

# How to verify without experts and reach the big leagues: University fact checking of the presidential debate of Chile in 2017

**Cómo verificar sin expertos y llegar a las grandes ligas: Fact checking universitario del debate presidencial de Chile en 2017**

**Verificar sem especialistas e alcançar as grandes ligas: fact checking universitário do debate presidencial do Chile 2017**

# 7

ARTICLE



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### Abstract

This article presents the teaching methodology applied in a fact-checking project to verify the presidential campaign and the televised debate of the 2017 elections of Chile in a journalism undergraduate course. The design and development of that project is explained. Their journalistic and learning results are analyzed, among these is to have been shortlisted in a Journalism award of professional excellence. The assessment made by students of their learning when verifying the public discourse of the authorities and their contribution to democracy in a watchdog role are exposed.

### KEYWORDS:

Presidential debates, Fact checking, Journalism, Teaching, Verification, Data checking.

### Resumen:

*El artículo presenta la metodología docente aplicada en un proyecto de fact checking para verificar la campaña presidencial y el debate televisado de las elecciones de 2017 en Chile, en un curso de estudiantes de pregrado de Periodismo. Se explica el diseño y desarrollo de ese proyecto. Se analizan sus resultados periodísticos y de aprendizaje, entre los que está haber sido preseleccionado en un premio de Periodismo de excelencia profesional. Se*

*expone la valoración que hicieron los estudiantes de su aprendizaje al verificar el discurso público de las autoridades, y de su aporte a la democracia en un rol de perro guardián o watchdog.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:**

*Debates presidenciales, Fact checking, Periodismo, Docencia, Verificación, Chequeo de datos.*

**Resumo:**

*O artigo apresenta a metodologia de ensino aplicada em um projeto de verificação de dados para verificar a campanha presidencial e o debate televisionado das eleições de 2017 no Chile, em um*

*curso de graduação em jornalismo. Se explica o plano e o desenvolvimento deste projeto. Se analisa seus resultados jornalísticos e acadêmicos, dentre os quais ele foi selecionado em um prêmio de Jornalismo por excelência profissional. Se apresenta a avaliação feita pelos estudantes de sua aprendizagem ao verificar o discurso público das autoridades e sua contribuição para a democracia em um papel de cão de guarda ou watchdog.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:**

*Debates presidenciais, Fact Checking, Jornalismo, Ensino, Verificação, Verificação de dados*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

During a semester, 26 Journalism students of the School of Communications of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, carried out an exercise of fact checking or data verification to the statements issued by the candidates for the presidency of Chile during the election campaign of 2017 in the debate transmitted simultaneously by all the television stations.

It was carried out under the premise of learning by doing, in a constructivist pedagogical approach whose method is that the student assimilates knowledge in the implementation of an activity, in a situation propitiated by the teacher with a social cognitive approach in which learning occurs in the exchange and cooperation with fellows, peer tutors and teachers (Schunk, 2012). It is a method that has been proven effective for the acquisition of journalistic skills (Pain, Masullo Chen, and Campbell, 2016).

## 2. OBJECTIVES

Objectives were raised in two lines. The first regarding learning, was measured from the reflection that students made of their process and the ability to achieve goals. Journalistic objectives were also raised: having two publications of professional and competitive standards regarding the other fact-checking initiatives that were active in Chile during the election.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW <sup>1</sup>

Fact checking was defined by Lucas Graves (2016, p.25) as: "Any analysis that publicly challenges a rendered account that is in competition." The author raises this definition to defend the thesis that it is a journalistic genre itself, with its own codes.

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1. The theoretical framework of this work is part of a project funded by the *Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Científico y Tecnológico de Chile*, Fondecyt, project N°1170843.

By breaking down the definition to operationalize it in a teaching process, the word analysis represents a reflective work around the data as evidence. The contrast of the information collected by the checker with other data allows to draw a conclusion that confirms or denies the information of the person who delivers an accountability. This analysis is a challenge and competes with the original statement, giving the reader the opportunity to discern his position on the subject.

