HOW IS CORRUPTION PORTRAYED IN THE BRAZILIAN MEDIA? AN ANALYSIS OF CORRUPTION IN NEWS PORTALS AND ON TWITTER

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ABSTRACT: *The media influences the construction and deconstruction of reality through social narratives. Consequently, this article analyzes the representation of corruption in the Brazilian media, especially in news portals and on Twitter. The main aim of the study is to compare the representation of corruption on news portals and social media to map the frequency of mentions of corruption, scandals, actors involved, convergences, and divergences between the two communication platforms. Results show that corruption is differently represented in the two kinds of media, which despite dialogizing with each other through the news agenda have different approaches. For example, on news portals, corruption refers to the denunciation of scandals involving political actors and investigations. In contrast, on Twitter, the phenomenon involves disputes about morality, credibility, party issues, the 2022 elections, and old scandals.*

KEYWORDS: *media, corruption, communication, Brazil, news portals, Twitter*

INTRODUCTION

Issues related to corruption in Brazil have assumed great importance on the international stage; according to Transparency International, Brazil has plummeted in the world ranking of corruption perceptions (CPI) to third-worst place. Scandals related to money laundering, influence games, and the arrest

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of politicians, as well as investigations by the federal police, contribute not only to the high media profile of news about this topic but also to the loss of credibility of democratic institutions. After all, the media plays an important role in such scenarios by providing visibility and information that contributes to the construction of policy and decision-making by the electorate (Thompson 2005; Castells 1997; Di Tella–Franceschelli 2011).

The "construction of corruption" is part of the production processes that occur within social and political fields, of which the media is part (De Paiva et al. 2017). Accordingly, it becomes a channel for contested and even staged struggles (Berti 2018).

The media can promote discussion among citizens, opening up space for the democratic public sphere, and consequently play a decisive role in involving citizens in social issues (Jackson–Valentine 2014) and, at a certain point, promoting citizen engagement (Skoric et al. 2016). Furthermore, in a democratic context, citizens tend to hold political actors accountable for their performance (Ferraz–Finan 2008).

In the context of the scope of views and immediate responses that are multiplied on social media (Pérez Curiel 2020), Twitter has become a crucial means of influencing issues related to corruption and dynamically signifies media selectivity and inclusion/exclusion (De Paiva et al. 2017). This occurs mainly in relation to dealing with the influence of political leaders on this social platform (Grover et al. 2021).

Moral evaluation strategies in relation to corruption are supported by the freedom of expression made possible when using this media (De Paiva et al. 2017). Twitter is one of the most widely used communication and information tools nowadays and includes topics ranging from those connected to political decisions to news that determines the daily lives of thousands of Brazilians. Among the topics that stand out on Twitter, the phenomenon of corruption has been a current topic lately due to the political instability of Brazil (De Paiva et al. 2017).

From a global perspective, Twitter has an estimated audience of 77.75 million users, with Brazil ranking fourth among the countries whose users access the social network most frequently, according to the study "Leading countries based on the number of Twitter users as of October 2021" published by *Statista* (2021). This is a context in which traditional media operate in parallel with the publication of posted tweets (Pérez Curiel 2020).

In 2021, the user base of this platform in Brazil was about 17.46 million users, with a projected 18.39 million users by 2025, according to *Statista* data (Statista 2021). Given the large volume of users and frequency of access, Twitter in Brazil has become a space for dispute about the meaning of corruption characterized by references to naturalization, selectivity, purges, forms of inclusion and exclusion, strategy, and moral construction (De Paiva et al. 2017).

Considering the space occupied by Twitter as a source of information, and the engagement included on the platform, as well as the complexity and notoriety of issues related to corruption in the country, this article seeks to frame how corruption has been portrayed by the main news portals in the country (namely, *Brasil de Fato*, *Estadão*, and *G1*), and their respective tweets and Twitter pages during the month of May 2021. The relevance of the study is demonstrated by the fact that news is constructed according to a media agenda, in which news portals contribute to providing information to citizens. Moreover, the social platform Twitter is an enabling environment for exposing ideas and divisions among citizens and *vice-versa*.

The analysis, based on the articles published by the portals and publications on Twitter, aimed to capture the two types of approaches to corruption from two different perspectives. On the one hand, the publications on the portals follow an editorial line that proposes news content consisting of scheduling. On the other hand, Twitter allows users to position themselves, read, and express their opinions about news content and information, although tweets are part of the social media that reflect the news agenda.

Thus the academic singularity of this work lies in the fact that it examines the framing of corruption by two different forms of media in Brazil and, in this way, contributes broadly to the promotion of research on this topic in portals and social media.

To guide the research, the work focuses on responding to three questions that seek to shed light on studies of corruption and its representation in the media:

> (a) How is corruption portrayed in the Brazilian media, especially in news portals and on Twitter?
>
> (b) Are there contrasts or similarities in terms of the recurrence of corruption narratives in articles published on news portals and in tweets?

