

ILCSS
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

CHEQUEADO IN ARGENTINA

FACT-CHECKING AND THE SPREAD OF DISINFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA



 chequeado

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WE ARE NOT JUST SAYING IT, WE ARE PROVING IT: **FACT-CHECKING WORKS**

By Laura Zommer, Executive and Journalistic Director, [Chequeado](#)

It doesn't matter if we're in Argentina, Brazil, the United States, the Philippines, India, South Africa, Turkey, Spain or the United Kingdom. Fact-checkers from all over the world usually receive the same critiques. The questions asked in all languages — with better or worst manners and more or less irony — are essentially these two: “**Is what you do useful at all (if the misinformation phenomenon is getting worst every day)?**” and “**Are you really unbiased?**”

When talking about the growth and [expansion of fact-checking around the world](#), the words “impact” and “independence,” or “autonomy,” pop up every single time. However, there's not enough research about it, especially outside the United States and some European countries.

At [Chequeado](#), the first organization dedicated to verifying public discourse in Argentina, Latin America and the global South, we've asked ourselves those same questions since we started in 2010. Everywhere we looked, there were [signs and casuistry](#) that kept us optimistic and helped us to continue with our task. However, we don't think it's right to demand of others something different than what we demand of ourselves. Therefore, we decided to invest on independent researchers, so they could answer those questions with evidence and data.

When we asked two years ago Dr. Ernesto Calvo (University of Maryland) and Dr. Natalia Aruguete (National University of Quilmes) **to measure the impact and role of Chequeado during the 2019 Argentine presidential campaign** with the methodology that they believed was best, we took a chance and assumed a risk. They would publish their findings no matter what — and they were not big fact-checking fans.

“Why are we doing this? What happens if the results are bad?,” were the questions asked by some members of Chequeado's team. “What if, even though we think we are unbiased and judge everyone

with the same yardstick, data show that this is not the case?,” asked others. For me, there was only one answer: “If the results are bad, we will change. It’s better to know and not waste our time and many people’s money.” The results were good. **Now, not only can we say that fact-checking works; we also proved it.** We even have data to show and convince the most incredulous.

According to the results of the research, **people don’t necessarily change their opinions when Chequeado says that something is wrong, but they do change their behavior.** Our intervention reduces the incentive to share content that is misinformative or divorced from evidence.

And not only that. According to Calvo and Aruguete, these results were shown in both sides of the political and vernacular divide. This means that supporters of the *Frente de Todos* and *Juntos por el Cambio* reacted similarly to Chequeado’s publications. We were a legitimate source of information for the two main political parties of Argentina’s last electoral dispute.

Results do not only present good news for fact-checkers, they also offer improvement opportunities if we wish to increase our impact. For instance, they reveal that “intermediate rankings” — like “Misleading” — generally cause the same reactions as “False;” that people would rather share an article considered “True” than a “False” one; and that each time we point out to someone that something is not how they thought it was, their opinion about our brand or organization gets lower.

The research involved a national and representative survey conducted to 2040 participants that included three modules and five experiments, the analysis of Twitter activity around Chequeado’s publications and the fact-checks’ topics between September and December of 2019, and the study of the consumption and viralization of everything that Chequeado posted on its social media networks between June and December of 2019. We believe that making these results public is a contribution for the legislative campaign of 2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the last decade, the dissemination of false news and its spread with political motivations — fake news — have become a major problem for democratic discussion. They lead to serious consequences, like the rise in intolerance and political incivility levels and a bigger polarization, among others. However, the answer to tackle this phenomenon was not long in coming: governments, media outlets, digital platforms and non-governmental organizations have begun to develop mechanisms to give credit to fact-based evidence and discredit false news. *Chequeado* is one of the fact-checking organizations whose goal is to develop this kind of mechanisms.

In this report, we present experimental, observational and media consumption results, that will show how voters interpret the content published by fact-checking organizations like *Chequeado*, and how *Chequeado*'s adjudications are disseminated and interpreted.

Generally, we use the term **adjudication** to describe the act of **determining if a group that shares political content is right or wrong, which offers political benefits to some people and causes harm to others**. In practice, we refer to *Chequeado*'s adjudication(s) when stating that something is true or false. We do not use the term “verify” since the political difficulties analyzed in this report are not related to the validity or falsehood of *Chequeado*'s fact-checks, but to the political effects of confirming or rejecting stories spread by a group of political actors. Therefore, the aim of this report is not to check if a story is false, or if it was verified correctly. **Our goal is to assess the extent in which different political actors accept and spread adjudications, i.e., a story's rating – “True,” “False,” etc. – assigned by an organization dedi-**

“...DIAGNOSIS OF
CHEQUEADO’S
PERFORMANCE
DURING THE
2019 ARGENTINE
GENERAL
ELECTIONS.”

cated to facts and data verification.

This report presents the results that, in our opinion, are more relevant for a diagnosis of *Chequeado’s* performance during the 2019 Argentine general elections. It is important to clarify that **when we talk about the government or “ruling party”, we are referring to the *Juntos por el Cambio (JxC)* party, the coalition holding executive power at the time this report was written. On the other hand, when we refer to the “opposition,” we mean the *Frente de Todos (FdT)* party.**

This report combines three types of primary data collected by the *iLCSS* team. First, observational data from Twitter activity between September and December of 2019. This data shows the activation (or circulation) of messages in social media networks during the Argentine presidential elections. Second, media consumption data to analyze the spread of *Chequeado’s* publications on Google, Facebook and Twitter. Third, a survey with three question modules and five experiments that analyze the consumption of corrections by Argentine voters, as well as information about attitudinal preferences, media consumption and political behavior. The national and representative survey was conducted to 2040 individuals in the last week of April, 2020, and included a sample design created by Netquest.

