Dual Transparency in the Self-Presentation of Brazilian Civil Monitoring Initiatives on Public Transparency

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Abstract

This article reflects on Brazilian civil monitoring initiatives that address public transparency, situating them within the broader phenomenon of civil monitoring that has emerged in recent decades and its implications for the media system. Descriptively, it analyses how these initiatives, discursively anchored in defence of the public interest and the demand for transparency, disclose (or do not) their own formative and operational elements, a hypothesis referred to as "dual transparency". To this end, the article provides a theoretical overview of public transparency within democratic systems, with a particular focus on the Brazilian context. It explores civil monitoring and the challenges faced by initiatives in establishing legitimacy, as well as their interactions with the media system. It then analyses six contemporary Brazilian initiatives on the subject, based on a review of their websites for discourses on four categories: (a) origin, (b) team, (c) funding, and (d) partnerships. The article reveals that these initiatives apply the concept of "dual transparency" inadequately and inconsistently, reflecting their inherent monitoring nature. Specifically, they often fail to disclose information about their sources of funding and expenditures, resulting in opaque systems where private interests may be concealed.

Keywords

transparency, media system, civil monitoring, discursive *ethos*

A Dupla Transparência nas Apresentações de Si de Iniciativas Brasileiras de Vigilância Civil Sobre Transparência Pública

Resumo

O artigo reflete sobre iniciativas de vigilância civil brasileiras que versam sobre a transparência pública, entendendo-as como parte de um fenômeno de democracia monitória conformado nas últimas décadas com implicações para o sistema político e midiático. De caráter

Comunicação e Sociedade, vol. 46, 2024

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descritivo, desenvolve uma análise acerca de como essas iniciativas, ancoradas discursivamente na defesa do interesse público e na cobrança por transparência, dão (ou não) visibilidade para os seus próprios elementos formativos e operacionais, em uma hipótese nomeada de "dupla transparência". Para tanto, o artigo desenvolve uma recuperação teórica sobre a transparência pública no sistema democrático e no caso brasileiro, aborda a democracia monitória e a vigilância civil, pensando nos desafios das iniciativas na construção de sua legitimidade, assim como suas interfaces com o sistema midiático. Em seguida, são analisadas seis iniciativas brasileiras contemporâneas sobre o tema, a partir de uma busca em seus *websites* acerca de discursos sobre quatro categorias: (a) origem, (b) equipe, (c) financiamento, e (d) parcerias. Como resultado, o artigo constata que as iniciativas em questão aplicam de forma deficitária e variada, de acordo com sua própria natureza de monitoramento, a ideia de "dupla transparência", falhando, especialmente, em apresentar informações sobre suas fontes de financiamento e gastos, construindo sistemas opacos nos quais interesses privados podem ser escondidos.

Palavras-chave

transparência, sistema midiático, vigilância civil, *ethos* discursivo

1. Introduction

The misuse of former President Jair Bolsonaro's corporate card, which had been kept secret under the provisions of his own Administration, emerged into the Brazilian public sphere in mid-January 2023. This issue, initially framed as a scandal involving the private use of public resources, was extensively covered by the country's major newspapers. It was prominently featured in outlets such as *Folha de S. Paulo* (Ferreira, 2023), G1 (*Governo Libera Dados do Cartão Corporativo de Bolsonaro; Veja a Lista de Gastos*, 2023), and *Estadão* (Brembatti & Valfré, 2023). With different analytical approaches, all these news reports referenced the source that initiated the release of the data: Fiquem Sabendo.

Fiquem Sabendo (https://www.fiquemsabendo.com.br/) describes itself as a non-profit organisation specialising in access to public information. Rather than being an isolated case, it is better understood as one of many examples of civil monitoring (Henriques & Silva, 2013, 2014, 2017). These, in turn, are part of a broader network of monitoring mechanisms that have emerged globally in recent decades, exemplifying what John Keane (2009, 2013) refers to as "monitory democracy". According to Keane's (2013) reasoning, various monitoring mechanisms operate continuously across different spheres, challenging power structures through a media *ethos* shaped by an abundance of communication.

In the case of Fiquem Sabendo, this initiative can be seen as part of a specific subset within this system: civil organisations focused on monitoring Brazilian public transparency, particularly through digital tools, and exposing potential abuses of power. They are joined by initiatives such as Tá de Pé (https://www.transparencia.org.br/projetos/tadepe), from Transparência Brasil, and Achados e Pedidos (https://www.achadosepedidos.org.br/), from the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism. These projects, operating in parallel and complementary ways, are largely driven by the opportunities created by the Access to Information Law (AIL), which has been in effect since 2012, and advances in digital technology. Together, they have introduced a new dimension to the country's

complex democratic and media landscapes. Their data and tools resonate in news stories across national media outlets, as illustrated above.

This article aims to explore specific aspects of these initiatives' operation, focusing on how they incorporate (or fail to incorporate) the elements of transparency they demand from other stakeholders in their public presentation — a concept referred to here as "dual transparency". This proposal is grounded in Silva and Melo (2023) observation of how these monitoring bodies shape a discursive *ethos* (Maingueneau et al., 2021), positioning themselves as guardians of the public interest by pursuing transparency and ensuring new ways of demanding and producing democratically relevant data. It is also supported by Henriques and Silva's (2017) argument regarding the importance of transparency in building the credibility of civil monitoring initiatives. Thus, the goal is to understand how these groups that demand transparency present themselves in their discursive practices, either through ethical principles related to the concept of *ethos* or in their efforts to build legitimacy.

