# *Fake News Meeting Self-Awareness:*
## *A Psychological Perspective on Social Cognition in the Age of Moral Hypocrisy*

## *Fake News encontrando Autoconsciência:*
### *Uma perspectiva psicológica sobre a Cognição Social na Era da Hipocrisia Moral*

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**Abstract**
The present work emerges as a critical-reflective proposal, applied to an empirical approach, on how the phenomenon of the dissemination of fake news can be understood from the theoretical basis of Objective Self-Awareness and related constructs in the scope of Social Cognition. To this end, the work took as an empirical reference a speech by the former president of the Republic of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, in which he stated that he had "there was a spark" ("pintou um clima")[1] with young Venezuelan underage women, insinuating untruthfully that such young women could be practicing prostitution. To this end, initially, the theoretical bases on the field of Social Cognition, Objective Self-Awareness, and Fake News were briefly outlined. In a second moment, links between the constructs addressed were proposed, using the empirical cut as a basis for analysis. Finally, from the results of the theoretical and empirical reflections carried out, possible paths were traced for the investigation of *fake news,* having the hypothesis of Self-Awareness as a central aspect of Social Cognition and Moral Hypocrisy as a relevant motivational construct in this phenomenon.

**Keywords**: Fake News, Social Cognition, Objective Self-Awareness, Cognitive Processes, Moral Hypocrisy.
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[1] The phrase "***pintou um clima***", which was translated as "***there was a spark***", is a Brazilian Portuguese idiomatic expression that typically implies a strong romantic or sexual draw to another person, a suggestive or flirtatious atmosphere, often mutual and context dependent. In this specific context, its use by Jair Bolsonaro attracted controversy due to the implications of a suggestive undertone in describing a situation involving underage Venezuelan girls. The translation "there was a spark" was chosen to capture the ambiguous and potentially inappropriate tone conveyed in the original Portuguese, aligning with the nuanced interpretation discussed in this analysis. The choice preserves the interpretive flexibility that led to public criticism while remaining faithful to the original expression's meaning within its cultural and linguistic context.

**Resumo**

O presente trabalho surge como uma proposta crítico-reflexiva, aplicada a um recorte empírico, sobre como o fenômeno da disseminação de notícias falsas (*fake news*) pode ser compreendido a partir do assento teórico da Autoconsciência Objetiva e construtos correlatos no âmbito da Cognição Social. Para tanto, o trabalho tomou como referência empírica uma fala do ex-presidente da república do Brasil, Jair Bolsonaro, na qual afirmava que havia "pintado um clima" junto a jovens venezuelanas menores de idade, insinuando-se inveridicamente que tais jovens poderiam estar praticando atividade de prostituição. Para tanto, inicialmente foram traçadas brevemente as bases teóricas sobre o campo da Cognição Social, da Autoconsciência Objetiva e das Fake News. Num segundo momento, foram propostos enlaces entre os construtos abordados, utilizando o recorte empírico como base de análise. Por fim, a partir dos resultados das reflexões teóricas e empíricas realizadas, foram traçados caminhos possíveis para a investigação das *fake news* tendo-se a hipótese da Autoconsciência como aspecto central da Cognição Social e a Hipocrisia Moral como construto motivacional relevante nesse fenômeno.

**Palavras-chave**: Fake News, Cognição Social, Autoconsciência Objetiva, Processos Cognitivos, Hipocrisia Moral.

**Introduction**

Understanding human beings in their relationships with themselves and others from the social context has been one of the significant challenges of psychological science, which demands the exploration of multiple ontological and epistemological paths to investigate such phenomena comprehensively. Among the possible directions, the field of Social Cognition stands out, an area dedicated to studying the cognitive processes involved in interpreting and facilitating social interactions. In this sense, the present manuscript is a critical-reflective proposal applied to an empirical approach centered on how the phenomenon of the dissemination of fake news can be analyzed in the light of the theory of Objective Self-Awareness and related constructs in the domain of Social Cognition. It seeks to briefly discuss theoretical and empirical considerations about the field, with the hypothesis that Self-Awareness, in addition to being a central aspect of Social Cognition, is intrinsically linked to the motivational construct of Moral Hypocrisy in this specific context.