We can divide the **conclusions** into three problematic axis: one refers to users, another one to the selection of events and consumption of *Chequeado’s* adjudications, and a third one to *Chequeado’s* activation on Twitter.

Let’s review them in more detail:



USERS:

- There are no biases from the ruling party (*JxC*) or the opposition (*FdT*) in the experimental interpretation of *Chequeado’s* adjudication. Survey respondents who identified themselves with either one of the two parties reacted similarly to

Chequeado's tweets that included ratings.

- When accepting *Chequeado's* adjudication, users did present cognitive biases. Voters have a clear tendency to accept adjudications that align with their political beliefs, and are less likely to do so when the adjudications disagree with their opinions. *Chequeado's* corrections also circulate more among those who share the same political beliefs (congruent community).
- We noted that *Chequeado's* stories are shared more when the adjudication confirms the content of the original tweet (*Two-Times-Right*). This means that the “True” classification is more viral than the “False” one. This asymmetry between “True” and “False” also partially explains the difficulties faced when sharing corrections. The message “It is false that...” is not usually shared by the community that fabricated the false information. It does not have a high degree of circulation among the community affected by the original tweet either. The message “It is true that...” validates an original story, and spreads quicker in the community aligned with such story, as well as the disagreeing community. As a result, the “true” message is equally shared by the people affected by it and those who stand against it.
- Lastly, voters who do not identify themselves with the ruling party or the opposition share less content and, if they do it at all, they do it slower. This lower activation rate among independents explains that the reaction to *Chequeado's* messages is more polarized in observational data. Therefore, it *twirls* — shows higher activation levels — towards the preferences of voters with strong partisan identification.



SELECTION OF EVENTS AND CONSUMPTION OF CHEQUEADO'S ADJUDICATIONS:

- We did not find biases from the ruling party (*JxC*) or opposition (*FdT*) in the selection of articles adjudicated as “False” or “True” between

July and December of 2019 — the electoral period. Users of different parties consume and spread *Chequeado*'s content in similar rates, according to observational data obtained from Buzzsumo.

- The number of adjudications that are cognitively congruent to *FdT* users is significant.
- In our analysis, stories were classified according to their “positive” or “negative” tone, i.e., if they confirmed that a political space did something or is formed in a certain way, or if they criticized that something was not done or did not happen, respectively. There is a considerable difference in the number of stories with a pro-government user (*JxC*) and a “positive” tone. Since *JxC* was in power in the period of time contemplated for this report, the number of stories assessed by *Chequeado* with a “positive” tone (news that describe alleged achievements by the government) is higher than those from the opposition, regardless of whether they are later classified as “True” or “False.”
- Regarding the platforms used for news consumption, people used Twitter more than Facebook¹ to read *Chequeado*'s stories. However, we did not find major statistically differences between government and opposition supporters or between adjudications that agree with the government or the opposition. There were also no substantial differences between “True,” “False,” “positive” or “negative” adjudications.
- Regarding partisan consumption, we did not find major statistically differences when the original user supported the government, the opposition, or others. We did not find major statistically differences in the consumption of stories classified as “True” or “False.” We noticed a higher news activation when the adjudication

¹ *Chequeado*'s audience in each social media network also varies. Until February, 2020, for example, *Chequeado*'s profile had 92 thousand likes on Facebook and 298 thousand followers on Twitter.

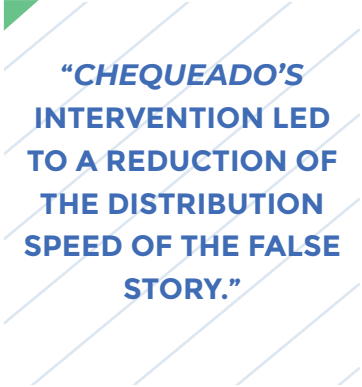
was “False” and the corrected user supported the government (*JxC*). This coincides with a higher activation of *Chequeado*’s messages between users that supported the *FdT* in the last week of the election period, when *Chequeado*’s consumption increased significantly. During this time, users closed to the *FdT* shared more articles that ranked statements made by members of the *JxC* as “False.”



CHEQUEADO’S ACTIVATION ON TWITTER

“THIS MEANS THAT *CHEQUEADO* DID NOT PUBLISH MORE ARTICLES IN FAVOR OR AGAINST ANY OF THE TWO POLITICAL PARTIES. SIMILARLY, *CHEQUEADO* DID NOT PUBLISH POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE FACT-CHECKS IN AN UNBALANCED MANNER.”

- *Chequeado* had a relatively modest activation level at the beginning of the election campaign, which grew during the second debate and the election itself.
- From that study, there is no evidence of biases from the ruling party (*JxC*) or the opposition (*FdT*) in the activation (circulation) of *Chequeado*’s adjudications. There are also no biases from the ruling party or the opposition in the activation of the “True” and “False” tags. This means that *Chequeado* did not publish more articles in favor or against any of the two political parties. Similarly, *Chequeado* did not publish positive or negative fact-checks in an unbalanced manner.
- **With regard to interactions between different user groups, @Chequeado’s automatic classification is always at the center of political communities, alternating between the government and the opposition.** At the beginning of the election cycle, the ruling party (*JxC*) interacts more frequently with the @*Chequeado* account. At the end of the election cycle, it is the opposition (*FdT*) who has more interactions with @*Chequeado*.
- *Chequeado*’s publications have a fairly short viralization cycle — approx. 36 hours. After 72 hours of published, the change in the adjudication’s circulation is modest.
- The observational analysis of a fact-check that concluded that it was “False” that former



**“CHEQUEADO’S
INTERVENTION LED
TO A REDUCTION OF
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president Mauricio Macri had used a hearing aid during the presidential debate shows that ***Chequeado’s* correction has significant statistically effects** in the sharp decline of the activity rate of opposition users (*FdT*), in the increase of the activity of government supporters (*JxC*) and in the higher speed of retweets. *Chequeado’s* intervention led to a reduction of the distribution speed of the false story.


INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the dissemination of false news and its spread with political motivations — fake news — have become a major problem for democratic governments.² Among the most serious and better documented consequences of disinformation are: the rise in intolerance and political incivility levels; a bigger polarization; and the voters' declining trust in government institutions and traditional media outlets, as well as in the knowledge shared by academic, scientific and technological institutions.

A response to the expansion of mis- and disinformation was delivered quickly; many democratic governments, traditional media outlets, digital platforms, international bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have begun to develop mechanisms to give credit to fact-based evidence and discredit false news.

However, in scenarios of high polarization, low political tolerance and high toxicity in social media, all messages are political and all fact-checking actions form a media universe permeated by conflict. In this context, it is key to understand how publications from organizations like *Chequeado* are interpreted and in what extent they are spread. To do so, we need to measure if the corrections are accepted

² Lazer and his colleagues define fake news according to its information source by describing news that “imitate” the content of traditional media outlets, although they lack the editorial rules and processes that guarantee the precision and credibility of such information (Lazer et al., 2018). As these authors understand it, fake news overlap with two other mechanisms: misinformation and disinformation. In this report, we used Wardle and Derakhshan definition of fake news (2017). They highlight the political intentionality behind fake news and distinguish them from news that are not validated.



“...DETERMINING IF A GROUP THAT SHARES POLITICAL CONTENT IS RIGHT OR WRONG, WHICH OFFERS POLITICAL BENEFITS TO SOME PEOPLE AND CAUSES HARM TO OTHERS.”

by voters; verify if the voters perceive that the act of correcting news is biased in favor of some candidates or parties; confirm if corrections are shared in social media and assess what user communities spread false information and/or their corrections.

As mentioned in the previous section, we use the term adjudication to describe the act of *determining if a group that shares political content is right or wrong, which offers political benefits to some people and causes harm to others*. In practice, we refer to *Chequeado*'s adjudication(s) when stating that something is true or false. We do not use the term verification because the aim of this report is not to check if a story is false, or if it was verified correctly. Our goal is to assess the extent in which different political actors accept and spread adjudications, i.e., a story's rating — “True” or “False,” among others — assigned by an organization dedicated to facts and data verification, like *Chequeado*.

Adjudicating a story, assigning it the value of “True” or “False,” has political consequences. In electoral processes, *Chequeado*'s publications are not spread in the same way by the people who benefit from them and the people that feel affected by them. Each adjudication is promoted by different political communities and results in adverse effects when it is adjudicated as “False.” On the other hand, each story promoted and adjudicated as “True” is beneficial.

Generally, the people that feel affected by adjudications do not believe in the correction and accuse the adjudicator of being part of some political operation drafted by the government, the opposition, traditional media outlets, national or foreign intelligence services, etc. Those who benefit from adjudications celebrate them and spread their content, politicizing the fact-checker's actions even more. In electoral contexts, the adjudication process is thus

absorbed and partly built from political conflicts.

As long as a fact-checking organization classifies a story as “True” or “False,” voters will perceive that organization as another actor in the election campaign. This affects the organization’s reputation and limits its ability to publish corrections of stories that are universally accepted by all political actors.

GOAL

The aim of this report is to present three different studies that comprehensively analyze: 1) what corrections published by *Chequeado* between July and December of 2019 have the higher dissemination levels; 2) what communities spread those publications; 3) in what extent voters accept and share adjudications that do not align with their political preferences.

RESULTS

This section presents the evaluations and main conclusions in more detail.

OBSERVATIONAL AND EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION OF *CHEQUEADO*

Social media data show that during the 2019 Argentine election campaign, voters that supported the government (*Juntos por el cambio, JxC*) and the opposition (*Frente de todos, FdT*) shared messages that aligned with their political preferences more often. Users that supported JxC spread stories that backed then president Mauricio Macri and criticized candidate Alberto Fernández. Users that supported the *FdT* did the opposite.

Observational results also point out that *Chequeado*'s corrections had a greater prevalence among government supporters (Macri) at the beginning of the election campaign, and among Fernández supporters during the election.

To address these issues, several experiments were performed. For the first two cases, the aim was to evaluate in controlled conditions the acceptance and dissemination rates of *Chequeado*'s correction.

#Audífono [#Hearingaid]

Our first experiment involved two phases: in the first phase, we showed to the 2040 participants an edited tweet, written by our team, where journalist Roberto Navarro³ accused Macri of using a hearing aid during the presidential debate of October, 2019.

After collecting the users' evaluations of the orig-

³ Roberto Navarro is an Argentine journalist and business man that supports Kircherism. He owns El Destape and was a host in C5N.

inal tweet, we moved forward to phase 2. We randomly divided our respondents in two groups. The first group was presented with a tweet from *Chequeado*, written by our team, that confirmed that the journalist's accusation was "True;" on the other hand, the other group was presented with a tweet that confirmed that Navarro's accusation was "False."

Different reactions were analyzed, including the perception about the original tweet (i.e., if they believed that it was true or false that Macri had used a hearing aid during the debate); the acceptance of *Chequeado*'s adjudication (if they believed whether the correction was right or wrong) and the intention of sharing the tweet or not. This provided an assessment of different aspects that define the consumption and dissemination of the original tweet, as well as *Chequeado*'s adjudication.