Bae Brandtzaeg and Følstad (2017) cataloged the different fact checking projects in areas of concern, which resulted in three categories: online rumors and jokes (e.g. Snopes.com, TruthorFiction.com), specific issues or controversy (e.g. StopFake, TruthbeTold) and politics and public affirmations (e.g. Politifact, FactCheck.org).

The latter gained notoriety especially after the 2016 presidential election in the United States (Singal, 2016; Kurtzleben, 2016), with initiatives that have massified verification techniques with an open public methodology such as *Factcheck.org* of the University of Annenberg, the *Politifact* site of the *Tampa Bay* newspaper and *The Washington Post Factchecker*. These three pioneering political projects in the United States have led other media such as the *National Public Radio* and *The New York Times* to join.

The objective of the political *fact checking* is to emphasize the *watchdog* role of Journalism, that oversees the authorities and prevents abuses (Dumitru *et. al.*, 2011; Iyengar, 2011; Jamieson and Waldman, 2003) by checking the information issued by people in a situation of power with primary and open sources. The aim of demanding accountability (Jamieson, 1992), is to check if the subject fulfilled promises he proclaimed publicly, the contradictions in his

speech and the quality of his sources of information.

The project presented in this article is of political *fact checking*, therefore, the activity of the students was focused on having a coherence between the conceptualization of the role of *watchdog* and its effective performance. In the teaching field, the challenge is to determine if this concept can be transferred pedagogically. That is, if you can teach to exercise a journalistic role through the verification of public discourse.

In the journalistic industry, the role of a *watchdog* is in permanent tension due to two pressures analyzed by Casero-Ripolles, Izquierdo-Castillo and Doménech-Fabregat (2014), the first has to do with the professionalization of political communication and the second is related to the commercial and political pressures of the media.

These two issues are especially sensitive when verification is understood as a journalistic genre, since the methodology involves contacting the original source that issued a statement to verify the data provided, giving room for clarification. This process causes the verifier to deal with the politician's communication advisors, which complicates the process as they are people who seek and have the tools to influence the public agenda of the media.

The second aspect is in tension with the code of international principles established by the Poynter Institute, through its International Fact Checking Network, which includes political balance without expressing partisanship and ensuring transparency in their working methods as well as in their financing (Poynter Institute, 2016). This makes it difficult for media that share a commercial vocation or whose owners are known to have a political agenda, but it repre-

sents an opportunity for university and independent projects.

## 4. THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN AND THE 2017 DEBATE

Eight candidates participated in the 2017 presidential election in Chile. Two representatives of the main left and right coalitions, Alejandro Guillier and Sebastián Piñera respectively, a third candidate represented an emerging coalition of the left and five others from independent parties or movements.

The televised presidential debates in Chile became a tradition within the country after the return to democracy in 1989, after 17 years of dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet's regime. By being organized by television stations independently or by the National Television Association (Anatel), journalists have played a key role in being responsible for interviewing candidates (Núñez-Mussa, 2018).

The televised debate is one of the last instances of the campaign and one of the few in which candidates are in a shared space with their contenders, so that the voter can compare (Jamieson and Adasiewicz, 2000). The debate is not only a media event but also a civic event that is part of the democratic process in the development of the election (Schroeder, 2000).

The eight candidates participated in the Anatel 2017 first-round debate that was broadcast simultaneously by all the national free television stations, which are those that belong to the association. The candidates were interviewed by four journalists who represented their television stations. Therefore, they are the ones who have greater control over the triangle of disputed agendas that collide in this instance: the

audience, the candidates and the interviewers (Jackson-Beeck and Meadow, 1979).

For the development of this exercise, verifying a debate offers a challenge since these are characterized by having a spontaneity component (Minow and Lamay, 2008) when facing candidates on topics that are not within their usual agenda. Therefore, it requires a strategy to predict some of the themes and statements.