More broadly, this research aligns with Keane's (2013) observations on the importance of examining and discussing contemporary monitoring mechanisms in their various forms, recognising their impacts and potential shortcomings. Two specific aspects underscore the importance of researching the groups discussed in this study. Firstly, Flinders' (2011) argument highlights the need to examine these monitoring mechanisms, particularly those related to public transparency, in a more pragmatic, critical, and detailed manner, considering the risks of politicising the concept of accountability. Understanding how these players operate with regard to their transparency is crucial for comprehending their practices in the monitoring system and for identifying potential co-optation of these civil initiatives by other interests and political agendas. Secondly, it concerns the relationship between these initiatives and the Brazilian media system itself. In the framework of monitory democracy, mediatisation is a key component of monitoring mechanisms. In this case, there is evidence of a close relationship between journalistic outlets and monitoring bodies. While this aspect will be explored throughout the article, it is worth noting that in the current crisis facing journalism (Christofoletti, 2019; Vasconcellos, 2020), media outlets' declining investigative capacity makes them more receptive to data and allegations of abuse from other sources — particularly when these align with journalistic practices and norms. Although illustrative, the example that opens this article reflects a broader trend, with initiatives often dedicating specific spaces to highlight when their productions resonate in the media (Silva & Melo, 2023). In this sense, investigating the transparency of these monitoring agents helps to expand our understanding of an aspect that remains underexplored in today's media system.

This text is organised into four stages. First, we contextualised the connections between these civil initiatives on public transparency and the democratic and media systems. Next, we conducted a literature review to explore discussions on civil monitoring, particularly drawing on the works of Keane (2013) and Rosanvallon (2008). The third stage examines the challenges encountered during the monitoring process, drawing on the research and insights of Henriques and Silva (2013, 2014, 2017), and explores

how these challenges underpin the argument of *dual transparency*. The fourth stage involves an analytical phase that builds on exploratory research. We surveyed civil initiatives on public transparency operating in Brazil. We systematically examined sections of their websites to assess how they implement transparency, guided by the question "who speaks?" and their respective indicators. The main findings indicate that while these projects are notably focused on highlighting their team members, they fall short in other areas — such as disclosing their funding sources — thus failing to embody the concept of *dual transparency* fully.

2. Contextualising Civil Monitoring on Public Transparency

As previously mentioned, the emergence and activities of the organisations discussed here interact with the democratic and media systems in various ways. Concerning the democratic aspect, these initiatives prominently feature the concept of "public transparency". The term "transparency" is associated with the ability to be seen through or made visible; its antonym is "opacity". According to Gomes et al. (2018), it is a misconception to view transparency as the complete disclosure of information. Instead, it is an adaptable and context-dependent mechanism. Martins and Reis (2014) argue that transparency is crucial for actualising democracy, as it enhances civil participation by providing citizens with access to information about ongoing activities, thereby allowing them to observe the actions of public authorities[1].

In Brazil, the right to access public information is enshrined in Article 5 of the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil (Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil de 1988, 1988). This principle has been further developed in recent decades, particularly with the enactment of the AIL in 2011. The AIL mandates that all states and municipalities with populations exceeding 10,000 disclose data on salaries, public policy expenditures, and the allocation of new targets. Nevertheless, surveys such as the one conducted by Gonçalves et al. (2018) reveal that over 30% of information requests made under the law remain unanswered. A report by the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Abraji; *Uso da Lei de Acesso à Informação por Jornalistas: 4° Relatório de Desempenho*, 2021) corroborates this finding, highlighting major issues with access requests, including service denials, unjustified secrecy — which notably increased during the Bolsonaro Administration — and the provision of information that does not address the specific questions posed.

The civil initiatives discussed here should be viewed as movements comprising various levels of organised groups dedicated to monitoring issues related to public transparency and addressing barriers that restrict citizens' access to relevant information. Melo (2024) observes that these projects primarily focus on developing tools to facilitate public access to Government information, such as bots for generating AIL requests,

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[1] Regarding the relationship between accountability and transparency, this article aligns with authors who advocate for a distinction between the terms, with accountability more closely linked to elements of responsibility and liability (Cunha Filho, 2018; Filgueiras, 2016; S. Silva, 2017).

open databases, and repositories with guidelines for specific inquiries. Additionally, a key aspect of their work involves interacting with the press and media system, particularly in publicising data and reporting instances of abuse.

In this regard, these initiatives evidently diverge from the model described by Henriques and Silva (2017). According to the authors, civilian watchdogs frequently justify their emergence by citing shortcomings in the press's role as a watchdog. Simultaneously, they depend on the visibility provided by newspapers to amplify the impact of their reports, often resulting in a sometimes adversarial and conflicting relationship with the media. In the case of the phenomenon discussed here, however, there is significant overlap between observatories and news outlets, both in team composition, where journalists are predominant and in their focus on positioning the press as a specialised, impartial source aligned with the public interests. In fact, some of these initiatives stem from organisations connected to the professional journalism system, such as those linked to the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalists, a civil entity dedicated to the professional development of journalists and the promotion of investigative practices and techniques. Melo (2024) notes that several groups are developing technological solutions not for ordinary citizens but to assist journalists in their investigative processes.