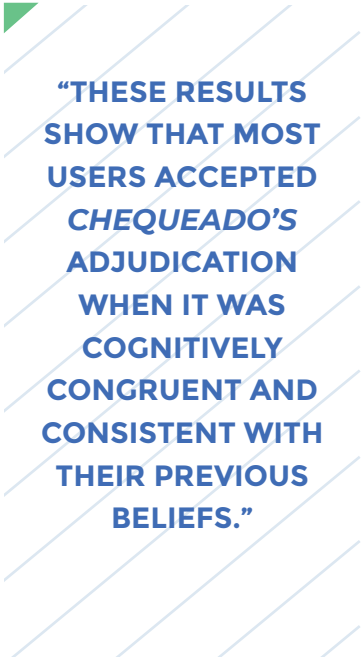
We asked the participants the following question: "After reading the correction, do you believe that the original tweet is... (surely false, probably false, probably true, surely true, I do not know)?"

The "False" adjudication was accepted by 66% of the ruling party users and only 46% of the opposition users.

- Of the 66% (*JxC*), 46% answered that the original tweet was "surely false" and the other 20%, that it was "probably false."
- Of the opposing 46% (*FdT*), 21% believed the tweet was "surely false" and the other 25%, that it was "probably false."

In the group that saw the tweet with the "True" adjudication, 75% of Fernández voters accepted it — replying that it was "probably" or "surely" true — against 41% of government supporters.

It is important to note that when the tweet was classified as "False," 33% of those that voted for Fernández asserted that the original tweet was



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surely or probably true. Similarly, when the adjudication was “True,” 41% of Macri voters said that the information of the original tweet was probably false. These results show that most users accepted *Chequeado*’s adjudication when it was cognitively congruent and consistent with their previous beliefs. However, when it was cognitively opposing and not consistent with their previous beliefs, the validity perception was lower because most of the respondents did not trust the original content and the correction.

Regarding the spread of the *#Audífono* message, which is the dissemination materialized in social media shares, we noted that, in line with the ruling party and opposition preferences, our false tweet was retweeted⁴ by 28% of opposition users (those who had answered before that they would vote for Fernández) and only 5% of users that supported the government (people who had said that they would vote for Macri). Including favorites and retweets altogether, 40% of Fernández supporters were in favor of the tweet, compared to an 11% of Macri supporters. Another 11% formed by supporters of both candidates replied to the tweet. This is consistent with other studies that show that replying on Twitter can be a sign of affinity or opposition.

Overall, when the information was aligned to the political beliefs of each community, a vast majority agreed with *Chequeado*. However, when the information was cognitively opposing, we noticed a greater dispersion between the people that were cognitively affected, as well as more “I do not know” answers when asked about the veracity of the information.

At the same time, the activation rate (retweets,

⁴ “To retweet” is one of the survey’s answers, since the message is not published on Twitter, but offered to our 2040 respondents at Netquest.

**“THE MOST NOVEL
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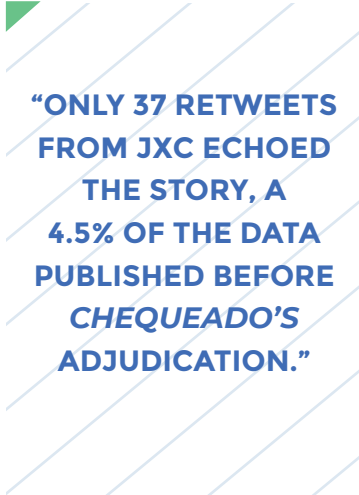
favorites and replies) is considerably higher when the adjudication confirms a group's beliefs than when it is cognitively opposing. The latter happens when a *JxC* voter sees *Chequeado's* message that confirms that Macri used a hearing aid, or when a *FdT* voter sees the tweet that confirms that it is false.

The most novel result of this experiment is that the “False” adjudication does not improve the message circulation within the cognitively congruent community. The users that support a certain party do not really share the messages that confirm that something that affects them is not true. On the other hand, the “True” classification (congruent-congruent, when it is confirmed that the user's party did something positive) generates enthusiasm, and the “False-False,” “True-False” and “False-True” combinations discourage users. This means that the message that is considered “True” (twice correct) within the community generates enthusiasm, while the correction of a false story does not.

Observational data and the effect of the fact-check

Why is the message that states that Macri used a *hearing aid* shared more by opposition users (in favor of Fernández) than Macri supporters? On the one hand, opposition users show higher levels of agreement; on the other hand, the retweeted message will appear on their contacts' timeline. Therefore, the expected dissemination of the false tweet will be comparatively higher among opposition supporters, because they agree with the message (cognitive congruence) and because of the “cascading activation” effect exerted by retweeting a message and make it visible for others.

Since this case was covered by *Chequeado* in real life, it is possible to analyze data beyond the experiment.



**“ONLY 37 RETWEETS
FROM JXC ECHOED
THE STORY, A
4.5% OF THE DATA
PUBLISHED BEFORE
CHEQUEADO’S
ADJUDICATION.”**

On October 20, 2019, shortly before the presidential debate was over, congresswoman Araceli Ferreyra tweeted a picture in which it looked like Macri was wearing a hearing aid in his right ear. During the next two and a half hours, 720 users that supported the *FdT* retweeted messages related to the hearing aid — 89% of the total number of retweets about the topic. Only 37 retweets from *JxC* echoed the story, a 4.5% of the data published before *Chequeado*’s adjudication.

Chequeado published a correction at 1:20 AM, which also circulated on social media. In the next 21 hours, 70.6% of retweets came from the *JxC* community (1376 tweets over a total of 1949). On the contrary, only 28.4% were published by *FdT* users. Like in the experiment, observational data show a dramatic drop in the activity levels of opposition users and an increase in the activity levels of government supporters at the time *Chequeado*’s article was published.