Turcotte (2015) concluded that the debates whose format was guided by journalists, compared to those who had questions asked by citizens, had a more limited thematic range due to a proper conditioning of the commercial logic of the media. Therefore, the preeminence in the participation of journalists, offers a strategic opportunity to approach a prediction of the issues that will appear to be verified, carrying out periodic press reviews before the debate, that show what are the issues to which the Chilean media have given more coverage and have associated more with each candidate; considering the high concentration of media in Chile (Monckeberg, 2009) and the homogeneity of editorial lines as a consequence (Gronemeyer and Porath, 2015).

This led to the decision to follow up the candidates during the campaign and also verify the claims of that period. This would allow students to establish contact with the campaign teams and determine the most relevant sources to verify information in addition to learning the research techniques and the way in which the candidates articulate their discourse. This would give them the tools to address the verification of the claims of the debate, the day after they were issued.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

26 undergraduate students of Journalism between the third and final year of study worked in the exercise within a minimum course.

The work was guided by a teacher who acted as editor in chief, supported by a team of five teaching assistants who worked as editors, the most experienced assistant was also the team coordinator.

For the US presidential debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in the 2016 election, media that were not specialized in verification such as the *National Public Radio* (NPR, 2016) and *The New York Times* (Ryan, 2016) performed online checks through their journalists specialized in the coverage of specific areas, for example, health or education.

Projects specialized in fact checking used verifiers who had been checking the candidates during the year. For example, *PolitiFact* (Qiu, 2016) had 10 verifiers in the first debate and *Factcheck.org* (Farley *et al.*, 2016) had nine for the last one. Working with university students implies a greater challenge since they are not experts in journalistic coverage or in the campaign and must learn the verification techniques.

To achieve depth and expertise, the 26 students were separated into groups from two to six members per candidate. Each group was in charge of a teaching assistant.

Individually, the students had to fill three forms of 10 verifiable statements, that is, with hard verifiable data that the candidates would have issued in the media. In class, students learned what made a statement verifiable, saw examples and how to check them.

Having no ability to predict which issues would appear in the televised presidential debate, a

frequency-based probability strategy was established. If a statement appeared repeated in more than one communication outlet, there was a possibility that the issue would arise in the debate as it was already inserted in the journalistic agenda.

Secondly, its relevance was considered as a topic or statement that could have a direct effect on citizens. This last parameter is the dividing line between a journalistic work that uses tools of the social sciences and a research work of that discipline. As proposed by the creator of *PolitiFact*, Bill Adair: "We are journalists, not social scientists. We choose statements to check based on our judgment" (Adair, 2013).

The above is related to the discussion that Uscinski and Butler (2013) began regarding the validity of the epistemology of *fact checking*, where they argue that reaching a verdict is arbitrary, because it does not have enough support in the social sciences and criticize the methodology to select sentences from journalists. This essay was refuted by Amazeen (2015) using empirical data that showed the coincidences in the selection of statements and criteria of different verification projects in the United States, which was again questioned by Uscinski (2015), who continued to demand greater methodological transparency.

Even so, the work of Amazeen (2015) coincides with that of Mena (2019), which demonstrates through data that journalists who practice the verification of public discourse coincide in their mission of demanding fair accountability and oppose an activist or biased role. Therefore, we consider it essential to have two explicit criteria shared throughout the newsroom that would guide the selection of sentences.

In order to help the students to make a sweep as complete as possible, different types of media were distributed among them and were

rotated for each submission. This way, each student did a press review on three different platforms, among:

- Printed.
- Digital.
- Radio.
- TV.
- Official social networks, programs and websites of the candidate.
- Spaces of alternative content such as videos on YouTube.