Several factors might explain the close relationship between Brazilian public transparency monitoring initiatives and the press. As previously noted, one reason is the origin of some of these initiatives, particularly those arising from partnerships and projects with Abraji, which embody an American ideal of impartial informative journalism with a public service orientation (Albuquerque, 2019). Simultaneously, this dynamic contributes to the broader context of contemporary journalism crises (Christofoletti, 2019; Vasconcellos, 2020), particularly regarding finances and authority. These initiatives align with a model of supposedly impartial journalistic format and grammar. They generate data that feed companies, which have ever-smaller teams, while offering tools to assist professionals with new stories. This close relationship expands the discussion on the nature of these initiatives, as it intertwines characteristics of both monitoring and journalism, thereby increasing the need to investigate various aspects of their work. A crucial step in understanding these actors is to explore the concepts of "civil monitoring" and "monitory democracy".

3. The Foundations of Civil Monitoring

According to Keane (2013), democratic models evolve in response to changes in societal communication. In the author's view, the advent of the movable press and its subsequent development led to the emergence of a representative democratic model in which newspapers publicised discussions about elections and political power. On the other hand, present-day democracy is directly linked to the idea of communicative abundance, characterised by societies saturated with multimedia practices and open access to technological tools. The author asserts that *monitory democracy* represents precisely an evolution of representative democracy, centred on the scrutiny of power through a broad concept of monitoring and transparency.

Keane (2023) recognises that citizens are no longer content with merely listening to their representatives. Society now seeks to understand how these discourses are put into practice, monitoring and following the actions of key figures of power. This scrutiny extends beyond rulers to include individuals in the corporate world and even celebrities. This perspective also evokes discussions about the public *versus* the private sphere, as the logic of constant sharing on social networks increasingly conditions us. As he sees it, monitory democracy is characterised by the proliferation of numerous initiatives focused on the continuous scrutiny of power, including civil initiatives that prioritise the public in defending their interests — what Henriques and Silva (2013) call "civil surveillance".

While Keane's (2013) reasoning is based on changes in the communication ecosystem, Rosanvallon (2008) views democratic distrust as the central catalyst for the emergence of civil monitoring. The author argues that the failures of the democratic regime have incited a process called "counter-democracy", in which citizens are disappointed with the practical application of the representative regime because the promise of equality is not fulfilled. As a result, *counter-powers* emerge, seeking information and creating a paradox of trust: the more public transparency there is, the greater the distrust becomes, as increased visibility exposes potential abuses.

For Rosanvallon (2008), the monitoring process in modern democracy is complex and consists of three functions: surveillance — which involves daily monitoring to establish a general field of action; reporting — where vigilant citizens turn identifiable issues into scandals and disputes; and evaluation — in which the public aims to improve the quality of governance by approving (or disapproving) of processes and Government management. These functions occur concurrently across various dimensions and stages and are driven by multiple actors. Together, they delineate the contours of the civil monitoring phenomenon, which is fundamentally characterised by new forms of activism that permeate contemporary political disputes and regimes of visibility.

Drawing from these scholars, we conclude that civil monitoring initiatives play an essential role in modern society. They not only facilitate public participation in monitoring processes but also address the challenges faced by citizens and expose various abuses of power. These initiatives are directed towards critically examining both private organisations and the press itself (Henriques & Silva, 2013, 2017). For instance, in monitoring public transparency, despite the legal requirement to disclose remuneration associated with public office, the Fiquem Sabendo initiative had to exert pressure on the Federal Government for three years to obtain information on pensioner payments (*Após Denúncia da Fiquem Sabendo, Governo Libera 27 Anos de Dados de Pensionistas Civis - Don't LAI to Me #Especial*, 2020). This example illustrates that, despite being mandated by law, not all institutions adhere to the legislation. In this instance, a civil society initiative was needed to highlight and publicise the issue — which was subsequently covered extensively by the Brazilian press.

An interesting aspect of monitoring public transparency is its variable application. Transparency legislation allows individuals to request government information independently and access government databases to conduct their own investigations from home.

Conversely, less diffuse practices lead to the development of the initiatives above, which are structured around more organised frameworks.

Although still under-discussed in academic discourse, civil monitoring initiatives offer significant contributions to democratic and media studies and the advancement of public transparency in Brazil. For this reason, the better we understand the dynamics of this phenomenon and the practical possibilities it offers, the more effectively we can reflect on the roles these actors play in contemporary societal debates. One way to achieve this is by exploring the challenges and obstacles faced by these organised watchdog groups.

