "There are a lot of websites, in Argentina, Latin America, in English, French, they are media outlets that verify public information, speeches, texts, generally related to the political and economical reality."[14] On the other hand, Mauricio, 25, who knew Chequeado from the debates during the presidential campaign, assured, "It's what's normally done on debates. It's done after the debate, which means: what did the participants say, if it is true or not and in what degree."[15] Chequeado was the only fact-

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[14] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[15] Focus Group 2, December 17, 2015.

checking organization they knew. Very few knew other examples of fact-checking and they could not provide any specific details.

Access

Access to Chequeado and to information produced by Chequeado followed the same patterns as the participants' regular news consumption. For example, Carolina, 53, said: "I see it on La Nación, there's a Chequeado column, which interests me, so I read it. Always on the printed version of La Nación, I never searched it on the Internet."[16] Bianca, a 23 year-old economist, accessed Chequeado through social media almost exclusively: "I follow them on Twitter, they would write something from time to time and I find out about things there. Going into the Website...only if I have a special interest about what kind of explanation they gave."[17] Access to Chequeado through social media is very common among young people, not only from Chequeado's official social media accounts (Twitter and Facebook), but also when someone else (an acquaintance or opinion leader) shares or quotes one of Chequeado's articles. Manuel, 19, exemplified: "On Facebook, someone who has a political orientation always shares a check about the candidate they don't like."[18]

Access frequency to Chequeado varies according to political moments. Even though Chequeado is more used during those moments of higher political activity (debates, the speech of the opening of the Congress Ordinary Sessions etc.), some participants accessed Chequeado at all times (to a lesser extent).

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[16] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[17] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[18] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

Perception

Chequeado was not perceived as a media outlet of general interest or as the first consultation site, rather as a tool that complements other media since it helps classifying the large amount of information available. Milagros, 22, summarized it: "Chequeado works as a referee. On the one hand, they allow you to broaden the biased point of view a newspaper might have. On the other hand, it creates a democratization of information. It brings you extra tools so that you can analyze information."[19] Valeria explained the difference between Chequeado and other journalistic media: "I believe that Chequeado's advantage is their focus on checking; media outlets do not always focus on checking since they don't have the time."[20]

For all participants Chequeado performed a both personal (reaching a conclusion about the facts) and public function (providing information to debate with other citizens). Hannah, 24, described Chequeado's role in her everyday media consumption, highlighting not only the function of referee, but also of complement: "We all do our own panning of information and we criticize as we do it (...) On that panoramic view I have Chequeado, and it helps me to... for example, I just read this article on La Nación and they say one thing here, but I compare it to another article on Página/12 and I start to find 'my own truth'."[21] Constanza, 23, gave another example of Chequeado as an authority: "It happened a lot during the last debate and the last elections that there were a lot of people on your Facebook wall arguing about something that

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[19] Focus Group 2, December 17, 2015.

[20] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[21] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

Macri or Scioli might have said, and suddenly you realized you just saved yourself 20 comments of people fighting."[22]

Trust

For most participants, Chequeado's levels of trust and motives can not be separated from the problem of the lack of data and reliability of public statistics in Argentina. As Valeria stated, "This is very hard to do in a country where statistics are a mess."[23] Martín, 19, remembered, "There are facts to which there is no data available and it's unverifiable[24] (...) it's terrible."[25] Marco gave a concrete example of the difficulty to fact-check in Argentina: "I read this article the other time: Macri had said that private employment hadn't grew in over four years in Argentina and the tag was 'arguable.' When you saw the data, it said: 'Lucio Castro from CIPPEC assures that employment had not only not grew, it had even fell. However, Indec does not publish data, therefore there are no official data available.' There is nothing 'true,' or 'false,' or 'arguable' there. There's something very wrong, and it's that there's no data in Argentina."[26] Trust levels also vary according to which the subject of the checking is. There is data that participants believe to be easy to check, and other that is not. For instance, Constanza said, "For the easy checks, for example: 'there are three thousand schools in La Matanza,' I trust more in what Chequeado says than in what La Nación, Página/12, etc. can argue (...) When it

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[22] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[23] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[24] Strictly speaking, according to Chequeado's rankings that are available to consult on the Website, the qualification for the lack of data available to check a statement is "unsustainable." It is "unverifiable" when a particular speech does not present any data viable to be contrasted.

[25] Focus Group 2, December 17, 2015.

[26] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

comes to easy checks, I trust more in Chequeado. On the other hand, if someone says 'the industry grew this much during...,' then I don't know, I wouldn't trust anyone."[27]

Both groups agreed that they trusted more in Chequeado than in traditional media outlets, although this did not represent a blind trust in the organization. Such greater level of trust is based on the exclusive focus on fact-checking, and on Chequeado's perception as a Non Governmental Organization (NGO), further away from the market and politics' pressures than traditional media outlets. Lucas, 21, highlighted that advertisers "often have an influence over what can or can't be published, who has to be mentioned and who has to be attacked. Chequeado, as an NGO, doesn't have money that stands in the middle since money makes everything more shady, so it's supposed to be more objective."[28]

However, there are motives that lead participants to be suspicious of Chequeado. First of all, some participants distrusted of how the subjects to be checked are chosen. Marco criticized: "The problem is that Chequeado is involved in this idea of objectivity that implies kicking left and right. I feel like they say: 'We are going to give 10 «True» to Macri and 10 to Cristina each week and we'll see how we publish it.' And this isn't the case."[29] The agreement with La Nación also aroused suspicion for at least one of the participants. Lucas reflected, "I was surprised when they became part of La Nación because it's a little contradictory. Chequeado doesn't only check what politicians say, but also what newspapers say, and La Nación was bastardized, but then I don't know if they absorbed a share of it or what, and suddenly it was a section on the newspaper."[30] These two examples suggest that participants evaluated

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[27] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[28] Focus Group 2, December 17, 2015.