The statements were uploaded to one form per candidate that served to transfer the responses to a common form that constituted a database with what was said by the contestants. In addition to writing the statement, the students had to explain the date it was published, the media, mark the segments of the sentence that were verifiable, justify the criteria for that decision and suggest a research strategy to carry out the check. This last aspect should be specific, because it first fulfilled the function of the student repeatedly practicing the intellectual exercise of planning an investigation and serving at a practical level to advance in the subsequent verification stage.

After each delivery of statements, students received feedback from the teaching assistants and the teacher to improve the next submission. Once all three were completed, each editor made a selection based on the frequency and relevance criteria explained. These were discussed in a meeting with the complete team of editors and guided by the teacher. From that selection, the affirmations to be verified were chosen and distributed among the students in the same teams in which they looked for them.

All student investigations should be replicable to consider the check accomplished. That is, any reader can follow the steps that the journalist executed to reach the same verdict. This entails a commitment to transparency in the process of gathering information and in the presentation of it. Therefore, resources such as the off the record or any other method to obtain data that was not through an open source and accessible by every citizen were not allowed.

The second criterion that was used was validity, understood for this exercise as the quality of the chosen source. For that, the strategies of portals such as *Politifact* (Drobnic, 2018) and *Chequeado* (Chequeado, 2018) were used, which first urges in consulting the original source that issued the statement. This contains the ethical component of allowing the issuer to clarify the origin of their data and if there was any error in the phrase. Then, the official source or the entity from which the data emerged or the highest authority in the matter regarding the subject being verified is sought. Once these steps were completed, the students contacted alternative sources, such as NGOs, foundations and experts.

The work with alternative sources was especially supervised for each statement, since these foundations or entities had to be independent, not linked to the candidates or the communities that support them, but with a technical profile.

Regarding the experts, it was a requirement that they have academic publications, teach or be linked to the subject in analysis. The specialists provided the journalist with an understanding of the subject and context, as well as analysis. However, it should always be a technical analysis and not based on opinion.

Before beginning the research process, students had a resource and technical workshop to track public information through websites. Since the Transparency Law came into effect in 2008 in Chile (Law No. 20,285, 2008), public bodies have made databases and documents available to all citizens, whose access requires knowing a series of steps. The students made two submissions of their work, the first only to measure progress in the research process and the second with a written chronicle. In addition to the text to be published, they should detail how they got the information in parallel to each paragraph for each submission.

Prior to the delivery of the second chronicle, the students worked in their articles in classes as if it were a newsroom, so they could clarify doubts, unify the style and establish a collaborative dynamic of teamwork.

A characteristic element of the fact checking portals is the verdict on the affirmation, being also a striking component to attract the attention of the reader. The pioneer is the *Truth-o-meter* of *Politifact*, which assesses the truthfulness of a statement on a six-level scale (Graves, 2016). That example and the Mexican project *El Sabueso* of *Animal Político* (El Sabueso, 2015), which brings the verdicts to the audience through the caricature of a dog, were used as a reference for the creation of our own instrument.

For the above, a six-level scale was generated with an even number to avoid tending to the middle and clearly defined, so that the student knew what verdict to apply with the teacher's final approval. We worked with an illustrator to develop a character that could have continuity for future initiatives of *fact checking* (Figure 1).

By presenting a scale, the verdict shows that the objective is not to harm politicians, but to

establish a standard of accountability within the democratic system.

The writing style was defined based on different examples, looking for precision and that the texts were as concise as possible. The premise raised to the students was that each line should be supported by evidence that verifies a fact within the statement.