4. Challenges and Obstacles in Monitoring

In Dewey's (1927) pragmatic perspective, the concept of the public should not be viewed as an inherent or predefined category but rather through a situational lens. According to the author, the public comprises individuals who perceive themselves as being impacted by the indirect consequences of certain actions and seek to intervene. Consequently, suffering and action are interconnected dimensions, marking a fundamentally communicative process involving the shared construction of meanings about a given situation (D. Silva, 2016). This pragmatic approach also highlights the vulnerabilities of such collectives, as their formation and dynamics are inherently uncertain (Henriques & Silva, 2022).

This aspect is crucial when considering that civil monitoring initiatives are fundamentally actions undertaken by the public and for the public. Therefore, it is pertinent to recognise the vulnerabilities inherent in these initiatives, particularly the necessity of establishing credibility to effectively position themselves as actors capable of sustaining demands and exposing abuses (Henriques & Silva, 2017).

Henriques and Silva (2013, 2017) argue that two key factors are critical for the success of these initiatives: visibility and credibility. In terms of visibility, these projects need to present themselves in a manner that not only influences the public but also stimulates mobilisation processes, thereby encouraging greater citizen participation in their collaborative proposals. Within this framework, the authors identify two primary obstacles: (a) the challenge of handling specialised information; and (b) the dynamics of interactions with the traditional press.

The first challenge relates to the need for these initiatives to have specialised members. For instance, as illustrated by the phenomenon under discussion, these organisations handle extensive databases, requiring members with technological expertise. This requirement often demands additional funding, which can strain the initiative's resources in other areas, as will be discussed further below. The second obstacle pertains to variations in the relationship with the press. In this context, as previously noted, initiatives focused on public transparency are distinctive in their attempts to build relationships with and even adopt the conventions of news media. One aspect of this endeavour involves some initiatives adopting the appearance of news portals, including their reporting and evaluation formats. This can manifest in both the presentation style of the content and the design of the interface, which may closely resemble that of news portals (Silva & Melo,

2023). Additionally, these initiatives aim to have their content republished in major media outlets. For instance, the Dados Jus Br (https://www.dadosjusbr.org/) features a tab labelled "In the Media" to showcase investigations that news outlets have shared. This approach serves two purposes: publication in these outlets not only attracts new readers to the project but also serves as a form of "transfer" of the media outlet's credibility, suggesting that the initiative is trustworthy.

From this point, we turn to the issue of credibility, which presents two additional challenges. According to Henriques and Silva (2017), these obstacles are (a) balancing credibility with visibility; and (b) ensuring the transparency of the initiatives. The first challenge is the complex and recursive interplay between visibility and credibility. On one hand, media visibility can bolster an actor's credibility. On the other hand, "the greater the visibility achieved by a specific initiative, the more intense the public scrutiny of its content" (Henriques & Silva, 2017, p. 35), demanding greater transparency in its practices. Consequently, there are no straightforward rules but rather a range of potentially vicious or virtuous cycles that arise from the interaction between these two factors.

This article focuses on the challenge of achieving transparency, which underpins our concept of "dual transparency". The disclosure of information about these initiatives is crucial, as it "can profoundly impact the group's perceived independence" (Henriques & Silva, 2017, p. 36). These initiatives often emphasise that their actions are guided by public interests, in contrast to the private interests of other actors. Additionally, dual transparency can help address different challenges, such as the issue of specialisation, since revealing team members' qualifications and expertise can bolster credibility. Henriques and Silva (2017) note that many monitoring initiatives, particularly those on the international stage that are focused on exposing issues, emphasise clarifying the qualifications of their teams, their sources of funding, partnerships, and the use of collected resources. This transparency effort is intended to strengthen the perception of alignment with the public interest (as opposed to private interests).

By adopting their own operational models, these initiatives shape a discursive *ethos* of civil monitoring that defines the scope of their activities. This concept is particularly significant in the context of their struggles for legitimacy (Maingueneau et al., 2021). Previous academic work (Silva & Melo, 2023) has identified this *ethos* as being centred around three core values: transparency, public interest, and collaboration. Transparency is pivotal among these values. These groups position themselves as advocates for a presumed public interest, highlighting the democratic significance of this concept. Therefore, it is essential to expand our understanding of how these initiatives function in society through the concept of "dual transparency", which encompasses both the notion as a guiding principle and as a practice that informs their actions.

5. Research Methodology and Findings

To investigate the presence (or not) of dual transparency in these initiatives' practice, we present here a design based on analysing the websites of Brazilian civil watchdogs on

the subject of public transparency. This choice is primarily based on Baldissera's (2009) concept of organisational communication, particularly the notion of the *communicated organisation*, which transcends authoritative discourse aimed at presenting values and projecting a favourable image, emphasising desirable elements while concealing inconvenient ones. In this sense, the communicated dimension is where a more direct expression of the ideal of active transparency (Logarezzi, 2016) would manifest within these organisations. That is, it refers to the discursive configurations through which they publicly disclose their core elements, revealing (or not) details about their teams, funding, origins, and other key aspects. The civil surveillance initiatives discussed here are predominantly based on digital environments. Their websites serve as privileged *loci* for investigating the communicated dimension (Baldissera, 2009). These platforms allow the initiatives to present themselves to various audiences in a controlled and strategic manner.

The first methodological step, based on this perspective, was to identify potential initiatives for investigation. By using keywords in search engines, particularly terms related to the surveillance initiatives discussed here, such as "public transparency", "civil monitoring", "civil surveillance", "monitoring portal", and "access to information law", we identified several initial websites.