The work considers that the media coverage of corruption tends to be multifaceted and ambiguous, involving different interests and practices (Mancini et al. 2016). This occurs in a context wherein new media can play an important role in the construction of public debate in relation to the phenomenon (Berti 2018). Along these lines, the questions raised in this work contribute to the research corpus concerning how corruption is represented in mainstream media outlets in Brazil and therefore make this work innovative in terms of its reflection of the phenomenon and its ramifications and effects on society. Moreover, this occurs in an environment in which media dialogue is fragmented, with an increasingly diverse social structure (Hidman 2009).

CORRUPTION AND MEDIA VISIBILITY

The growth of mass media and the spread of new information and communication technologies have contributed to the impact of media scandals, especially when corruption is involved (Thompson 2002). Media visibility becomes a contentious issue in an intense information environment (De Carvalho Jr. 2013; Thompson 2005). In this context, the emergence of media conglomerates has led to the integration of media that tend to market the same messages in different forms and by different means through various technologies (Gamson et al. 1992).

The information cascade formed by a succession of information publications allows individuals to base their decisions on false or true assumptions about the knowledge they acquire (Damgaard 2018; Walgrave–Vliegenthart 2010). In this scenario, the role of the media is highlighted in society in relation to corruption cases (Hajdu et al. 2016), as the media participate in the construction of social narratives (Bourdieu 1989).

Most cases of corruption highlighted in the public sphere originate in investigations in the journalistic arena, not in anti-corruption institutions and bodies (Berti et al. 2020; Brunetti–Weder 2003). Another interesting factor in this scenario is that the increase in cases of the exposure of political corruption has contributed to the self-sustaining nature of the latter, generating anti-corruption activities (Heywood 1997).

In fact, the media provides information to citizens, who, consequently, have the ability to judge and hold accountable (or not) public officials involved in corruption. The media thus play an important role in fighting corruption, acting as mobilizers of public opinion and overseers of power, contributing to the condemnation and exposure of corruption (Tumber–Waisbord 2019; Altschull 1995).

The media tends to provide an interpretation of corruption and, to some extent, influences the way the public discusses and evaluates specific issues, allowing a variety of opinions and content for debate (Charron–Annoni 2021; Berti 2018). Therefore, the media affect complex and relevant issues in everyday public life; thus, understanding corruption and its subtleties is part of the framing associated with its various contexts and arenas (Berti 2018).

Regarding politicians in the context of media visibility and the political arena, it is interesting to note that the increase in news involving political scandals has led to a range of new strategies for counteracting 'negative' images (Tumber 2004; Thompson 2005). After all, information is certainly not controllable; due to the wide set of communication networks, it becomes difficult to restrict what information is exposed in the public domain and predict the consequences of such disclosures (Thompson 1998; 2005).

Thus, on the one hand, the link between corruption and the media is fundamental for the fight against corruption, but on the other, politicians and institutions desire control over press freedom (Berti et al. 2020). While the media enables a promotional culture that allows disclosure about politicians, it also makes the latter vulnerable due to scandals (Tumber 2004).

In terms of searching for information in different arenas, it should be taken into account that citizens who search for information using social networks tend to be more aware of the phenomenon than citizens who search for information through traditional means (Charron et al. 2019). Furthermore, due to the mediatized context, the concept of a social network involves leveraging the sociability of interests and groups to establish connections between actors, which can be symmetrical or asymmetrical (Cunha–Araújo 2018).

Given this scenario, it is worth noting that the free press can serve as an effective institution for exposing abuses by government and institutions, as independent journalists can contribute to investigations if they have the incentive to uncover irregularities (Brunetti–Weder 2003). In this regard, media performance co-occurs with that of the judicial system, considering that reports can serve as formal investigations or vice versa (e.g., when an anti-corruption investigation or verdict can be broadcast by the media, thus strengthening the work of anti-corruption authorities) (Berti et al. 2020).

Scandals as part of visibility

The presence of media corruption scandals has its roots in the decline of ideologies, the legal regulation of political life, and the politics of trust due to the protagonism that such scandals assume (Figueiras 2017). Added to these factors are the recurring changes in the media, which contribute to the portrayal of scandals in contemporary times (Tumber–Waisbord 2019).

Thus, scandals become a means of analyzing corruption in the media. The approach is simplified to make it understandable since corruption is a complex phenomenon (Berti et al. 2020). The impact of scandals in the media is significant due to the negative connotations that such content has (Lull–Hinerman 2000).

Some studies show a link between the rise in the number of media scandals and democratic crises (Tumber 2004). However, there is still much to understand – mainly whether hypocritical behavior affects public opinion beyond any scandals (McDermott et al. 2015). Since scandals have become a predominant feature of journalism, truth is always up for debate (Lull–Hinerman 2000). However, scandals are not natural 'facts' but are constructed of events relayed by the media (Berti et al. 2020).

A media scandal reverberates and becomes public when a person's actions violate or dishonor morality in society (Lull–Hinerman 2000; Thompson 2002). In this way, a scandal represents a narrative about a breach of morals and values that contrasts with the mediatized construction of reputation. The greater the political visibility, the more impact the scandal has (Thompson 1998).