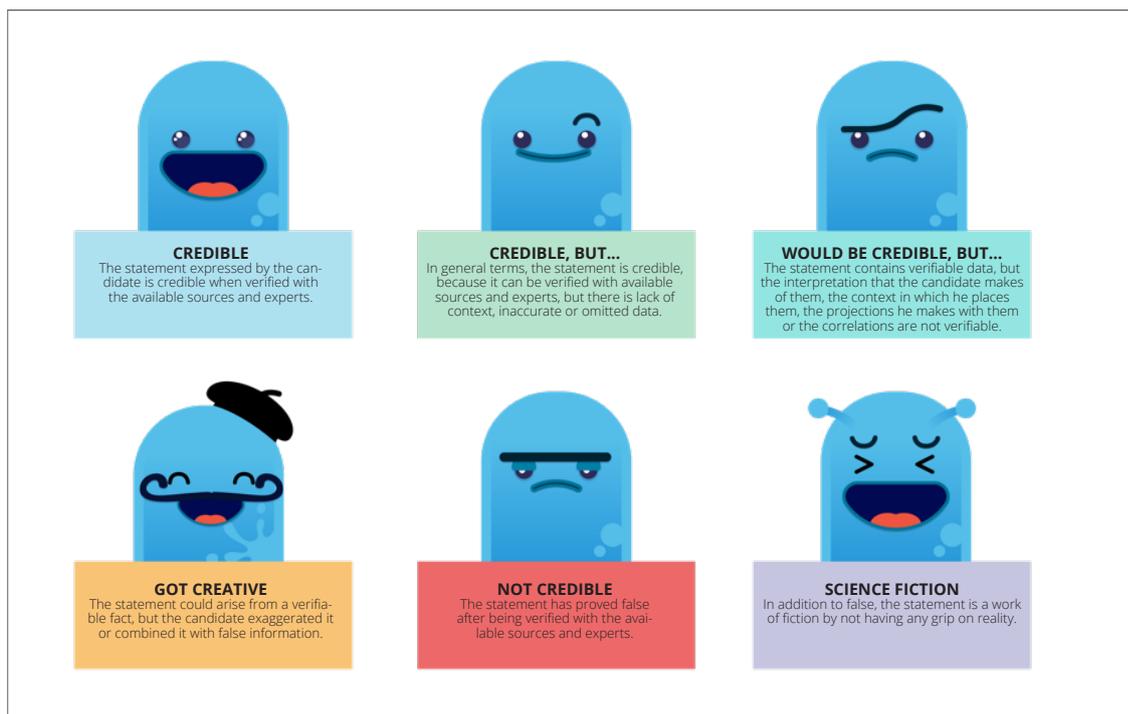
During the transmission of the debate, the team of editors participated in a joint viewing with a subsequent meeting to discuss the verifiable statements that arose in that instance. In parallel, the students subsequently filled out a document with the identified phrases of the candidates they were following.

The next day, the students worked from 8.30 am to 8 pm. in the verification of their affirmations in the university, as if it were a professional newsroom. The day began with a meeting with its editors to define the final statements to be checked and then carry out the verification. At closing time, everyone submitted their finished articles.

## 6. RESULTS

### 6.1. JOURNALISTIC RESULTS

The project had two publications in the politics section of the mainstream portal *T13.cl*, which only acted as a distributor. Both explained the work methodology. The first, as a result of the exercise carried out during the semester, contained the verification of the claims that the candidates made in the campaign and was entitled: *Credible, not credible or creative? We verify the statements of the presidential candidates* (Fact Checking UC, 2017a). This work was among the four most viewed content in the politics section of the portal.



**Figure 1.** Verification scale. Source: Original illustrations by cartoonist Paulo Oñate for Fact Checking UC.

The second publication consisted of the verification of the candidates' statements in the televised presidential debate and was published the day after the broadcast under the title: *Credible, not credible or creative? Verification of the statements in the Anatel debate* (Fact Checking UC, 2017b).

To confirm that a professional standard was achieved within the framework of an academic exercise, examples are presented in comparison with the two professional journalistic fact checking projects that also addressed the debate, *Chilecheck* (Chilecheck, 2017a) of *CNN Chile* and *El Polígrafo* (El Polígrafo, 2017) of the newspaper *El Mercurio*.

The possibility of having a team of 26 verifiers trained during a semester and a team of six editors, facilitated publishing before the other two media.