From these portals, we identified information on other partnerships, such as collaborations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that support each other. It is worth noting that the selection of these projects was based on two criteria: (a) temporality, aiming to select more current portals to understand their common and up-to-date practices; and (b) diversity, to contrast initiatives from the same organisation with entirely voluntary projects (those not specifically related to an NGO), in order to understand their potential differences and contrasts. We therefore selected the initiatives listed in Table 1, which provides the name of each initiative, the organisation involved in its development (if any), and a summary of its activities to facilitate comparison. The initiatives are organised in alphabetical order.

Name	Organisation	Summary
Achados e Pedidos	Associação Brasileira de Jornalismo Investigativo (Abraji) and Transparência Brasil	Repository of information requests and prior accesses to public databases.
Colabora Dados (https://colaboradados.github.io/)	Independent	Monitoring the operation of transparency portals linked to Brazilian organisations.
CTRL + X (https://www.ctrlx.org.br/)	Abraji	Tool to measure the impact of content removal requests made by politicians and parties.
Dados Jus Br	Transparência Brasil	Dissemination of data on the Brazilian justice system.
Fiquem Sabendo	Independent	Reports and investigations using government databases.
Publique-se (https://www.plublique-se.org.br/)	Abraji	A search engine that indexes court cases in which parties and/or politicians are mentioned.
Tá de Pé	Transparência Brasil	Monitoring of projects funded by the Federal Government, including their expenditures and progress.

Table 1. *Selected surveillance portals*

Building on this, we initiated a systematic search for transparency portals, following the approach suggested by Amorim and Almada (2016). This process involved selecting specific tabs for analysis in advance. To focus on the application of dual transparency within these initiatives, we categorised the information tabs of the projects into sections such as "Home", "About Us", and "Institutional". This approach allowed us to gather data on the information provided by each initiative, assess their self-transparency practices, and identify what is or is not shared with the public (Baldissera, 2009). It is important to acknowledge that other analytical approaches are possible, such as examining the transparency of the data collection and presentation processes used by the portals themselves — specifically, whether they specify how the data was obtained and the procedures followed. However, given the plural nature of the instances, we decided to focus on the discursive elements that present a "self" within these initiatives. We believe that these spaces contain more central elements related to the materialisation of transparency, particularly concerning the disclosure of origin and funding

To guide the analysis, we identified the key characteristics deemed standard for each section of the portals. This approach helps establish normative criteria for evaluating transparency. Table 2 was developed based on the challenges associated with civil monitoring initiatives discussed by Henriques and Silva (2013, 2017), as well as the *ethos*-building framework proposed by Maingueneau et al. (2021). Thus, there is an expectation for practices; for instance, a reputable politician is expected to present themselves in a manner that is "honest and serious" in their speeches (Maingueneau et al., 2021, p. 4). Similarly, since these initiatives demand transparency, audiences expect them to exhibit transparency in their self-presentation.

Question	Indicators	Inquires
Who is speaking?	Origin	Where did the initiative originate, when was it established, and what is its history?
	Team	Who is responsible for producing the material published on the project portal and conducting the investigations, and what are their roles and qualifications?
	Funding	Where do the funds received by the initiatives originate, and how are they allocated? Balance sheets detailing donations and information on official funders.
	Partnerships	Mutual collaborations, involved partners, and cooperation strategies, including links directing to partners to facilitate access to joint projects.

Table 2. *Preliminary methodological outline*

We identified four key indicators ("origin", "team", "funding", and "partnerships") and compared the expected measures for each. This approach addresses the central question of *who is speaking*, focusing on who is behind the initiative and the sources of the interests driving the project. The first indicator is "origin", which pertains to the expectation of information regarding when and how the project was established, which allows for identification with the public and provides insight into the initial scope of the activity.

The next indicator, the "team", focuses on who is responsible for the monitoring activities. As previously noted, the names and basic details of the team members, including their roles, responsibilities, work history, and qualifications, are expected to be disclosed.

The third indicator is "funding". Ideally, this should detail the financial sources supporting the project, which can reveal the interests behind the monitoring efforts and indicate potential connections to private interests. In this sense, it is essential to recognise that merely crafting a narrative on the idea of independence is insufficient if the project has financial backers who might compromise its neutrality. For example, *PR Watch* faced criticism for being funded by foundations with a liberal bias while denouncing conservative governments (Henriques & Silva, 2017). Furthermore, it is worth noting that while some initiatives are voluntary, they still solicit financial donations from users. This implies that funding expectations should encompass details on how the collected funds have been used — in other words, a financial statement.

Finally, the last indicator is "partnerships". This aspect should be acknowledged as the most distinctive, as it focuses on analysing the information disclosed about partnerships rather than simply their presence or absence. In other words, the focus is on examining how partnerships, typical of civil surveillance initiatives (Henriques & Silva, 2017), are detailed. This includes assessing whether there are direct links to facilitate access to partners and how these partnerships are described.