The time it takes *JxC* supporters to retweet messages about the alleged hearing aid (latency) is around 84%, which means that they share the messages quicker. In other words, *JxC* users are more “excited” about the story that confirms that the original tweet is false and increase the intensity with which they share messages about the issue, while *FdT* users mostly ignored the correction.

Observational analysis shows that *Chequeado*’s correction has significant statistically effects in the decline of the activity rate of opposition users (*FdT*), in the increase of government supporters (*JxC*) and in the higher speed of retweets. However, it is important to mention that the results measured under these conditions (high attention in a concentrated amount of time) do not guarantee that the effects are the same than those observed in longer timeframes with lower attention levels.

#Ofelia

We conducted another experiment with anti-opposition content designed by our team. An alleged tweet from the username @lanataenel13⁵ accuses lawmaker Ofelia Fernández from the City of Buenos Aires (who supports the opposition) of not finishing high school and still earning a high salary (300,000 pesos, roughly 20 times the minimum income at that time). We will refer to this case as #Ofelia. This disinformation was highly visible during the 2019 elections. Results show that there were more retweets, favorites and replies among Macri voters, and less among Fernández supporters.

The tweet #Ofelia had more retweets among the users from the cognitively congruent community, which in this case was formed by government supporters, than #Audífono. While the congruent community chose to retweet 33% of the times, the favored group only retweeted the #Audífono message 26% of the times.

Regarding the adjudication acceptance (“True” or “False”), the differences between government and opposition supporters for the #Ofelia case were larger than for #Audífono. Among the government supporters, 69% accepted the “True” classification, compared to the 38% of opposition supporters that accepted the “False” correction. This means that, comparatively speaking, the “True” adjudication produced more cognitive congruence between government supporters than the “False” adjudication between opposition voters. This is not a minor difference, especially if we consider that the “False” adjudication is the one that *Chequeado* published in real life.

5 The user name is not an official account and used the name of journalist Jorge Lanata, who hosts the show *Periodismo para Todos*.

We can also observe greater acceptance of the “True” adjudication among voters that do not support the government nor the opposition. Among those who would abstain, or cast a blank vote, 66% agreed with *Chequeado* that the original tweet was “surely or probably true,” but only 39% agreed that the tweet was “surely or probably false.” The 27-points difference is noteworthy and worrying. It shows that the acceptance of the wrong adjudication (“True”) is widely larger than the correct one (“False”).

As with *#Audífono*, the experiment shows a very high retweet rate for congruent-congruent information — when the community that agrees with the original tweet (pro-government) gets the congruent adjudication (“True”). In that case, the retweet rate is of 37%, 4 points above the 33% rate of the original tweet. On the contrary, when Fernández supporters saw the tweet that said that the original message was false (opposing-congruent correction), they only retweeted it 20% of the times. Like *#Audífono*, **two-times-right** produces high activation levels. An opposing correction does not have the same effect.

It is interesting that in *#Ofelia*, the positive effect of the “True” adjudication does not only happen in the cognitively congruent community (Macri), but also in the opposing community (Fernández) and abstentions. The “True” correction had more retweets than the “False” correction in all three communities: the one benefited from the content (with the adjudication that it was true that a lawmaker from the opposition had not finished high school and had a high salary), and the one affected by it (since the adjudication mentioned one of their own lawmakers).



CONSUMPTION OF *CHEQUEADO* IN SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

In this section we will evaluate the consumption of news published by *Chequeado* during the election cycle in different social media networks. The goal was to measure the reach of publications for each platform, adjudicated user (ruling party, opposition, others) and type of adjudication (“True,” “False,” “Positive,” “Negative”). This way, it is possible to assess if there are any biases in the processes of fact-checking selection and production, as well as the type of user and platform that spreads the corrections

Between September 2 and December 22 of 2019, we analyzed 343 stories published by *Chequeado* whose consumption was reported by Buzzsumo. The information includes the number of times the story was shared in Facebook, Twitter, the Alexa ranking, the type of reactions from users that shared the story (     ), etc.

The median number of shares was of 40 times per article, with a maximum of 19,319 times and a minimum of 0. There were 20 stories that were not shared by other accounts or users, which represents 5.43% of the total assessed in this report. The five most shared stories gathered 39% of the 66,411 interactions registered by Buzzsumo.

The five most shared stories included four “False” adjudications (Bolivia⁶, adjudicated to the opposi-

⁶ The newspaper *Clarín* published a picture in the cover of their printed edition of a protest in La Paz, capital of Bolivia. The picture was in favor of Evo Morales and not against “a possible fraud,” like the newspaper had assured (see: <https://chequeado.com/hilando-fino/la-foto-sobre-la-manifestacion-en-bolivia-de-la-tapa-de-clarin-era-a-favor-de-evo-morales-no-en-contra-de-un-posible-fraude-como-dijo-el-diario/>)

“OUT OF THE FIVE MOST SHARED STORIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA, THREE WERE COGNITIVELY CONGRUENT WITH FERNÁNDEZ VOTERS AND TWO, WITH MACRI SUPPORTERS.”

tion; Baradel⁷, about strikes, adjudicated to the opposition; Pichetto⁸, protesters, adjudicated to the opposition; Macri⁹, hearing aid, adjudicated to the government) and one “True” (Macri, exports¹⁰, adjudicated to the government). Out of the five most shared stories in social media, three were cognitively congruent with Fernández voters and two, with Macri supporters.