While *Chilecheck* focused on the two candidates with the highest percentage in the polls, the university project verified all eight. *El Polígrafo* also included all, but only one statement per candidate, compared to the project checked by students that had an average of three statements per candidate.

Of the three statements of the candidate Sebastián Piñera that were verified, two coincided with that of *Chilecheck* and the only one of *El Polígrafo*. Of the three statements of the candidate Alejandro Guillier that were verified, the project coincided in two with *Chilecheck* and the only one by *El Polígrafo*.

Two examples stand out regarding the content of the verification. In the case of Guillier, the three projects coincided in a correlation proposed by the candidate: "Each peso invested in education saves you 6 or 7 pesos in health" (Anatel, 2017). The project of the students and



**Figure 2.** The disproportionate graphics that the candidate Sebastián Piñera showed. Source: Capture obtained from the first round of the Anatel Debate in 2017.

*Chilecheck* got the same response of the candidate's team on the original source of the information that corresponded to two studies, one from the World Health Organization and another from the Pan American Health Organization. On the other hand, *El Polígrafo* did not have that information.

The correlation did not appear in the original source, so the students did a review of the academic literature on the subject and a study of the Nobel Prize in Economics, James Heckman, was found. This data was discovered by a student and was then quoted by *Chilecheck*: "Other media that make public speech verification indicated that the proportion indicated by Guillier is related to the work of the American professor James Heckman" (*Chilecheck*, 2017b). The exercise of the Catholic University

was the only one that was published at the time that *Chilecheck* uploaded its article. *El Polígrafo* also mentioned Heckman's study the next day, without referencing previous publications.

The second example is valuable as a fact checking exercise, because it required a two-level verification. The affirmation of the candidate Sebastián Piñera was:

The ENUSC survey, available through the INE, shows that during our government the victimization rate fell from 30.7% to 22.8%. A million Chileans stopped being victims of crime thanks to this security advance, which during this Government has increased again by 28%. 700 thousand Chileans have been additional victims of crime, be-

cause of how security has receded. (Anatel, 2017)

When issuing it, he showed a graph whose scale was altered with a very wide margin of difference between 22.8% and 28% (See Figure 2).

The verification of affirmations during the campaign led to all the figures being previously verified and published. Therefore, the analysis could focus on the interpretation of statistics and their graphic representation. In the other two projects, it was agreed to consult the candidate's team and the documentary sources that support the figures. *Chilecheck* had a specialist in statistics, while *El Polígrafo* interviewed an expert in security and the representative of an NGO against crime. The university project interviewed a professor of statistics, a specialist in citizen security, an academic of graphic design and a professor of sociology who also contributed with a similar case of poor representation of data occurred in Venezuela.

This confirms that the methodology of carrying out a work prior to the event that is going to be verified, not only provides a greater possibility of reacting on time, but increases the amount of perspectives to be included in an article, because it grants more time to contact more sources.

The student project was shortlisted in the digital category of the Journalism of Excellence Award organized in Chile by Alberto Hurtado University (UAH Journalism, 2018), competing with *Chilecheck* and confirming the journalistic quality of this work.

## 6.2. LEARNING OUTCOMES

A self-assessment survey was applied to understand the impact that the exercise had on students. Written authorization was requested from the 26 students to use their responses

anonymously in order to generate publishable research and for improvements in the course. All those presented in this work have such authorization. In this section are the main learning outcomes that appeared through the instrument.

The first learning that could be verified was the perception that students had of working in a journalistic dynamic comparable to what they will face in a future work environment, particularly on the day of the verification of the event in which they worked a full day as a team.

The elements that contributed that sense of reality to the exercise were the pressure to deliver with a closing time and that the final product was published in a mass media of high visibility, as these responses indicate:

"While there are things to learn, the day itself is everything to feel that real weight. All that previous work was reinforced during the debate and other instances of listening to the candidate and knowing that she has said it before. So, it is likely that I could carry out such an exercise, again, if that opportunity occurs."