We also identified the need to provide examples of self-transparency notes for the initiatives at the end of the analysis. Once again, we followed the principles of Amorim and Almada (2016), who suggest that for an evaluative analysis of transparency portals, it is crucial to qualify the indicators through defined concepts. Consequently, in a second outline, we established expected characteristics based on the initial questions, assigning equivalent scores for each category (Table 3), with each indicator having the same maximum score (3 points).

Indicator	Expected characteristics	Equivalent score	Total
Origin	How it started (history of the initiative's creation)	1.0	Minimum 0.0
	When it started (year)	1.0	Maximum 3.0
	Where it started (initial steps and actions)	1.0	
Team	Names of team members	0.75	Minimum 0.0
	Team members' qualifications	0.75	Maximum 3.0
	Roles within the initiative	0.75	
	Possible connections to other roles (e.g., CV, professional background)	0.75	
Funding	Who the funders are (names of organisations)	1.0	Minimum 0.0
	How much they receive from funders (full amount)	1.0	Maximum 3.0
	Financial statements detailing receipts from legal entities and/or individuals (donations)	1.0	
Partnerships	Details about partners involved in collaborations (names, logos, or highlights)	1.5/not accessed	Minimum 0.0
	Links to the portal of equivalent partners	1.5/not accessed	Maximum 3.0/not accessed

Table 3. *Evaluation scores for the methodological outline*

Note. As mentioned above, the situation is different for partnerships. An initiative might have no partnerships, in which case the indicator would be "not assessed". If partnerships are present, the focus is on qualitatively assessing their characteristics and representation.

Thus, each indicator can receive a minimum score of 0.0 if the information is not found or is minimal compared to what was expected and a maximum score of 3 if the initiative provides comprehensive information that addresses all the categories. For the analysis, an initial overview of the portals was conducted, followed by a detailed search for each element. The authors of this research completed the classification of indicators and expected characteristics through a three-stage process:

1. joint determination of the expected elements;

2. individual classification of all portals by each author;

3. joint discussion and harmonisation of results.

Below, we present the main findings of this analytical process.

5.1. Origin

We initiated this phase by following the same organisational approach used in Table 1 — the alphabetical order. We began with the Achados e Pedidos platform. The origin of this initiative is only vaguely described and primarily attributed to the novel partnership between Abraji and Transparência Brasil. As a result, there is limited information about the project's origins. The only clue is the year 2017, which appears in the website's final scroll bar, but this detail is not mentioned elsewhere, including in the institutional information. In order to verify this information, the public must refer to external sources, such as news articles about the launch of the Achados e Pedidos portal (*Lançamento do Portal Achados e Pedidos*, 2017). The description of the project's initial steps provides a brief overview of its history. The "Institutional" tab mentions early interactions with public bodies, members of society, and journalists to gather data for the repository. It indicates that the initiative was developed with significant external support, though specific individuals involved are not detailed. According to Table 3, Achados e Pedidos addresses only two questions: the year of establishment and the initial steps.

In contrast, the second initiative, Colabora Dados, offers a more detailed account of its origin. The portal credits journalist Judite Cypreste as the key figure behind the project's conception, aligning with the "founding myth" thesis (Lourenço & Ferreira, 2012), which attributes the initiative's inception to a specific individual. In this instance, the project notes that communication expert Judite Cypreste identified the need for the initiative and assembled a team to achieve this goal. The year 2019 is also mentioned in the scroll bar, addressing the three categories analysed. Conversely, the CTRL + X portal provides no information about its establishment or creation year. The "About Us" page only offers a brief explanation of how to use the tool without detailing its origins, suggesting that the project does not meet any of the three criteria for this indicator.

As for Dados Jus Br, the year it was created is uncertain. The website's repository starts in 2018, but this may not reflect the actual year of creation, as repositories can include data from years prior to or subsequent to its establishment. The project's history

is not detailed in the institutional information tabs; it only includes a simplistic outline of the initial actions taken due to the need to release judicial data. We understand that the frequent mention of Transparência Brasil suggests that additional information about the project might be available on the organisation's website but not necessarily on the initiative's own portal, creating a scenario similar to CTRL + X.

We also found no mention of the history of the Fiquem Sabendo project or the specific year it was created on the current website. Similar to Dados Jus Br, the website's first survey dates to 2019, but it is not possible to confirm this information as it is not explicitly described. Meanwhile, the first actions and recognitions are showcased in an institutional video. The Publique-se and Tá de Pé initiatives take different approaches in this category. The first has its own website, where it is not possible to specifically understand its origin or history, not even the year it was created. Tá de Pé, which is integrated into the Transparência Brasil website as an external chatbot, provides a detailed history. It notes its inception in 2016 and explains that in 2021, it transitioned to become an exclusive WhatsApp chatbot. Additionally, its creation is linked to winning an award at the "Google Challenge" event.

5.2. Teams

Regarding the "team" indicator, the absence of information about members might be a deliberate strategy to protect those involved in the initiatives, even though it could undermine the initiative's credibility. For this analysis, we also sought information related to this aspect, but none of the initiatives provided such details. Nonetheless, this represents a limitation that will be addressed in the final considerations of this article. Specifically, we verified that Achados e Pedidos follows the same pattern observed in the initial analysis: the project participants are not mentioned, and the indication of a joint effort by Abraji and Transparência Brasil is reiterated. However, it is not possible to determine who is behind the project just by accessing the initiative, making it lacking in all the analysed categories. In contrast, Colabora Dados presents a more positive scenario: the portal provides detailed information about the members, including their names, qualifications, roles, past experiences, and even their cities of residence. For instance, the members are distributed across various regions, such as the South, Southeast, and Northeast, demonstrating good regional diversity.