Taking as an empirical reference, a controversial statement made by the former president of the republic, Jair Bolsonaro, during the 2022 electoral period (in which he insinuated, in an unproven way, that young Venezuelan minors were practicing prostitution), it is intended to contextualize the theoretical models presented, exploring

possible interconnections between the concrete social situation and the concepts discussed in the scientific literature.

In the final session, we seek to consider the potential contributions of social cognition to studies on fake news, emphasizing future investigations that address self-awareness as a mediator of social cognition. It also proposes to explore, for example, the interrelationships between individual beliefs, the spread of fake news, and the role of Moral Hypocrisy as an underlying motivational factor.

## The Perspectives of Social Cognition

Considering that human beings coexist in a context of interaction with themselves and the world, one of psychological science's great interests lies in understanding how this process occurs. In this scenario, Social Cognition emerges as a fundamental approach, exploring the underlying mechanisms that enable human interaction and understanding in dynamic social contexts. In this sense, studies in social cognition can be understood as a set of neurocognitive processes underlying the ability of individuals to "make sense of the behavior of others" as a crucial prerequisite of social interaction (Arioli et al., 2018, p.01). Considering that this process of giving meaning to the behavior of the other implies being able to differentiate oneself from it, the concept of social cognition can also be considered, more broadly, as a set of cognitive processes by which people understand not only others but also themselves (Beer & Ochsner, 2006). This duality, involving both other perception and self-perception, highlights the complexity and centrality of social cognition to human interactions.

As highlighted by Arioli et al. (2018), social skills emerge as early as 14 months, being developed throughout life in order to enable the decoding of social information – such as faces and emotional expressions –, promote the elaboration of inferences about other people's mental and affective states, as well as subsidize the decision-making process in line with social standards and demands (p.01). These evolutionary skills are crucial as they are the basis for building mental models that guide more complex social interactions throughout life. Thus, for the authors, research in social cognition has been developed on three major fronts: I) social perception, II) social understanding, and III) social decision-making (p.02). This tripartition provides a clear

framework for research, facilitating empirical and theoretical analyses of social-cognitive abilities and their manifestations in different cultural and situational contexts (Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021).

However, from a broader perspective of Social Cognition, Beer and Ochsner (2006) consider that the investigation of social experience from the cognitive processes in its various modalities (declarative/procedural; implicit or explicit) can focus on two main dimensions: I) in the individual's perception of other people, involving aspects that make up a repository of knowledge of the social world external to the self; or II) in the exercise of the individual's self-understanding in his relations with the social world, since the self is also perceived as a social object, mainly due to its strong influence in shaping the perception of the other. This second conception of domains seems particularly relevant, considering that the person, in his social experience, needs to construct limits that define him as a unique element within a collective system.

That is, the person's understanding of his or her role as a member of a collective social system occurs in the light of a scrutiny of subjective experiences of the self. Precisely, because of this aspect, the perception of the outside world – and, by extension, of social interactions – is neither objective nor linear, as individual self-perception directly influences how the social world is understood. In the same way, the social world is also shaped by the self-perceptions of the other members of the social group. Supporting this thesis, Beer and Ochsner (2006) state that these two socio-cognitive processes can be interconnected in two ways: first, through the construction of self-knowledge, facilitated by the learning obtained by understanding other people; second, by the role of the self as a cognitive filter that guides the perception of the other (p. 99).

Thus, understanding the close relationship between the influence of self-perception on people's perception, empirical evidence has shown that cognitive biases (particularly those linked to the self) seem to alter the processes of interpreting cues about the perception of others and the social environment. These cognitive biases often reflect intrinsic motivations or biases that distort the interpretation of social stimuli, contributing to inaccurate perceptions. Thus, the distortion of perceptions in the face of motivations and prejudices can result in the formulation of distorted or inaccurate social reality judgments. This compromises the individual's ability to

understand others and themselves, directly affecting their ability to self-regulate and adapt to established social standards. As Beer and Ochsner (2006) discussed, this dynamic reveals how subjective factors can interact with social demands, highlighting the challenges imposed on social cognition in different contexts.