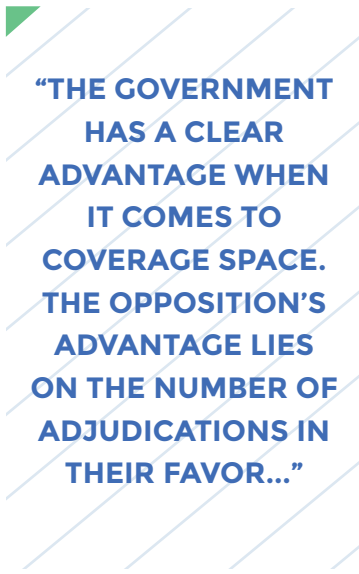
From a consumer point of view, we could not find major differences in the number of times that the stories were shared when the adjudication target supported or opposed the government. There were not any differences in the consumption of articles from *Chequeado* when the original story was pro- or anti-government or pro- or anti-opposition either. This can be seen in the share rate depending on the type of identified user and the type of political orientation of the original information.

7 On Facebook, there was an image that wrongly confirmed that the leader of the Buenos Aires education union (SUTEBA), Roberto Baradel, had said: “I do not see any reasons why there would be unjustified strikes during the next school year” (see: <https://chequeado.com/verificacionfb/es-falso-que-baradel-dijo-no-veo-motivos-para-hacer-paros-injustificados-en-el-proximo-ciclo-lectivo/>)

8 The vice-president candidate for JxC, Miguel Ángel Pichetto, said that “65% of the budget is for social programs, demonstrators, poverty cooperatives, cartoneros [cardboard sellers], and cardboard multinationals.” *Chequeado* determined that this was “False.” (see: <https://chequeado.com/ultimas-noticias/pichetto-el-65-del-total-del-presupuesto-esta-comprendido-ahi-en-planes-piqueteros-cooperativas-de-la-pobreza-cartoneros-multinacionales-del-carton/>)

9 See: <https://chequeado.com/el-explicador/es-falso-que-macri-tenia-un-auricular-durante-el-debate-presidencial/>

10 Macri assured that “we managed to triple beef exports” *Chequeado* verified with official data from the Ministry of Agroindustry (see: <https://chequeado.com/ultimas-noticias/macri-sobre-la-carne-vacuna-en-estos-anos-logramos-triplicar-la-exportacion/>)




“THE GOVERNMENT HAS A CLEAR ADVANTAGE WHEN IT COMES TO COVERAGE SPACE. THE OPPOSITION’S ADVANTAGE LIES ON THE NUMBER OF ADJUDICATIONS IN THEIR FAVOR...”

These results show that, like in the previous sector, cognitive congruence or discordance justify the higher or lower share rate: users share the messages that confirm their beliefs more and the ones that are against them, less.

Having said that, there is a selection bias. From 165 tweets that *Chequeado* classified as “True” or “False,” 48 included information that affected the opposition (45 negatives and 3 positives) and 91, the government (68 negatives and 22 positives). There were almost twice as many adjudications that verified stories related to the government compared to the opposition, which means that there were more fact-checks to members or stories of the *JxC* than the *FdT*. At the time this report was written, *JxC* was governing the nation, the Province of Buenos Aires and the City of Buenos Aires.

The adjudication rate that harms the government — i.e., that confirms a critique from the opposition or rejects one of their own positive statements — is close to 50%. Meanwhile, the adjudication rate that harms the opposition is much lower, only 12%. **T**he government has a clear advantage when it comes to coverage space. The opposition’s advantage lies on the number of adjudications in their favor (from “False” adjudications to anti-opposition information).

The difference in the number of *Chequeado* publications that validate favorable positions for the opposition becomes higher in November; specifically, after the general elections. There are no statistically significant changes in the number of favorable adjudications for the *FdT*, but the number of adjudications that benefit the government decreases. This fall is partly caused by a decrease in the amount of original positive stories supporting *JxC* that are classified as “True.” There were also fewer positive stories published by the government



“...IT IS VERY LIKELY THAT THERE IS A DIFFERENT DENOMINATOR FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION. THEREFORE, THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOTH GROUPS COULD BE EXPLAINED BY A LARGER AMOUNT OF FALSE, ANTI-OPPOSITION NEWS.”

after their electoral defeat, for example referring to the administration's achievements.

Ultimately, we can confirm that there is a larger selection of fact-checks to *JxC* than *FdT*. This is not replicated in the consumption levels since, as we already discussed, there are no major differences between the shared stories when they are analyzed according to the cognitive congruence of all political actors.

However, we do not have enough information about the total amount of misinformation fabricated by both communities (denominator). This prevents us from evaluating if the results are produced by differences in the amount of fake news created by the two communities that participate in the virtual debate or differences in the stories selection. In our opinion, it is very likely that there is a different denominator for the government and the opposition. Therefore, the differences between both groups could be explained by a larger amount of false, anti-opposition news. During the electoral cycle of 2019, we found that the number of fake news fabricated by supporters of *JxC* was consistently higher than the ones fabricated by supporters of *FdT*. These results are consistent with previous studies about activation in social media during #Maldonado and #Tarifazo [#ratehikes] (Calvo and Aruguete, 2020).

If we analyze the number of times that *Chequeado*'s articles were shared in different social media networks, general results show a bigger contribution from Twitter than Facebook. This is more important when the original author of the post in social media networks is identified as an opposition supporter, thus proving that pro- or anti-opposition stories went more viral in Twitter than Facebook. On the contrary, the difference between both platforms when the stories are pro- or anti-government is not statistically meaningful.

Chequeado on Facebook

Results show that *Chequeado's* corrections that do not cover government or opposition actors are more spread on Facebook. Fact-checks that verify the opposition are less disseminated on Facebook. The difference between the government and the opposition activation rates on Facebook justify the stronger presence of government news on Facebook during the electoral cycle of 2019.

