



# Verification of the Public Discourse of Ecuador's Mayors on Local TV and Inclusion of Innovation and Technology Topics, Between February 20 and March 22

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**Abstract.** The purpose of the research is to determine the accuracy of the statements made by the mayors of Ecuador, and the inclusion of issues related to innovation and technology management, based on the fact-checking methodology. The research question is: Do the public statements of Ecuador's mayors presented in local television news programs tend to be false? A quantitative methodology based on the Ecuador Chequea protocol was used. A sample of statements by mayors of eight cities was obtained and broadcasted between February/20 and March/22. The statements are grouped in 10 axes, showing the correspondence between the functions determined in the law and the work they perform. Most of the statements refer to health in the face of Covid-19 control, followed by political issues, economy, public works and culture. The statements of the governors in this case are true, there is no contamination of fake news, the proximity helps direct accountability.

**Keywords:** Disinformation · Fact-checking · Cultural Proximity · Local television

## 1 Introduction

The media operate as mediators between society and power, play an important role in the monitoring and accountability of those in power, inform citizens and are a means of expression for political organizations.

Of all media, traditional and digital, television has a direct impact on public opinion and forms models of behavior, so it seeks to monitor the quality of programming to meet the interests of viewers, and consequently maintain high audiences [1].

Among the characteristics of television that have allowed it to become the medium with the greatest presence and reach worldwide are its domestic, educational, advertising and political uses [2], for which it is said that it has a powerful capacity to offer seductive languages that invite to ideal worlds. Other qualities are proximity and instantaneity [3] to bring events that happen thousands of kilometres away.

Therefore, it is of permanent interest to inquire into the contents, narratives, forms of programming and, particularly, local television news to know what, who and how the data, facts and criteria that contribute to the quality of democracy are present.

The local perspective is justified by proximity, but also by the practices of transparency and accountability through the Internet, which are appropriate in the face of emerging phenomena such as disinformation.

Disinformation distorts the role of the media, affects the dialogue between those in power and citizens and can neglect the needs of progress. In democracy, accountability is a vertical relationship between society and the vigilant action of the media [4, 5]. Accountability is referred to as an instance of accountability by virtue of being a direct way for dialogue between rulers and citizens, thus contributing to a better coexistence thanks to the quality of information and the construction of a diverse public opinion.

The objectives of accountability are to protect freedom of expression, prevent or limit the damage that the media may cause and promote positive benefits for society [6]. Accountability is based on three fundamental pillars: information transparency, self-regulation and public participation [7, 8].

Unfortunately, direct communication between authorities and citizens is not frequent, it is channeled through the media and, in recent years, occurs in social networks, which, as well as presenting opportunities, also lead to speculation and so-called fake news.

Regarding the denomination of fake news, it should be stated that it is an oxymoron, if it is fake news, it is not news because "in journalism, in principle, there is no fake news, so much so that one of the rules is verification" [9]. Fake news (distorted, misleading, misleading, inconsistent) is incorrect information that pretends to be real [10, 11, 12] and circulates particularly in social media.

The opposite of fake news is fact-checking journalism, a practice that consists of checking published information after the fact [13]. Fact-checking arises in response to the crisis of trust in the media, its purpose is to diminish the effects of fake news [14], it applies "techniques of data journalism to unmask the errors, ambiguities, lies, lack of rigor or inaccuracies of some content published in the media" [15].

In the present research, the statements that mayors issue through local television related to the fulfillment of their functions as local government authorities are considered as the object of study.

According to the administrative structure of Ecuador, the local government instance is called Decentralized Autonomous Government (GAD) whose purpose is to favor citizen participation and the active involvement of individuals in decision-making processes as well as in their execution.

In Latin America, decentralization is understood as a means to deepen and perfect democracy, strengthen development "from below", contribute to citizen equity, reduce the state apparatus and make public management more efficient.

The Constitution of Ecuador develops the framework of organization, competencies and resources of the GADs, which are specified in the Organic Code of Territorial Organization, Autonomy and Decentralization (Cootad). The mayor is the first authority of the municipal GAD and exercises exclusive executive power. According to Art. 54 of the Cootad [16] the municipal governments have, among others, the following functions:

to promote sustainable development and local economic development processes, implement the right to housing, provide services, promote and sponsor culture and the arts. And also, according to Art. 55 of the same Cootad, the municipal governments have exclusive competencies such as: providing public services, planning, building and maintaining physical infrastructure and health and education facilities, preserving, maintaining and disseminating the architectural, cultural and natural heritage of the canton.