## Challenges of Studies in Social Cognition

The empirical investigation in the field of Social Cognition, although promising, has proved to be quite complex, both in terms of the lack of consensus on the conceptual bases that delimit its approach, as well as concerning the additional difficulty in understanding sociocognitive processes, which are firmly crossed by cognitive biases of the most diverse orders.

There is still no consensus or clear evidence on how sociocognitive processes are represented in the brain in the form of neural correlates. As Beer and Ochsner (2006) pointed out, social phenomena can encompass overlapping neural areas. This suggests that social cognition is not associated with a single brain module but with dynamically distributed networks. These authors highlight neural differences associated with distinct strategies of self-perception, such as the use of abstract information as opposed to episodic information, as well as the perception of other people (p.102).

Considering the effect of cognitive biases, studies in social cognition have a problem of accuracy that cannot be disregarded. This question arises primarily due to the subjectivity inherent in human cognition, with biases often shaped by individual experience. This seems evident to the extent that a good part of the inaccuracies of perception is closely linked to aspects arising from the subjective experience of the individual and his *Self*, such as the belief systems that guide them, the activations of cognitive heuristics that influence their actions, and the motivational factors that permeate their thinking and conduct (Beer & Ochsner, 2006; Haselton et al., 2009).

## Self-awareness

Based on the fact that Social Cognition emerges as a phenomenon that seeks to understand social interactions from cognitive processes of self-perception and perception of the other, it seems clear that the exercise of social experience recruits

the individual to a self-attentive posture. This is because social interaction requires that this individual place himself as part of the phenomenon, in which the Self acts as an integral element of any social relationship, either by receiving information from the community that makes it act towards a socially desirable standard or by modeling its field of perception of the world based on its beliefs and self-conceptions. Whereas Objective Self-Awareness can be defined as the act of becoming the object of one's attention (Nascimento, 2008), to the extent that the person experiences socio-cognitive processes, he is also exercising self-awareness at some point because he is paying attention to himself (Nascimento & Roazzi, 2017; Silvia & Duval, 2001).

Proposed contemporaneously by Duval and Wicklund (1972), the Theory of Objective Self-Awareness (OSA Theory) is a self-evaluative and motivational model in which the attentional focus is on certain salient self-aspects of the Self (Self real), which is compared through a judgment of discrepancy about the correction patterns arising from the social context (Self ideal) to which the individual is inserted (Nascimento & Roazzi, 2017). The subject successfully mitigates such discrepancies, generating behavioral and cognitive consequences associated with positive affects. However, if the perception of distance between the real and ideal is high, or if – regardless of the discrepancy – the judgment of adequacy to the standard is not possible, the individual will tend to be negatively affected. Thus, the discrepancy between Self The real and ideal usually seems to instantiate a state of discomfort that motivates the individual to act in order to neutralize it, either by avoiding the self-conscious state or by acting to minimize the discrepancy (either by adjusting the Real Self according to the patterns of the ideal Self or by relaxing the referential patterns of the ideal Self according to the Real Self) (Silvia & Duval, 2001; Wicklund, 1975).

Empirical studies on Objective Self-Awareness, especially those of a psychometric nature, have presented to the literature several dimensional aspects of the construct, highlighting: I) its short-term reflexes or situational self-awareness - self-awareness – (understood as state reflexes, associated with environmental self-focusing stimuli) and long-term dispositional self-awareness - self-consciousness – (related to stable personality traits and unrelated to the situational environment experienced by the individual demonstrating their inclination to the self-conscious state); II) its dimensions Public (where the focus is on the external aspects of the Self

linked to their self-perception as a social object, such as behaviors and physical appearance) and toilet (directed to the internal experiences of the Self, such as beliefs, motivations, feelings, etc.); Beyond the motivational aspects of autofocus reflexive (linked to a genuine curiosity about oneself, where the person is positively interested in understanding more about one's internal processes) and Ruminative (related to a state of anxious attention, of a repetitive and dysfunctional nature, motivated by fears and insecurities of the Self  (Silva Júnior, 2019; Nascimento, 2008; Trapnell & Campbell, 1999).

Understanding self-awareness as a central cognitive parameter, Morin (2022) proposes in his theoretical model of Dynamic Self-Processes a comprehensive conception of the construct, which includes any type of self-focused attention. In this sense, it points out the relationships between the exercise of self-reflection and self-processes dear to the phenomenon of social cognition, such as self-regulation, theory of mind, autobiographical and prospective processes, self-knowledge, self-concept, and self-esteem.