Chequeado on Twitter

On Twitter, we observed a stronger presence of the opposition. *Chequeado's* publications are more widely spread when the subject of the verification is from the community that is benefited by the adjudication. Once again, the differences in adjudication effects are due to differences in the density of government and opposition social media accounts in Twitter and in Facebook. Each platform can have more or less users that support one of the two parties, or that publish more or less content.

We can conclude that:

- The consumption of *Chequeado's* stories expressed in "Total Shares" by Buzzsumo is slightly higher on Twitter than Facebook.
- We did not find any statistically meaningful differences between the government and the opposition in the consumption of *Chequeado's* adjudications on Twitter, Facebook and Google (Alexa).
- We did not find differences between the platforms when the adjudications agreed with the government or the opposition.
- We did not find differences between the platforms when the adjudications were "True" or "False."

- We did not find differences between the platforms when the adjudications were “Positive” or “Negative.”

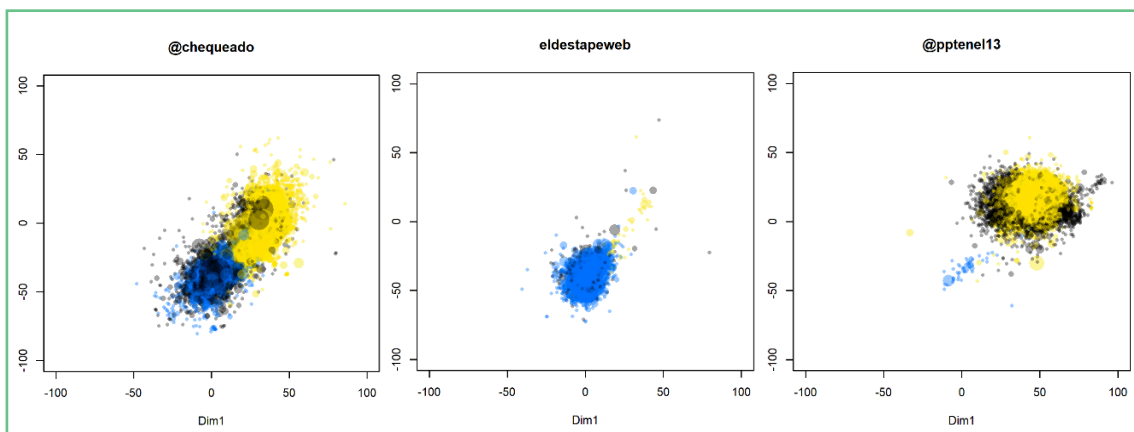


HOW DO *CHEQUEADO*'S PUBLICATIONS SPREAD ON TWITTER?

This section analyzes another type of observational data to measure the activation of publications on Twitter. We analyzed the insertion of the words “*Chequeado*,” “@*Chequeado*,” “True” and “False” in particular, and compared them to hashtags and accounts of high circulation during the electoral cycle.

“*CHEQUEADO* IS LOCATED AT THE CENTER OF THE TWITTER NETWORK AND ITS PUBLICATIONS ARE SHARED BY USERS THAT SUPPORT *JXC* AND *FdT*.”

Chequeado is located at the center of the Twitter network and its publications are shared by users that support *JxC* and *FdT*. In line with previous results, each community shares the information that is cognitively congruent with its political preferences. We did not find any evidence that would suggest that these communities are unwilling to share *Chequeado*'s corrections when they benefit them.



This means that ***Chequeado* is located towards the center of the network, the in-between. This also means that the messages are classified**

differently between both communities, unlike most of the network’s political authorities¹¹.

***Chequeado’s* penetration level is relatively high: we estimate that over 80% of government and opposition users read *Chequeado’s* messages during the election week.** The frequency in which *Chequeado’s* stories were seen, however, varied during the campaign. During the presidential debates and the election week, the messages penetration and network’s density increased — this refers to the number of users that saw the stories in their timelines and the frequency in which those stories were seen.

In summary, *@Chequeado* has a rare implementation, since it is activated from both sides of the political divide, “la grieta.” This was more visible during the last weeks of the presidential campaign, when the number of links to *@Chequeado* increased dramatically. ***@Chequeado’s* tweets are retweeted similarly by both communities. Each community activates different topics, depending on what benefits them, due to the cognitive congruence that they imply.**



GENERAL PERCEPTIONS FROM VOTERS OF DIFFERENT PARTIES REGARDING THE CREATION AND DISSEMINATION OF FAKE NEWS

Who are the people responsible for the dissemination of false news?

Two of every three respondents, regardless of their political preferences, identified the users as the main spreaders of false news. For Fernández supporters and independents, the second party responsible are media outlets, and the third one, politicians. Macri supporters consider politicians to

¹¹ By the network’s political authorities, we mean accounts and users that generate a lot of interactions and that legitimize statements of both groups.

“TO REDUCE DISINFORMATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA, WHAT DO YOU THINK IS MORE IMPORTANT: TO DELETE FALSE INFORMATION OR TO PUBLISH MORE CORRECTIONS?”

be the second most important actors responsible for spreading false news.

What do the respondents believe that needs to be done to reduce disinformation in social media?

In our survey, we asked: “To reduce disinformation in social media, what do you think is more important: to delete false information or to publish more corrections?” Regardless of the voters’ political preferences, most participants replied that it is more important to “delete” false information. However, it was also shown that more information levels reduce the preference for this option and increase the preference for “respond in public.”

How are mis- and disinformation items spread?

Our survey also assesses the users’ perception regarding the way in which mis- and disinformation reach their timelines or WhatsApp. In both cases, family and acquaintances were mentioned as the most frequent sources of false news. It is slightly more likely than a family member will send false information on Facebook, which is also consistent with the systematic differences in the network structure of each platform.

What do respondents want to do with the false news they receive via WhatsApp?