When it comes to defining political scandals, what stands out is whether the scandal involves an action that violates one or more social norms or moral standards for which the action 'must' receive public attention (usually through the media) and reaction (Thompson 2002; McDermott et al. 2015). This is especially true considering that social media nowadays tends to affect the perception of corruption both in political institutions and relationships of trust (Charron–Annoni 2021).

Generally speaking, a media scandal resonates and becomes public when an individual's acts offend or dishonor the "idealized morality of a social community" through dishonorable acts (De Lima 2006; Lull–Hinerman 2000:62). Given this, politicians involved in scandals tend to find it more difficult to deal with voters than politicians not involved in scandalous conduct (McDermott et al. 2015). From this perspective, scandals have other effects that range from impacting morals to sanctions, reflecting the "policy of shaming," which is linked to individual reputations in society (Tumber–Waisbord 2019).

METHODOLOGY

To address the main questions about how corruption is portrayed in the Brazilian media and the contrasts or similarities in recurring narratives, how corruption is framed in terminology in the media, and how the phenomenon can be mapped, this work uses a corpus of 478 news articles and 587 tweets from the following social media and news platforms – *Brasil de Fato*, *Estadão*, and *G1* – published during the month of May 2021 (Table 1).

Table 1. *Articles and Tweets: Content of survey of news portals and Twitter*

Media platforms	News portals	Twitter
Brasil de Fato	42	30
Estadão	149	472
G1	287	85
Total	478	587

Source: Author's own calculation.

The choice of these portals and tweets was based on Google Page Rank, an indicator that ranges from 0 to 10 that Google uses to determine the relevance or importance of a page on a portal, added to the editorial orientation of each medium in the political spectrum, taking into consideration the complexity of media bias cited by Groseclose and Milyo (2005).

More specifically, the news portal *Brasil de Fato*, with a page rank of 7/10, takes a center-left position and represents a popular view of Brazil and the world on its website. In contrast, the portal *Estadão*, with a page rank of 8/10, is positioned in the center-right, and *G1*, with a page rank of 9/10, has the same tendency as the previous portal (center-right).

The analyzed tweets were taken from the respective Twitter pages of @brasildefato, @g1, and @estadão. The posts in this corpus were created by Twitter users who access the information published through these news platforms and contribute with tweets. Accordingly, a comparison between news portals and tweets helps examine corruption as portrayed in the news versus Brazilian citizens' opinions (in the form of tweets).

To structure the analysis of the portrayal of corruption in the news portals of *Brasil de Fato*, *G1*, *Estadão*, and the posts on the respective Twitter pages, the study used automated content analysis using two software programs, SentiOne[2], and T-Lab[3]. Thus, the research proceeded from the principles of content analysis as described by Laurence Bardin (1977), who pointed out that the structure of a research analysis must be associated with four main poles: pro-analysis, material exploration, conclusions, and interpretation.

It is necessary to clarify that content analysis is a process of encoding raw messages in a text using a processed and organized classification scheme – this process being the main tool for organizing content to identify recurring items (Kondracki et al. 2002). In this process, raw data require processing before their analysis, and interpretive approaches assume that such content has been created for the purpose of communication (Lune–Berg 2017).

Since this approach is based on the development of content analysis focusing on articles and contributions, the research focuses on the selection of keywords that serve as the basis for this study. Seven terms related to corruption (corruption, bribery, kickback, nepotism, clientelism, collusion, embezzlement, and money laundering) were selected to map the collected content.

The choice of terms is based on the ideas of Rothstein and Varraich (2017), who treat the phenomenon of corruption as an umbrella concept associated with

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2 SentiOne: Used for monitoring and mapping online discussions and finding relevant insights with AI-based data analytics and a listening engine.

3 T-Lab: Software-designed linguistic, statistical and geographical tools that enable text analysis.

multiple categories/branches. In exploring the nuances[4] surrounding the term corruption, Varraich (2014) confirms that many concepts are associated with corruption as there is a wide range of understandings of it in academia.

In addition, it is noteworthy that the choice of the terms (Table 2) was based on earlier studies that deal with the subject, as well as translations and translated terms, but also in relation to the concepts discussed in the Portuguese language on the subject – that is, considering the cultural aspects of corruption in Brazil.

Table 2. Words linked to the concept of corruption

Clientelismo (Clientelism)	Conluio (Collusion)	Corrupção (Corruption)	Lavagem de dinheiro (Money Laundering)
Nepotismo (Nepotism)	Peculato (Embezzlement)	Propina (Kickback/Bribe)	Suborno (Bribery)

Source: Compiled by the author.

Despite academic efforts to fully analyze the framework, the work encountered three limitations. First, word variants were not collected. The Portuguese-language research focused only on the terms included in Table 2 without considering grammatical variants. Second, of the eight words associated with corruption, some are more common than others for various reasons such as social, geographic, and economic factors. Third, and finally, each portal and Twitter service is associated with a different number of daily publications.