The CTRL + X initiative also does not provide information about the team members on its website, failing to meet any of the requirements assessed for this indicator. Conversely, the Dados Jus Br project includes a dedicated tab listing team members' names and professions, along with links to their CVs. However, the specific roles of these individuals within the project are not detailed.

Fiquem Sabendo provides its team members' names, positions, qualifications, and full CVs, accompanied by photos in a dedicated tab. The portal also differentiates between

permanent team members and those who contribute on a voluntary or occasional basis. Notably, the board features a predominance of communication experts, highlighting the application of journalistic principles in the portal's development.

Publique-se provides the names and roles of its team members but does not include specific details about their qualifications or backgrounds. In contrast, the Tá de Pé project does not individually categorise its producers. Instead, it provides information about the entire Transparência Brasil organisation, resulting in a less detailed and more integrated presentation of the team involved in the initiative.

5.3. Funding

The "funding" indicator reveals significant variations in our analysis. For the Achados e Pedidos initiative, the Ford Foundation is prominently mentioned. However, the information provided is inconsistent: the initial statement claims that the project is fully funded. Further down, on the same tab, it specifies a grant of $250,000 for two years. Consequently, it is unclear when the funding started, when it will end, or if it will end at all. Additionally, no details are provided regarding the breakdown of these expenditures.

As for Colabora Dados, no information about funders was identified. The project constructs a narrative of independence, claiming it relies solely on donations, but there is no available estimate of the amount received or how it is used. The CTRL + X project does not disclose its funding sources, it only mentions "support from Google". In the case of Dados Jus Br, the situation mirrors that of the Achados e Pedidos portal. There is a specific section that lists the Betty and Jacob Lafer Institute as a funder. We do not have access to the amount or the balance sheets. However, external information from the organisation's own website reveals that the Institute is a Lafer family organisation associated with the Klabin Foundation (Resistência Artística Setor Público, n.d.). Nonetheless, this information is not available directly on the initiative's website, and the funding details are somewhat concealed behind the foundation's name.

We also noted significant efforts by Fiquem Sabendo to maintain transparency regarding its funding. It was the only initiative where we could access detailed balance sheets and accountability documents, including descriptive names and amounts. However, we did encounter some discrepancies in the financial statements, such as conflicting percentages for 2020 that vary between the balance sheet and the website information. In contrast, the Publique-se project provides no information about its funding. On the other hand, Tá de Pé lists the Tinker Foundation (https://tinker.org/) as its primary funder but only mentions this without providing figures or balance sheets. The Tinker Foundation is identified as an organisation focused on sustainability and equality in Latin America, based in the United States.

Again, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research: there may be confidentiality clauses preventing the disclosure of funding information. Acknowledging

this possibility, we examined all the initiatives for any indications of such restrictions but found no textual evidence. Even so, this possibility should not be entirely dismissed, as it suggests avenues for further research.

5.4. Partners

Finally, the "partnerships" indicator is addressed only modestly across most of the projects. The most comprehensive example is the Achados e Pedidos initiative, which features a dedicated tab for its partners. This includes other volunteer projects, such as Fiquem Sabendo, and communication-related foundations like Agência Lupa and the Aos Fatos portal. The tab provides clickable links to the partner websites through their logos. The Colabora Dados portal does not mention specific partnerships. The CTRL + X project, on the other hand, briefly notes a partnership with Google's support and collaboration with Abraji. This information is provided in text format only, without any logos or links.

Furthermore, Dados Jus Br shows two partners in addition to Transparência Brasil: the Universidade Federal de Campina Grande and the Federal Institute of Alagoas. There are no links to the partners, just their logos. Fiquem Sabendo adopts a similar approach: the partners are listed at the end of the "About Us" page with their logos but without links. Similar to Achados e Pedidos, the partners include other communication initiatives and projects, such as ObjEthos — an observatory on journalistic ethics.

In the case of Publique-se, there is a mention of individual contributors, indicating the possibility of collaboration in the fact checks. However, there is no additional information about who these individuals are or how they collaborated on the project. Regarding collaborating organisations, there are logos and links to Abraji, Transparência Brasil, and the *Digesto* project. On the other hand, Tá de Pé does not describe its specific partners on its website tab but indicates that it is possible to become a partner by contacting the project through the publicised email address.

5.5. Findings and Discussion

Accordingly, we have segmented the evaluations of the four indicators for each initiative in the following format. The total score is relative to the maximum possible score (12 points, or 9 points, if there are no partnerships indicated), representing the expected transparency (Table 4).