This research seeks to verify the statements or speeches issued by local governors, for which the following context is relevant.

The discourse of leaders on television is fragmented due to the time and production conditions of the medium [17]. Political activism is the one that has benefited the most from television discourse; it represents a highly creative and constantly changing opportunity to generate and cohesive identity.

The public discourse of rulers on television is a key element in the construction of social subjects and the public agenda. Discourse analysis is a rapidly evolving field of study that is applied in different contexts.

For Morales [18] “discourses serve to interpret diverse social phenomena, to define the agenda of urgent issues, to reduce our uncertainty, to mobilize individuals and to distribute power within society”. Therefore, public discourse is a social and communicative phenomenon, they have an oral character, most of them are prepared in writing and then read, or recorded and transcribed, and are always framed in a certain communicative situation or situation of enunciation [19].

Based on the above, the purpose of the research is to determine the accuracy of the statements made by the mayors of Ecuador using the fact-checking methodology. The research question is: How have the public statements of the mayors of Ecuador been presented in local television news programs? The research question is explained by the fact that the proximity of local authorities with citizens generates excessive trust and leads to protagonism and populist practices aimed at maintaining the electorate.

## 2 Materials and Methods

The research is descriptive [20], using quantitative methodology through content analysis of the public statements of the mayors of Ecuador whose records are hosted in digital social networks.

The analysis is supported by the verification protocol of Ecuador Chequea

the first Ecuadorian media entirely dedicated to the verification of public discourse and misleading content circulating on the Internet. The portal is part of a movement of fact checkers with at least 100 active global experiences, among them Chequeado, from Argentina [21].

From a selection of statements made by authorities, without discriminating by party or ideological orientation, Ecuador Chequea develops four stages: 1) Monitoring and selection of verifiable phrases or contents, 2) Comparison of the selected phrase with the original source, 3) Contextualization of the statement, and 4) Qualitative amplification of the verified data. At the end of the process, a category is assigned according to the classification shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Categories of Ecuador Chequea's methodology

Categories	Concepts
True	Statements by political subjects that are fully accurate, directly congruent with the objective source and do not omit data or limit the contextualization of the subject matter under discussion.
Yes, but	Statements that include verifiable information or partially true data, thus requiring further contextualization exercises.
Unsustainable	Any expression that does not allow direct identification of the arguments or databases from which the statement has been derived.
Fake	A statement that openly contradicts the objective data. A fallacious argument.
Quasi-fake	The contents that go viral on the Internet but correspond to disinformation are identified. Altered images, audios with false messages, videos taken out of context, WhatsApp chains, etc.
In depth	A new category added with the onset of the pandemic.

The selection process of the audiovisual pieces took place as follows:

- Verification of the media outlets listed in the Public Media Registry, as of 2021, of the Communication Council of Ecuador [22].
- Selection of television media that keep archives of their newscasts on Facebook or YouTube, the social networks of greatest consumption and preference.
- Use of the internal search tools of the social networks Facebook or YouTube to filter or locate the pieces to be analyzed through keywords or tags: mayor, GAD, municipality, mayors' name.

A sample of the mayors' statements broadcast between February 2020 and March 2022 on eight local television stations, or community spots on national television stations, in the three geographic regions of the country was obtained.

- Coast:
  - 1) TC television - Guayaquil, (Guayas). Name of the newscast: El Noticiero.
  - 2) Manavisión Channel - Portoviejo (Manabí). Name of the newscast: Noticias Manavisión.
  - 3) Rey TV Channel 39 - Quevedo (Los Ríos). Name of the newscast: Rey Noticias.
  - 4) Palmas TV - Esmeraldas (Esmeraldas). Name of the newscast: Enlace Regional Informativo.
- Sierra:
  - 1) TV MICC – Latacunga (Cotopaxi). Name of the newscast: Informativo 47
  - 2) Teleamazonas – Quito (Pichincha). Name of the newscast: Noticiero 24 horas.

- 3) Academia TV Canal 2 – Cuenca (Azuay). Name of the newscast: Academia TV Noticias.

- East:

- 1) TVC Los Encuentros – Los Encuentros (Zamora Chinchipe). Name of the newscast: Encuentro Informativo.

Data processing was performed in the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v. 22 software.