REPRESENTATION OF CORRUPTION ON NEWS PORTALS AND TWITTER

The research assumes that the news is disseminated through the portals and that Twitter is part of a flow of information that results from this content (and *vice versa*) by enabling citizens to access and express their opinions through the platform. The two chapters below seek to present the most commonly recurring narratives in relation to corruption in both textual vehicles. The first focuses on reports from news portals, with the items most frequently mentioned being

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4 The research defends the general concept of corruption in view of the broad concept of the phenomenon, which is associated with various factors such as geographical, political, social, and even religious factors, and has as its theoretical basis the problem of the universal concept of the phenomenon (Kurer 2005; Varraich 2014; Rothstein–Varraich 2017).

scandals involving corruption. Then the subchapter continues with an analysis of how the portals expose the news about the phenomenon.

The second chapter focuses on public tweets, focusing on morals, ethics, and credibility, themes presented in May 2021 that created repercussions related to the platform. In the subchapter, an overview is given of how corruption is presented through these tweets and on the portals, focusing on the main points.

THE MAINTENANCE AND REPERCUSSIONS OF CORRUPTION SCANDALS ON PORTALS

In a context in which mediatization is part and parcel of Brazilian communication when comparing articles on news portals and tweets, it was observed that corruption scandals stand out. This helps us to understand the dynamics of news in relation to public communication, as the former is rich in information flows, ranging from those of public relations sectors to the responses of institutions (Tumber–Waisbord 2019).

As can be seen from Figure 1, when comparing corruption between articles on news portals and public comments/tweets, words associated with corruption scandals are more frequently found on portal news (87%) than in tweets (13%).

Figure 1. Corruption scandals embedded in news portals versus tweets
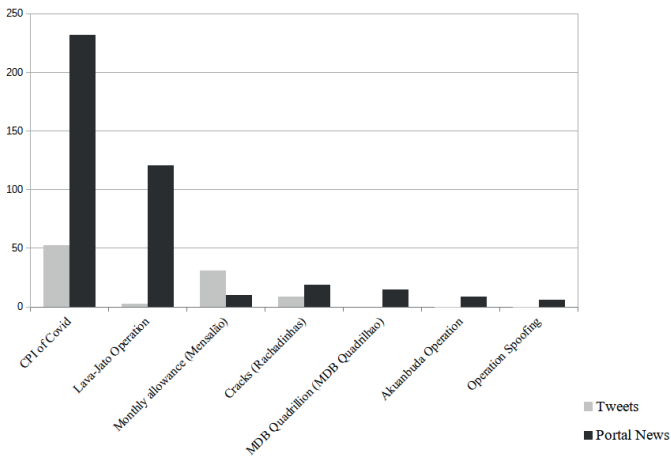
Source: Data collected during the research.

The two major corruption scandals represented on the portals during the period analyzed are the most recent CPI-COVID[5] (57.4%) scandal and the resumption of the Lava Jato[6] operation (30.9%). Therefore, corruption covers the present when dealing with COVID-related CPI and the past in the case of Lava Jato.

This evidence shows that despite the representation of scandals in both information vehicles, news portals are the most significant sources of this type of content in the researched period. Thus, it may be concluded that scandals are routinely covered in communication in the country. After all, it is through the news that individuals absorb interpretive frameworks that 'explain' events and happenings in the world, functioning as newsmakers in defining events, causes, actions, history, and results (Park 2012)

Besides, the latter two scandals are part of the background to the electoral configuration of 2022. When dealing with the COVID CPI scandal, the reports make evident the government's accountability. According to the COVID CPI report, Bolsonaro is considered responsible for at least nine crimes, in addition to the involvement of his supporters, such as ministers, children, federal deputies, businessmen, and governors.

On the other hand, concerning the scandal associated with the Lava Jato operation, the published materials resume the investigation, one involving former President Lula. Thus, the articles return to the fact that the former president was imprisoned for 580 days after being convicted due to the investigations associated with the Lava-Jato operation for the crimes of passive corruption and money laundering in the case of Triplex do Guarujá[7].

It is worth mentioning that corruption also appears as a factor in the memory in contemporary history of Brazil, in the form of citations about the condemnation regarding the Lava Jato Operation linked popular politicians, such as ex-president Lula, recalling the arrest and subsequent release of the politician.

When it comes to the tweets (Figure 1) that focus on the comments of Brazilians on the respective pages on Twitter, it is possible to observe how the representation of corruption is linked to the scandals involving CPI do COVID (23.7%) and Mensalão (13.9%).

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5 Parliamentary commissions of inquiry in Brazil that investigated alleged omissions and irregularities in the actions of the government of President Jair Bolsonaro during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil.

6 Investigations were carried out by the Federal Police of Brazil into a money-laundering scheme that moved billions of reais in bribes. The operation began on March 17, 2014. The name of the Lavajato operation alludes to gas stations moving amounts of illicit origin.