Initiatives x Indicators	Origin	Team	Funding	Partnerships	Total
Achados e Pedidos	0.0	0.0	2.0	3.0	5.0/12.0
Colabora Dados	3.0	3.0	0.0	0.0	6.0/9.0
CTRL + X	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	1.5/12.0
Dados Jus Br	1.0	2.25	1.0	1.5	5.75/12.0
Fiquem Sabendo	1.0	3.0	3.0	1.5	8.5/12.0
Publique-se	0.0	1.5	0.0	3.0	4.5/12.0
Tá de Pé	3.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	4.0/9.0

Table 4. *Score results*

Only two initiatives, Fiquem Sabendo, and Colabora Dados, achieved more than half of the total possible score, indicating a degree of opacity in these initiatives. We observed significant variation among the initiatives across different categories. For example, the "origin" indicator shows considerable, with scores ranging from maximum to minimum and average, indicating sharp discrepancies. In contrast, the "team" and "partnerships" indicators generally receive higher scores, reflecting more consistent and positive results in these categories. The indicator with the largest deficit is "funding", where only one initiative achieves the maximum score, while the others show considerable gaps in information. This highlights a significant variation in the level of self-transparency across the portals, indicating a general lack of disclosure regarding their financial origins and operations. When an initiative provides a detailed account of its origin, for example, it often lacks in its funding information. This is also true in the opposite direction, where initiatives provide little clarification across all categories.

An example of this approach is Achados e Pedidos, which prominently features partnerships with detailed links and highlights. However, intrinsic information about the project, such as its origin, team, and funding details, is absent. This may suggest that the initiative relies on referring to other organisations — such as its NGO partners — to provide this information, while it chooses to focus on different categories instead.

It is important to note that these findings reveal variations that may be related to the objectives of the initiatives. For example, CTRL + X focuses heavily on functioning as a tool and making it available for public use, reflecting an *ethos* centred more on its services than on self-representation. Nevertheless, the opacity exhibited by these initiatives is concerning, particularly given their potential to attract media attention and be perceived as "neutral" entities serving the public interest.

It is also worth noting that the higher score for Fiquem Sabendo corroborates the assertion by Henriques and Silva (2017): initiatives primarily focused on reporting require greater credibility, as they are central to accusations and debates over meaning in public controversies. This is evident in the design of the Fiquem Sabendo website, which, among the initiatives, most directly engages in formulating reports (Silva & Melo, 2023).

This suggests that other groups, which do not focus as intensively on such objectives, may be less concerned with their credibility and the activation of *dual transparency*, leading to more opaque practices.

6. Final Considerations

This article aimed to explore a relatively under-researched aspect of the modern media landscape: civil monitoring initiatives focused on public transparency. Given their growing prominence and their portrayal in media as champions of public interest and transparency (Silva & Melo, 2023), the article investigates how these initiatives embody the concept of "dual transparency". Specifically, it examines how they integrate the transparency they advocate into their own discursive practices and self-presentation.

By analysing the portals of six Brazilian initiatives, using the indicators and expectations for transparency in civil monitoring developed by Henriques and Silva (2017), it became evident that these initiatives generally fail to present comprehensive self-transparency, adopting varied approaches to the topic. Notably, the indicator with the greatest emphasis is the "team", which underscores the importance of showcasing the individuals involved and their relevant expertise to enhance credibility. Meanwhile, funding is often neglected despite its crucial role in maintaining these initiatives' perceived independence. The non-disclosure of funding represents a form of opacity that warrants further examination. It highlights the need for future discussions and efforts to understand who is truly behind these initiatives and what interests might be at play beyond a generic discourse on the public interest. This is particularly relevant for funding from wealthy foundations and corporations, which introduce complexities by blending public and private interests and could suggest concerning aspects of the politicisation of accountability, as noted by Flinders (2011).

It was also observed that, despite originating from similar organisations like Abraji, the projects exhibit distinct approaches to transparency. This difference is evident when comparing Achados e Pedidos, CTRL + X, and Publique-se. Achados e Pedidos emphasises its partnerships, while CTRL + X does not disclose any. Publique-se stands out by providing a detailed description of its team, an element absent in the other two projects. However, all three initiatives fail to disclose comprehensive financial information, suggesting a possible shared organisational culture permeating the initiatives.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that initiatives positioned as entirely independent — without necessary ties to other organisations — tend to show more positive results in terms of *dual transparency*. This can be attributed to their need to establish credibility and gain visibility from a more modest starting point, for these initiatives, which are associated with established organisations, may "borrow" credibility or even conceal their own transparency behind the established reputations of these larger groups.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research, particularly due to its reliance on the self-representation of these initiatives. Some absences might be attributed to other factors — such as confidentiality agreements regarding funding or measures to protect participants by not disclosing team information. Although no direct evidence for these factors was found, such hypotheses warrant further investigation, possibly through interviews with those responsible for each initiative. Another important issue is the relationship between these initiatives and journalists' associations, which may create a hybrid model combining elements of civil monitoring with journalistic practices. This blending could challenge and complicate the traditional concepts of civil monitoring mechanisms.

Despite these limitations, we believe this study paves the way for further research in this area, including examining initiatives focused on monitoring the private sector and exploring transparent *ethos* in other project domains. We underscore the significance of *dual transparency* in sustaining public trust, enabling civil society monitoring initiatives to overcome challenges and enhance their effectiveness, thereby supporting democratic processes.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

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