Generally, most users would rather ignore false news they receive via WhatsApp, rather than replying to it. The preference to “ignore it” is 8 points higher between women than men. This suggests that men are more likely to confrontation.

CONCLUSIONS

This report analyzes how Argentine voters perceive, accept, consume and share *Chequeado's* corrections. As we mentioned at the beginning of this report, to adjudicate means to inflict cognitive harm to a group that accepted false news and to award cognitively the group that was first affected by such falsehoods.

The fact that some users accept and spread disinformation also shows that debunking and limiting the dissemination of fake news can sometimes be perceived as an aggression against their preferences. When analyzing verifications of false stories, it is important to understand to what extent the conflict provoked by *Chequeado's* adjudication can affect the possibility that some users will believe in the fact-check and share it.

The activation we observed from the message “I was right!” is highly superior than “I told you it was not true!” In other words, stories that adjudicate a “True” meaning help the validity perception and activity rate to grow.

Since fact-checking organizations focus on correcting false claims, the value of the “True” adjudication is often underestimated. This presents some advantages for the organizations’ reputation, and activation. This does not mean that they should not correct “False” stories. However, between July and December, *Chequeado* published twice as many “False” adjudications. This implies that *Chequeado* is consistently causing “cognitive harm” to its readers, and more frequently than “awarding cognitively.”

If we work from the base that the “cognitive award” increases an organization’s credibility and reputation and that, on the other hand, “cognitive harm” hurts them, we can conclude that *Chequeado* is consistently increasing the number of “I do not know” and, consequently, decreasing the level of attention and dissemination of its corrections.

Similarly, it is important to note that disinformation does not only aim to share false information, but also — and often more importantly — to increase the visibility of a topic that benefits the community that shares it. Our report found clear activation effects when organizations adjudicate a value of “True” to a story that users already believed to be correct, at the expense of what happens when a value of “False” is adjudicated to a story in which such users did not believe in.

The survey’s results show that corrections about important topics — that can be verified simply and transparently and are adjudicated as “True” — should have positive effects in the organizations’ reputation. In our opinion, this should increase the chances of future corrections to be accepted by more users.

The results of this report also show that during the 2019 Argentine electoral process, *Chequeado* was an authority in a network activated by users who were both in favor and against the government.

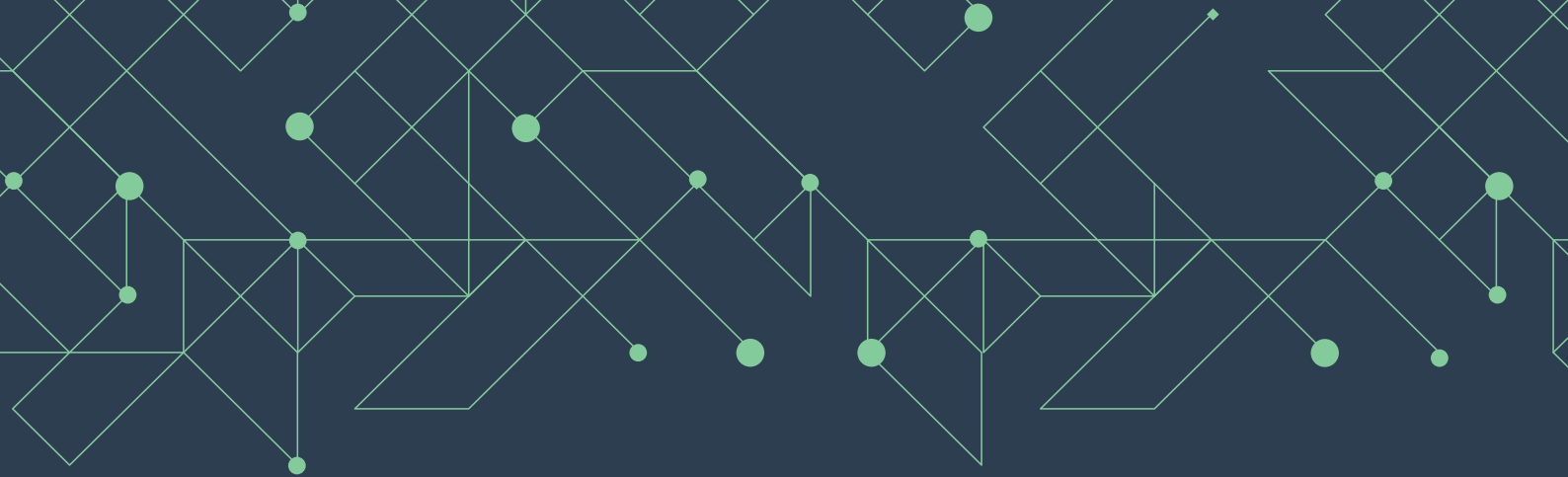
“THE RESULTS OF THIS REPORT ALSO SHOW THAT DURING THE 2019 ARGENTINE ELECTORAL PROCESS, CHEQUEADO WAS AN AUTHORITY IN A NETWORK ACTIVATED BY USERS WHO WERE BOTH IN FAVOR AND AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT.”

Activation rates in observational data show that there are no activation biases and, moreover, that activation differences depend almost exclusively on the type of message that is being adjudicated.

When *Chequeado* published cognitively congruent messages with the opposition or the government, the activation rate was relatively similar.

Lastly, since the amount of disinformation fabricated by the government and the opposition is not

symmetrical and has different denominators, we believe that the calibration of *Chequeado's* selection process has to explicitly evaluate these differences and make transparent decisions for the public. We believe that an important recommendation for *Chequeado's* internal process is to create, for example, a statistical evaluation of the **number of false stories** reported on Facebook that are congruent to each political group. This will allow *Chequeado* to gain control over potential implicit biases when selecting stories.



 **chequeado**