7 The Guarujá triplex was the key component in the investigation and conviction of former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT), carried out during Operation Lava Jato.

In this sense, public opinion on the social platform reinforced the investigations related to the health system, including reference to old investigations such as the Mensalão scandal of 2005, a vote-buying scandal that occurred during the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, considering that it is the media that corroborates the maintenance and history of corruption scandals (Mancini et al. 2016).

The relationship between news about corruption on portals

The portrayal of corruption occurs more frequently in articles on the portals. This indicates a tendency to tell stories about corruption that focus on corruption scandals, usually involving a political actor. From this perspective, corruption described on the portals is communicated to the population through scandals, investigations of crimes, convictions, and police operations. Thus, when dealing with corruption, the media plays the role of providing information and of policymaker, enabling the electorate to make decisions (Di Tella–Franceschelli 2011)

The focus of corruption news on the portals is denouncing crimes, with the aim of informing readers about the involvement of politicians and institutions. But, over and above this, it involves republicizing corruption cases that are part of Brazil's history, such as the Lava-Jato operation and the Mensalão case.

An important point for analysis (Figure 2) is that when comparing the portals in May 2021 in terms of the fluctuation in mentions of corruption over time, there is no linear trend. Thus, we conclude that despite the scheduling of communication in the information vehicles, publication about the latter phenomenon varies in time in terms of the date and volume of posts.

Figure 2. *Portal mentions of corruption over time – Brasil de Fato, Estadão, G1*
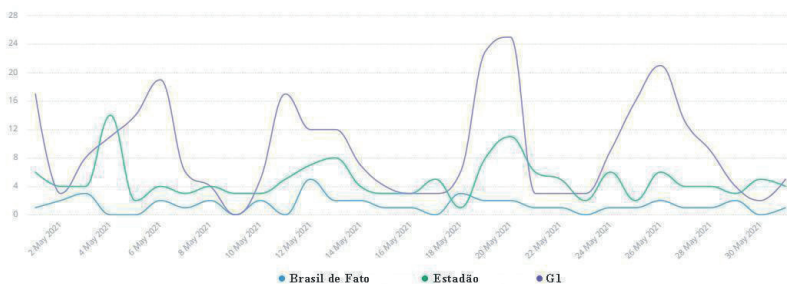
Source: Author's own calculations using SentiOne software.

Despite the homogeneous nature of the material published about corruption in news portals, it should be noted that the frequency of publication among portals changes according to media interest. Of the portal publications that were analyzed, *G1* stands out in relation to *Brasil de Fato* and *Estadão*. Two hundred and eighty-eight articles were analyzed on the *G1* news portal, of which corruption-related terms appear 637 (100%) times. Terms most related to the phenomenon are money laundering (24.8%), corruption (48.4%), embezzlement (10.6%), and bribery (1.1%) – (Table 3).

Table 3. *News portals: Occurrence of terms linked to corruption – G1, Estadão, Brasil de Fato (%)*

Corruption-related terms on news portals in Portuguese (English)	*G1* (n=637)	*Estadão* (n=257)	*Brasil de Fato* (n=73)
Clientelismo (Clientelism)	0.00	0.38	1.36
Conluio (Collusion)	3.45	1.55	4.10
Corrupção (Corruption)	48.35	69.64	73.97
Lavagem de dinheiro (Money laundering)	24.80	20.23	9.58
Nepotismo (Nepotism)	0.94	0.38	0.00
Peculato (Embezzlement)	10.67	4.28	1.36
Propina (Kickback/bribe)	10.67	3.50	4.10
Suborno (Bribery)	1.09	0.00	5.47
Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*

Source: Author's own calculation.

The *G1* articles deal with issues related to President Bolsonaro, former President Lula, embezzlement-related crimes related to COVID-19, the impeachment of Wilson Witzel,[8] the investigation into former Minister of the Environment Ricardo Salles[9], in addition to the lack of female representation in

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8 The Wilson Witzel case was a corruption case during the pandemic involving the elected governor whose term was permanently revoked in impeachment proceedings. Additionally, the article mentions that during the pandemic, the Department of Health hired companies to renovate properties in the state without putting this out to bid because it was considered urgent work.

9 This refers to the "Akuanbuda Operation," in which ex-minister Ricardo Salles was investigated in relation to an illegal timber export scheme; in this approach, corruption was presented as a crime, informing readers of denouncing the involvement of politicians and institutions.

the COVID CPI members, which generated discussions about gender equality in the composition of the members of the commission of inquiry.

Regarding the analysis of the news portal of *Estadão*, 257 (100%) references were found to be linked to terms associated with corruption in May. Among these terms, the most frequent was "corruption" (69.6%), followed by money laundering (20.2% of all references) and embezzlement (4.3%) (Table 3).

The *Estadão* portal refers to corruption in relation to complaints, citing the involvement of politicians and also the institutions involved in the crime. However, the main approach deals with the Akuanbuda operation.