[29] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[30] Focus Group 2, December 17, 2015.

Chequeado according to their own ideological-political preferences (distrust on the National Government and La Nación, respectively).

Second, the fact that there are different grades on Chequeado's ranking ("true," "true, but," "exaggerated," etc.) also leaded to distrust. The labels that are in between ("true, but," "exaggerated") were perceived as problematic for one of the focus groups: "You say 'I only have «True» or «False», but also a «But» or an «Exaggerated» and that's really an opinion, because «Exaggerated» is someone's opinion. Therefore, Chequeado is not as objective," claimed Valeria, "I agree with what she says,"[31] added Hannah.[32]

Overall, most participants trust Chequeado, but with reservations. In the words of Juan, 22: "If there were an objectivity - subjectivity pH: 0 being absolute objectivity and 14 absolute subjectivity, Chequeado would be closer to 0 than the average newspaper, but no one will be absolutely objective, there isn't such a thing."[33]

Chequeado and the Elections

Participants believed that having Chequeado as a source for the press and the citizenry was positive and that Chequeado being used by both parts (people and media, and politicians) is convenient. Bianca remembered that Martín Lousteau used Chequeado data during the debate with Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, before the elections for Chief of Government for the City of Buenos Aires, and suggested, "if you go with a sign that says 'Chequeado': 'Look, Chequeado said that what you are saying is false', and you manage to make the other one

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[31] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[32] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[33] Focus Group 2, December 17, 2015.

nervous, then it's a useful tool."[34] Hanna emphasized that politicians "use data a lot" and remembered that same presidential debate, where there was an argument between Adolfo Rodríguez Saá and Nicolás Del Caño, and "Del Caño asked him for a number, but Rodríguez Saá said, 'I give you my word', and that's not enough."

However, the participants agreed that the Website "didn't become a nightmare for politicians or liars, because in this country people do not really care about corruption" (Valeria). Carolina attributed this to the voters' characteristics: "That is the way society is, we have to grow a lot if we want them to be careful." Lucas suggested, "Those that have more 'greens' in Chequeado are the ones that have the least amount of votes: socialists, false radicals. Because they don't have nothing to lose, so why would they lie?" Bianca stated that, even though she believes Chequeado to be valuable, "people already made their decision, I don't think a check will change your vote."[35] Mauricio and Lucas believed that Chequeado could discourage some voters, by showing the candidates' lies. However, Mauricio clarified that only some voters: "If you have a more idealistic vision of politics, then it will burst your bubble."[36]

SUMMARY

Chequeado appears as a useful tool that complements traditional media outlets and, at the same time, plays as a referee of public discourse. Participants valued that it is not a commercial outlet and that it is independent from political power, although they did not always agree with the checks' subjects and ratings. Participants did not blindly trust Chequeado, just as they did not trust media or public discourse in general, and they

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[34] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[35] Focus Group 1, December 15, 2015.

[36] Focus Group 2, December 17, 2015.

emphasized the difficulty of establishing fact-truthfulness in Argentina, where there is no reliable system of public statistics. Although some accessed more to Chequeado during the electoral campaign, they did not consider it a tool to define their vote, nor that candidates would be afraid to being labeled with a "False" from Chequeado. Chequeado would have a more indirect contribution, since its existence would contribute to a fact-culture more than a promise-culture, as some of the exchanges during electoral debates suggested.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the survey taken by journalists, Chequeado's presence in the media and the statements made by focus groups participants suggest that Chequeado's impact can not be understood in an isolated manner, but as another actor of the main plot between political communication, speeches and public information in Argentina.

On the one hand, Chequeado seems to have succeed in becoming a synonym of fact-checking in Argentina; both journalists and citizens practically did not know any other fact-checking organizations. This organizes Chequeado hierarchically: journalists that use it as a source tend to trust its verifications; citizens are more inclined to trust Chequeado rather than traditional media. When media outlets quote Chequeado, they respect its rating, and citizens see Chequeado as a referee in the middle of the argument about politics in Argentina. Access to Chequeado for citizens is integrated to their consumption of information, and they can find Chequeado data on their usual media consumption, from the printed newspaper all the way to Facebook (which does not imply that they access Chequeado every day).

On the other hand, Chequeado is unknown by a large share of journalists, particularly journalist that work outside the AMBA, and such ignorance agrees with a rather limited coverage of Chequeado's work, especially if La Nación is excluded from the sampling. Besides, even though citizens tend to trust more in Chequeado than in traditional media outlets, the difficulty to gain access to reliable public statistics, both for Chequeado and for the rest of the producers of political content, puts in risk the concepts of "fact" and "data", which also affects Chequeado's credibility. Journalists and citizens agree that, in a context of uncertainty,

Chequeado does not seem to have much influence over political leaders and the citizens' voting intention.

An effort to increase Chequeado's presence, especially in media outlets from other provinces, could help result in a wider coverage and knowledge of journalists and citizens. This could be achieved through agreements between Chequeado and the media, such as the case of La Nación, and it would also detach Chequeado from the link perceived as exclusive or of belonging between the organization and the newspaper. The presence of Chequeado's journalists as regular columnists on some TV shows seems to be helping this cause. In regards of the lack of trust in public information, it is hard to believe that an NGO would, by itself, solve this problem. A check will not change someone's vote, as one of the participants said, but it can contribute to a revaluation of data and verifiability of public discourse.

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