Given the brief considerations, it seems appropriate – if not necessary – to look at Social Cognition in the light of the theoretical precepts of self-consciousness. Both in its aspects related to the development of self-perception (for example, self-knowledge, self-concept, and self-esteem) and also about the ability to perceive oneself before others and the social context (such as self-regulation, theory of mind, and the public dimension of self-awareness).

**The dissemination of fake *news* as an object of study in Social Cognition**

Although the spread of fake news – *fake news* - is not something new in society, it is a fact that from the popularization of digital means of communication and interaction - especially social networks - the phenomenon has taken on relevant dimensions to the point of decisively influencing the formation of public opinion, both from a political point of view and also in ideological beliefs aligned with specific social groups. In this context, *fake news* was notably boosted in the 2016 US presidential elections and of significant importance in manipulating public opinion and in the results of the 2018 Brazilian presidential contest (Pennycook & Rand, 2021; Seixas, 2019). With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the dissemination of fake news goes

beyond the political arena. Also, it reaches distrust concerning measures to combat the virus supported by science, such as questions about the practice of social isolation and the levels of safety and efficacy of the vaccines offered to the population. However, for *fake news* to exert social effects, the receiver of the message must believe in its veracity. Hence, one of the biggest questions on the subject: why, even in the face of a social system with broad access to various sources of information (capable of making it possible, for example, to check the veracity of the receivers), do people believe in fake news? Several studies seek explanations from different perspectives.

In the view of Pennycook and Rand (2021b), the understanding of these reasons involves two different ways to conceptualize belief in true and false news: I) through discernment in capturing the overall accuracy of one's beliefs (being measured by the difference between true beliefs minus false beliefs); or II) through the level of general belief that a person has with a given piece of news, regardless of its accuracy (i.e., it is not necessarily linked to the person's ability to distinguish truth from falsehood). In this sense, based on a survey of literature on the subject, the authors point out three recurring aspects associated with the phenomenon: a) <u>political motivations</u>, insofar as the failure to discern fake news is rooted in an "identity protection cognition", in which it makes the individual believe excessively in what is consistent with his or her party ideology,  being at the same time excessively skeptical of what is incongruous with their political beliefs; b) <u>reasoning</u>, based on dual process theories, where research under this focus considers that the possibility of analytical thinking can nullify automatic and intuitive responses, evidencing the role of cognitive reflection in the identification of fake news; and c) <u>heuristics</u>, where studies on the decision-making process point out that people make use of mental shortcuts to judge news,  emphasizing the effect of the familiarity of the subject, the source of the news and the emotional evocation in the attribution of a true or false news.

Based on a scoping review carried out with 26 experimental studies on determinants of belief in *Fake News*, Bryanov and Vziatysheva (2021) identified three main types of factors that supposedly influence individuals' belief in fake news and that have been the subject of studies in the field: I) <u>those related to the message,</u> located outside the individual recipient and associated with the characteristics of the news, the way it is presented and the environment where the information is exposed; II) <u>related</u>

to individual factors, associated with the receiver's characteristics, beliefs, and psychological traits, which can influence adherence to fake news; and III) those linked to intervention factors, seeking to identify and measure the effects of measures adopted to combat *fake news* (p.11).

Some theorists have highlighted an aspect of the causes for the evident escalation of *fake news* in contemporary humanity: the epistemic change of the truth references adopted. Thus, to the extent that consumers of information *online* move away from evidence-based standards of objective truth and approach a notion of truth consistent with their alternative realities, generating what has been called "post-truth" (Brynov & AMP; Vziataysheva, 2021, p.02). Based on this logic, in the face of the symptoms of declining trust in social institutions, the greater perception of inequality, the growing political polarization, and diverse ideological beliefs, the individual is accredited to build a post-truth aligned with the context of his ghetto, often oblivious to the truth of the facts (Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021; Seixas, 2019).