Another case of corruption on the portal involved the former mayor of Saquarenama[10] who was the target of the Desmico Operation initiated by the Public Ministry of the State of Rio de Janeiro (MPRJ) in relation to a fraud scheme that investigated crimes of money laundering and criminal organization.

In May, the news portal *Brasil de Fato* presented 43 articles that used the terms. However, it should be noted that in the material that was analyzed, the sum of all the terms was 73 (100%), with the word "corruption" (74%) being the most common, followed by the terms "money laundering" (9.6%) and "bribery" (5.5%) (Table 3).

Of the 74% of instances in which the term "corruption" was used, it is associated with scandals, investigations of crimes, convictions, and fighting corruption. However, the most important issues in the articles involved the return of Lula to the electoral scene in 2022, the involvement of PT in corruption scandals, and the accusation of Bolsonaro and his influence game in the congress. Other recurring news included the approval of Lula as a presidential candidate for the 2022 elections and post hoc reporting about the former president's arrest and the aftermath.

## CORRUPTION IN TWEETS: AN ARENA FOR QUESTIONING MORALS

While the portals focus on political scandals, it may be noted that on Twitter, in the period being examined, the posts of tweets by Brazilians adopt a narrative that revolves around morals, ethics, and credibility, thus contrasting with the

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10 The impeachment of the governor of Rio de Janeiro. Wilson Witzel case, a corruption case in the pandemic scenario involving the elected governor whose term was permanently revoked in impeachment proceedings. Additionally, the article mentions that during the pandemic, the Department of Health hired companies to renovate properties in the state without putting them out to bid because it was considered urgent work.

intense information about scandals generated mainly by news articles. From this, the background interpretations of scandal narratives are articulated through the moral background that underpins social institutions (Lull–Hinerman 2000).

In the tweets, 51.4% of the narratives address moral issues, followed by ethics (24.6%) and credibility (23.9%). This contrasts with the references on the portal: moral (45.4%), ethics (34.8%), and credibility (16.7%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Morality and corruption in news portals versus tweets, May 2021
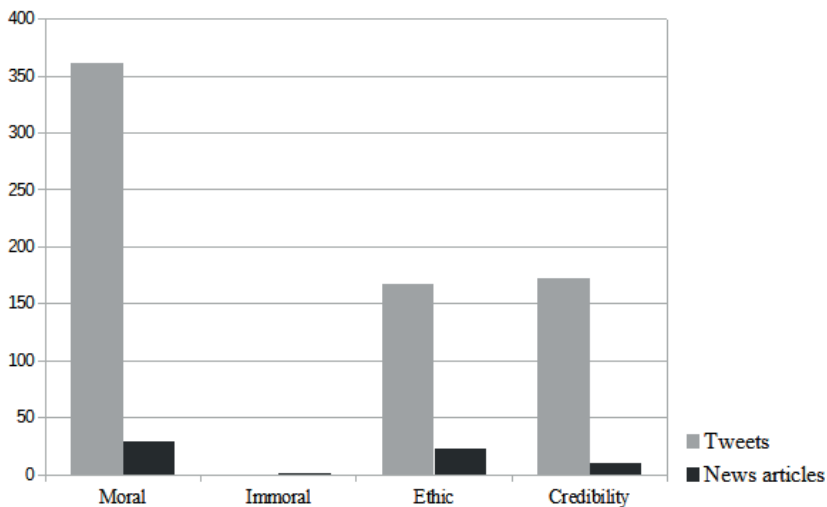
Source: Data collected during the research.

The absence of morals and ethics related to corruption cases is the main focus of the indignation of citizens and the topic of discussion in the tweets. On the social platform, morality is defined as a necessary attribute for fighting political corruption, indicating the need for this factor in politics. Despite the different informational trends in the two communication vehicles, there is a tendency to worship a strategy of moralizing, highlighting, or respecting (Barros 2014).

In the specific case of this research, the issue of credibility stands out when its existence is challenged, with most mentions of the term connected to the Labor Party (PT). The tweets put the PT at the center of corruption cases and question whether the party has credibility due to its involvement in scandals. Therefore, it can also be said that political scandals have become part of a morality game (Lull–Hinerman 2000:62).

In the tweets, outrage about corruption is reinforced in reference to the pursuit of morality, ethics, and credibility in the political arena. Bearing in mind that scandals about issues have repercussions for social and political life, it is due to them that debates about ethics, morality, and inequality occur in relation to individual behavior and institutions, so scandals in the media tend to reveal more than corruption and irregularities (Tumber–Waisbord 2019). Accordingly, morality becomes a social agent in a social world (Bourdieu 1989).

On the other hand, the issue of morality is little highlighted in the news, appearing only in articles that address the moral and ethical weakening of Brazilian democracy and how this is reflected in corruption.

Tweet debates and tools of outrage

While news portals focus on the dissemination of news about corruption, highlighting denunciations, scandals, and political characters, in the case of Twitter, the presentation of the phenomenon focuses more on current issues, indignation, developments in the CPI-related investigations connected with COVID-19, and the electoral disputes of 2022. In addition, there is a tendency to mention party corruption as a political manifestation, especially when it comes to the time the Workers' Party (PT)[11] was in power.