"It was like working in a press department, the fact that we were with *T13* also felt that it made people take us more seriously and felt very close to what we will be really doing in a few years."

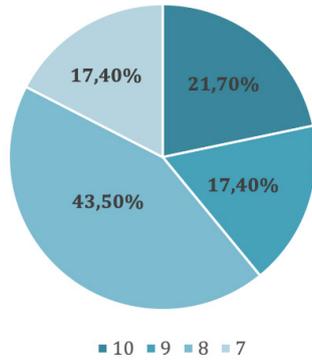
"Learning research methods is highly valued, in addition to working for a real environment helps to do serious work with pressure to get everything done very well."

"I think it is very important, since it is an approach to the reality of the media. It motivates the journalistic vocation since real results can be seen".

The event itself is relevant, but the journalistic results show that for this to be significant, prior preparation is essential.

Students were asked to evaluate from 1 to 10 how prepared they felt to address the verification exercise the day after the debate. Figure 3 shows that, of the 26 responses, all were between 7 and 10.

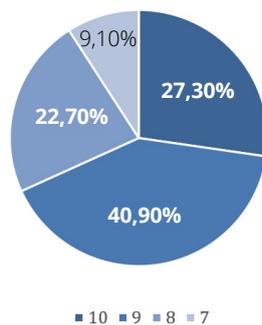
On a scale of 1 to 10, how prepared did you feel to address the verification exercise the day after the debate?



**Figure 3.** Preparation to face the live verification exercise perceived by students. Source: Own elaboration based on the data provided by the students in the self-assessment survey.

Then, they were asked to measure how prepared they feel to face a new journalistic verification task after completing the exercise. Figure 4 shows that on a scale from 1 to 10, the 26 responses were distributed between 7 and 10.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how prepared do you feel to perform a journalistic task of data verification after you have completed the exercise?



**Figure 4.** Preparation to face a new verification perceived by students. Source: Own elaboration based on the data provided by the students in the self-assessment survey.

The students' answers to explain this weighting, show the value of the methodological preparation as a situation of transfer of tools in the formative process and applicable to other verification contexts:

"I think it was good to have had previous exercises to verify data. Obviously, after having done two *fact checking* exercises (one before the debate and the other after), confidence increases by practicing."

"I understood the logic of the statement check, which ones are or aren't checkable, and I also used the tools taught to verify if they were true. I understood the logic of source selection and that is why I feel prepared to face this exercise in the future."

"During the semester we discussed what we were going to do, the search for phrases and especially the part of proposing a reporting strategy. I think that helped me a lot to get ready the day after the debate. With a clear idea of what to do and what was important to check and what was verifiable."

"What I rescue most from this exercise is the great amount of knowledge that I acquired in just one semester. I was surprised how we could carry out an investigation in just one day".

Both in the self-assessment and in the final product it is found that the students achieved the learning objective of being able to identify the relevant phrases and sources.

One aspect that showed the self-assessment was that students considered the experience of working with their classmates as a contribution to their learning. In their responses, tea-

mwork is outlined as an essential component for the success of the exercise:

"I think that for us to work as a team, it was very necessary to help each other. Thanks to that we did it. I think that, like the others, I contributed in everything I could to finish a job well done."

"I think that, like my colleagues, I always had an attitude of cooperation and help when I saw that something was wrong or we should, for example, talk to the candidate's team. The day of the fact checking we all supported and helped each other".

This is complemented by the sense of reality that the exercise contributed.

The last aspect that the evaluation showed was that the students became aware of a skeptical attitude towards the speeches of the authorities in a watchdog supervisory role:

"I emphasize mainly the journalistic work of questioning and verifying what many people take for granted, just because an authority says so."

"I learned to distinguish those statements that really matter, to distinguish the phrases of the candidates according to relevance and frequency. I also appreciate that the day of the debate I really saw it with other eyes. More critical and detailed eyes."