### 3 Results

The results of the content analysis of the statements made by the mayors of eight cities in Ecuador collected in the news programs of the main local television stations that keep their audiovisual records in the social networks Facebook and YouTube are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2.** Verification results

Verification results	Topics				
	Food assistance	Culture and heritage	Economy	Education	Justice
True	8	9	7	2	3
Yes, but	0	0	4	0	1
Fak	0	1	2	0	0
Quasi-fake	0	0	0	0	0
In depth	0	1	0	0	0
Totals	8	11	13	2	4
Verification results	Topics				
	Public works	Policy	Health - Covid 19	Citizen Security	Public services
True	8	18	17	9	9
Yes, but	3	1	2	0	1
Fak	1	0	0	0	1
Quasi-fake	1	0	0	0	0
In depth	0	0	1	0	0
Totals	13	19	20	9	11

(continued)

**Table 2.** (continued)

Verification results	Verification mechanisms				Totals
	Media archives	Documentary information	Institutional Web sites	Testimonials	
True	39	6	39	6	90
Yes, but	5	0	5	2	12
Fak	0	2	2	1	5
Quasi-fake	0	0	1	0	1
In depth	0	0	2	0	2
Totals	44	8	49	9	110

## 4 Conclusions

The public statements of the mayors of eight cities of Ecuador made in open television news between February 2020 and March 2022 are grouped around 10 thematic axes: food assistance, culture and heritage, economy, education, justice, public works, politics, Health - Covid 19, citizen security and public services, therefore, there is correspondence between the functions that according to the law (Cootad) must fulfill with the expressions of the work they execute.

The greatest proportion of manifestations (18%) refer to health in relation to the control of the Covid-19 pandemic, a logical situation since the control of contagions is coexisting. Other topics are the economy, public works and culture, axes that animate and sustain the provision of goods and services.

In second place, the treatment of political issues stands out (17%), proper to the function of mayors and related to the attention to citizens, however, it does not derive in a paternalistic or populist image as estimated in the research question.

However, in the period analyzed, no topics related to innovation and technology related to the work of government officials were included, nor in association with the predominant topics, probably due to the health emergency and the technological structures they had in place prior to the pandemic.

The statements of the governors are true, through the methodology of Ecuador Chequea, the ambiguous, doubtful or inconsistent expectations were verified.

Adding the percentages of true and conditional contrasts (yes, but) it is established that 93% of the expressions tend to the truth, thus the research question is answered in the sense that, although some statements are ambiguous, they are based on certainties, those that seem exaggeration are rhetorical figures, typical of the speech of small cities or motivated by the close relationship, which do not imply falsehood.

There is no contamination of fake news in the mayors' communication; proximity helps direct accountability.

At the local, proximity and neighborhood level, consistent discourse is encouraged.

The mechanisms that provide the best support for verification are media and institutional data repositories, which are forms of open digital governments.

**Table 3.** Morphology of verified information

Topics	Informative genre			Region		
	Interview	Information, news	Report	Coast	Sierra	East
Food assistance	1	7	0	0	7	1
Culture and heritage	3	7	1	0	11	0
Economy	1	11	1	2	11	0
Education	0	2	0	1	1	0
Justice	0	4	0	0	4	0
Public works	2	9	2	0	13	0
Policy	7	11	1	1	17	1
Health - Covid 19	2	17	1	6	12	2
Citizen Security	2	7	0	1	8	0
Public services	2	8	1	4	6	1
Total	20	83	7	15	90	5
Topics	Source, archive location		Plane			
	Facebook	YouTube	Close-up	Middle plane	General plan	
Food assistance	6	2	1	3	4	
Culture and heritage	11	0	2	3	6	
Economy	12	1	1	7	5	
Education	2	0	0	1	1	
Justice	3	1	1	1	2	
Public works	12	1	0	4	9	
Policy	6	13	6	8	5	
Health - Covid 19	17	3	4	10	6	
Citizen Security	5	4	0	6	3	
Public services	9	2	3	7	1	
Totals	83	27	18	50	42	

Table 3 provides the support to indicate that:

- The majority of mayors’ testimonies on local television are presented in less than three minutes.
- The most used news genre in local television to present mayors’ testimonies in the news.
- Facebook is the social network preferred by local television in Ecuador to host its news archives.
- The television plane most used for mayors’ testimonies in the medium.
- The majority of testimonies are collected from within the GADs

Future lines of research are methodological triangulations, use of qualitative designs to reaffirm the conclusions presented here, explore other reasons and interpret data. It is also of interest to evaluate the management practices of local governments based on the proximity axis.

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