Twitter-related visibility and the possibility of responding immediately are factors that increase the political influence of the social platform (Pérez Curiel 2017). Therefore, because of this interaction, the platform offers greater freedom of expression and becomes the site of polarized dispute between left and right when it comes to corruption, especially when the issue of the comparison between Bolsonaro and Lula is reproduced at the time of this research.

It is important to keep in mind that Brazil, in the current context, exists in an unprecedentedly politically polarized environment with a leader with populist traits opposing the press (Fontes–Marques 2022). Therefore, the social platform is part of the environment of public reflection about the Brazil of the present and the Brazil of the past. In this sense, for the respective politicians and candidates for the 2022 elections, the corruption discussed in the tweets makes room for electoral debate and polarization among citizens.

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11 In 2003, with Lula's inauguration as President of the Republic, the party began to command the Brazilian Executive for the first time. Shortly after 2011, Dilma Rousseff, Chief of Staff during the Lula period, was re-elected in 2014. However, in 2016, Dilma left the presidency after the impeachment request.

In a way, corruption reinforces the arguments associated with the elections of 2022. On the one hand, it helps in making comparisons between the corruption of the Bolsonaro government, linked to money laundering resulting from the unfolding of the Covid CPI scandal and interference in the Federal Police, and the 13 years of the PT, remembering the detention of former president Lula and the scandals of the Lava Jato operation. This confrontation between governments is evident in some excerpts, as seen in the tweets. But, on the other hand, the President did not "buy" deputies, as happened in PT Mensalão.

Regarding the volume of posts on the topic of corruption, a general comparative analysis of mentions of the words associated with corruption in May on the Twitter pages of *Brasil de Fato*, *Estadão*, and *G1* leads to the conclusion that peaks in the frequency of these posts do not tend to correspond (Figure 4). However, there is also a discrepancy in the mentions of terms since the mentions do not match; accordingly, it is possible to observe that the Figure shows the wide range of public opinions enabled by social media.

Figure 4. *News portals: mentions of corruption-related terms in May 2021– Brasil de Fato, Estadão, G1*
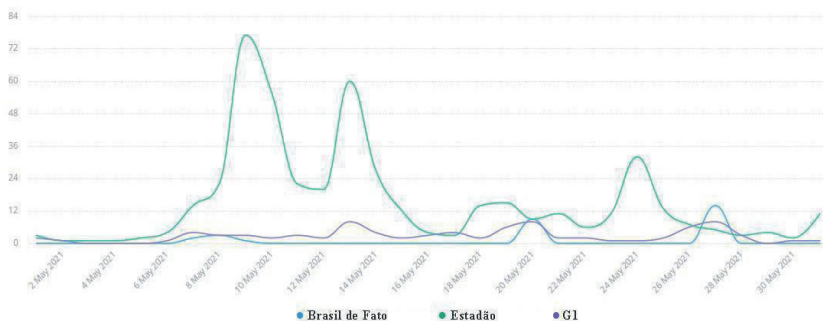
Source: Author's own calculations using SentiOne software.

In addition, the tweets show a different approach to the portals regarding the presentation of concerns about the defragmentation of the state, political support, pandemic issues, and concerns about Brazil's democracy.

Regarding the frequency of mentions of the phenomenon, *Estadão's* Twitter most often mentions corruption, with 93.4% of references to the latter term, 2.8% to clientelism, and 1.6% to money laundering, totaling 1,002 (100%) references in total (Table 4).

Table 4. *Twitter: Recurrence of terms linked to corruption – Estadão, G1, Brasil de Fato (%)*

Corruption related terms on Twitter in Portuguese (English)	Estadão (n=1002)	G1 (n=87)	Brasil de Fato (n=57)
Clientelismo (Clientelism)	2.79	0.00	0.00
Conluio (Collusion)	–	1.15	0.00
Corrupção (Corruption)	93.41	93.10	26.32
Lavagem de dinheiro (Money laundering)	1.60	4.60	49.12
Nepotismo (Nepotism)	1.20	0.00	0.00
Peculato (Embezzlement)	0.40	0.00	0.00
Propina (Kickback/Bribe)	0.40	1.15	0.00
Suborno (Bribery)	0.20	0.00	24.56
Total	*100.00*	*100.00*	*100.00*

Source: Author's own calculation.

The corruption in this informational vehicle seems to be linked to passages that repeatedly preach religious ideologies, such as the glorification of God and the family, as the sentence in a tweet, "liberal in economics, conservative in God and family mores,"[12] shows. Furthermore, there are repeated references to the Workers' Party (PT) when recalling corruption scandals and the fact that the 2022 election campaign had President Bolsonaro and former President Lula as the main characters. The following part of a tweet indicates this repetition: "The PT [Workers' Party] had 16 years to solve the problem and preferred to steal."