"(I emphasize) Learn to look at the debates according to the specific data they offer and that beautiful words become empty words."

"It helped me to grow journalistically in the face of current events and democratic duty".

## 7. DISCUSSION

The theoretical proposal of Lucas Graves (2016), that the *fact checking* is a journalistic genre with its own codes, is reinforced with the results of this project by presenting a product that, from the start, requires following a particular method to reach a result that is determined by an editorial verdict on the claim.

The tension between Social Sciences and Journalism mentioned by Adair (2013), can be seen in the two processes of this exercise that Uscinski (2015) questions, both in the selection of statements and in the final verdict. However, the methodology appears robust, showing a process that privileges the probability of appearance in the debate of the topics addressed by the candidates according to their frequency and supported by a press review that allows to build a broad base of statements where coincidences can be found among journalists of the same team. This was supported by a team editorial discussion about the relevance of these that serves to not benefit specific biases at the time of selection.

Although it could be considered that the exercise is carried out in a privileged space, because it is within the framework of a non-profit university course, that aims to make good Journalism over any other purpose, the results show that, within the political section of the medium that published it, it had high readership, which means that it can also be an attractive product for the audience in a competitive environment.

The coincidences in the selection of affirmations and that one of the investigations was

quoted by a commercial medium as *CNN Chile* coinciding with the newspaper *El Mercurio*, is evidence that introducing a university component in the verification ecosystem is a contribution. This is because the number of verifiers working allowed to publish beforehand and thus be a resource for the rest of the community of *fact checkers*, who are not understood as competitors. It is consistent with both the vision of Amazeen (2015) and Mena (2019) where the journalistic criteria and values, supported by a replicable and transparent methodology, keep the arbitrary component that contains an editorial decision under control.

The precariousness of some data used as the original source by the candidates and the relationship that the students established with the campaign teams, evidences the tension exposed by Casero-Ripolles, Izquierdo-Castillo and Doménech-Fabregat (2014), between the political operators and the journalists. In this case, it is even more pronounced because there are no commercial pressures involved or political commitments of any kind. In addition, the advisors of each candidate were not dealing with professionals but with students.

This relationship gives rise to the need to strengthen a culture of political oversight in the campaign period. 2017 was the first year in which there were three projects in parallel verifying the candidates and their teams showed they were not used to being consulted in that way.

The advisors reacted to the students as if they were providing a service and not the opportunity to clarify their sources, which is an alarm for the need to have researchers with greater expertise to develop the technical proposals

presented by the candidates for the presidency. In addition, there is a need to maintain these practices in upcoming elections to raise the standard of data with which campaign promises are made.

In the student self-assessment survey, teamwork and the sense of reality emerged spontaneously, confirming that the application of constructivist teaching is functional for a practical long-term and high complexity exercise like this.

The students were able to reflect on their attitude towards the authorities they should cover as journalists, which shows how the watchdog role can effectively be taught and passed through a dynamic of learning by doing, cultivating an attitude of skepticism in future information professionals.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The main conclusion delivered by this work is that the democratic commitment required by Journalism can be cultivated from the university environment with high standards of work, meeting objectives consistent with the industry in which future communication professionals will perform and making students become aware of the value of establishing a culture of accountability to the authorities.

This becomes especially valuable in countries like Chile, where a culture of accountability is still emerging. The fact that this is part of the academic training of a university student provides a tool that can be systematic to contribute to democracy.

The classroom, understood as a dynamic, collaborative and propelling space for teamwork, serves to design verification processes that the industry cannot afford because of time and resources, from the perspective of the product and learning.

Having a particular event to verify, emerged as an instance valued by students and facilitated to build a methodology with a clear purpose, which closes in the event. This is why it appears as an academic opportunity to start university verification projects.

A future challenge is to innovate in the way of presenting information using graphic and audiovisual resources that can bring the exercise closer to the audience and teach it, articulating that teaching with the one applied in the research methodology.

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