Reference is also made to the investigation by the Federal Police of Senator Omar Aziz for the diversion of more than 120 million in public health funds in the midst of a pandemic. Former Justice Minister Sergio Moro is also mentioned in connection with the corruption scandals of the judiciary: "In other words, in the Bolsonaro government, theft is free" and "The Bolsonaro Family is smeared in public coffers."

As shown in Table 4, the variation on the *Estadão* portal in relation to the words "corruption," "bribery," "bribery," "nepotism," "clientelism," "collusion," "embezzlement," and "money laundering" is high and predominant when compared to that on other Twitter pages (*G1* and Brazil particularly).

When it comes to *G1* on Twitter, there are 87 (100%) references to the term "corruption," with the term itself being the most common (93.1%) references,

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12 Translations from news portals and tweets by the author.

followed by "money laundering" (4.6%) and "collusion" and "bribery" (1.2%) (Table 4).

Twitter is a tool that contributes to the social discussion related to social policies, elections, and corruption scandals, as well as political positioning. An example of this is that the *G1* tweet's main focus is the 2022 presidential election, which becomes a factor for debate on the social page concerning positions for or against Bolsonaro and Lula. In addition, corruption is also linked to the political dispute between the parties of the right and the left, which makes it one of the main points of discussion.

In addition, corruption in Rio de Janeiro is the subject of three reports related to corruption in the state: "Rio de Janeiro is a state 'thrown to the ground;' such corruption is reflected in daily violence; you don't trust anyone in the police, in the guards, in the mayors, governors, anyone."

Overall, 29 posts involving tweets and retweets were found in May on the *Brasil de Fato* Twitter page, of which there are 57 (100%) references to the search terms (corruption, bribery, kickbacks, nepotism, clientelism, collusion, embezzlement, washing of money). The term "money laundering" (49,1%) appears in first position, followed by "corruption" (26.3%) and "bribery" (24.6%) (Table 4).

The analysis shows that the posts on the portal and linked to the terms related to corruption focus on three phenomena at the national level – the Workers' Party and its involvement in corruption scandals associated with the smuggling of forest products and the favoritism of Minister Ricardo Sales.

CONCLUSION AND FINAL DISCUSSIONS

This work analyses the portrayal of corruption in the news portals *Brasil de Fato*, *Estadão*, and *G1*, as well as in the tweets of the respective Twitter pages, to examine the contrasts and similarities associated with the phenomenon during the month of May 2021 in Brazil. In the analysis, it was found that although the portal's news and tweets include dialogue about agenda-setting, when it comes to the phenomenon, there is a difference in how corruption is approached in each vehicle, which through the analysis can be seen from the approach of the themes to the repercussions of cases of corruption. This reinforces the notion that the concept of corruption is socially constructed and that its construction depends on the context in which it is discussed in the media (Berti 2018)

The portals that deal with the subject of corruption connect it with stories that denounce political scandals and the unfolding investigations of operations,

always focusing on the connections of political actors. In this case, corruption takes the form of indictments when readers are informed about the involvement of politicians or institutions in bribery cases, money laundering, and others.

Therefore, these articles in the portals address corruption cases from past years, such as those that involved Lava-Jato and Mensalão, not forgetting the investigations of the present, when COVID-19 is cited. The publication of corruption reports in Brazil becomes a means of monitoring governments, which in a way, feeds the image of journalism as a guardian of the public interest (De Lima 2006).

On the other hand, Twitter, a social medium that enables the widespread expression of opinion when corruption occurs, becomes an arena for moralization and political polarization in the eyes of the population and involves a partisan, religious, and moral campaigning approach. Thus, disputes between parties appear in the tweets, such as comparisons between the current president Bolsonaro and the ex-president Lula linked to historical factors of mismanagement and the responses to these activities. Through using short messages, Twitter provides an open and accessible space for exposing comments and ideas through a network structure, contributing to a process of interaction and discussion of news content (Bruns 2008; Bruns et al. 2012)

Another difference is the fact that on the portals, scandals are detailed, while on Twitter, the focus is less complex and justified by a religious emphasis and morality or contrast between disputes involving the past and the current presidents, Lula and Bolsonaro since the users of the platforms take a political position when it comes to the defragmentation of the country in relation to the appropriation of public funds. Certainly, in this pre-electoral context, visibility and the possibility of responding immediately are crucial for users of the social platform (Pérez Curiel 2017)

Finally, it is worth reflecting that when it comes to corruption, the scandals that are most clearly expressed on news portals unfold and are confronted by the indignation and morality of public opinion, which in this case, occurs through tweets. From this perspective, it is possible to conclude that there is no scandal without the media, but at the same time, there is no corruption without moral judgment, as the latter feeds the indignation of citizens.

Indeed, the media plays an important role in limiting corruption (Ferraz–Finnan 2008). However, there is still much to be done in relation to this issue. The media endorses the theme and makes citizens more reflective and proactive, but it also helps to trivialize the phenomenon. Thus, there is a need for greater awareness and research so that corruption becomes part of the social, political, and economic debate.

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