Despite the various perspectives of investigation, it is a consensus that the phenomenon of *fake news* has revealed itself as a significant influencer in contemporary social interactions, a fact observed in this work from the point of view of studies undertaken in the field of Social Cognition. However, even though it is the object of many research programs, the heterogeneity of the variables related to the construct and the lack of methodological standardization become significant challenges for the development of comparative and intercultural investigations that allow a more precise range of evidence about its predictive aspects.

**Link between the phenomena of *fake news* and Social Cognition in the light of self-awareness.**

Based on the assumption that *fake news* is a non-factual message that intentionally simulates the appearance of authentic content in order to deceive potential receivers, its analysis in the light of self-awareness seems a pertinent path when seeking to understand the cognitive dynamics that make (or not) an individual believe in fake news.

As already brought up in the previous section, the attitude of believing or not in fake *news* can involve several analysis perspectives. Here in this work, we highlight,

on the one hand, the general precision of the individual's beliefs in discerning the true from the false (a very sensitive aspect, for example, to the ability of cognitive reasoning) and, on the other hand, the epistemic change of the truth references adopted (bringing us the notion of a post-truth detached from the facts, quite sensitive to the subject's ideological positions). Regardless of the view followed, the receiver will process a message and summon him to a self-reflexive exercise about how that external information can be congruent or not with his references of truth. To the extent that the judgment of belief in the message is cognitively supported by a set of self-processes of the *self* (such as prospecting, theory of mind, self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-concept), the individual's self-perception frames him as a participant in the social context, thus influencing his decision-making.

Similar to what is foreseen in the OSA Theory, as the receiver is faced with a message that conveys content or values far from those postulated or experienced by the real *self*, this individual tends to elicit a feeling of discomfort. Looking at the problem from the perspective of discernment and accuracy of beliefs, such a condition will motivate you to seek a state of balance by reducing the discrepancy between the pattern disseminated in the message and those of the *real self*, either by identifying the message as false (avoiding the validity of this pattern for comparative purposes with your salient beliefs),  or by verifying that the information is true (seeking, therefore, through self-regulation, to adjust their beliefs to the truthful content disseminated by the message). Also close to that postulated in the OSA Theory, Pennycook and Rand (2021a) - based on a meta-analysis of 20 experiments on *precision prompts* or *nudges* - found that diverting the receiver's attention to the concept of information accuracy (focus on the standard) contributed to a lower level of dissemination of *fake news* (salient behavior).

In turn, when looking at the problem from the perspective of post-truth (i.e., when the subject adopts a notion of alternative truth aligned with his interests and those of specific ideological groups), the scrutiny of the receiver seems to preserve the self-focus on the references of the *real self*, thus seeking to reduce the discrepancy by adjusting the reference standards. Thus, in our view, *fake news* would operate in the service of the balance of self-consciousness, offering patterns of an *ideal self* desirably coherent with the *real self* of the receiving individual.

**An empirical analysis in the light of Social Cognition: "pintou um clima" ("*was there a spark")?***

In order to promote a brief critical-reflective analysis of a concrete social situation based on the theoretical overview addressed here, a controversial statement given by the then President of the Republic of Brazil at the time, Jair Bolsonaro, on 10/14/2022 in an interview for a podcast was adopted as empirical material:

> *"I was in Brasília, in the community of São Sebastião, if I'm not mistaken, on a Saturday, riding my motorcycle. [...] I stopped at a corner, took off my helmet, and saw some young girls… Three or four of them, pretty, about 14 or 15 years old, all dressed up on a Saturday in a community, and they seemed somewhat alike.* **There was a spark, so I went back.** *'Can I come into your house?' I entered. There were about 15 to 20 girls, all Venezuelan, getting ready on a Saturday morning*. **And I asked: pretty girls, 14 or 15 years old, getting ready on a Saturday, what for? To earn a living!"[2]** (*"There was a spark ",* 2022b, our emphasis)*.

In addition to the expression "painted a mood" having been questioned by opponents and part of the press for its sexual and pedophilic nature, Bolsonaro, in his speech, seems to build fake *news* that young Venezuelan women would be getting ready in the middle of a Saturday morning to "*make a living*," insinuating – from the narrative brought by the former president – a possible situation of prostitution.

Given the great repercussion caused by the statement, one of the young Venezuelans who attended this meeting was heard by the UOL news report[3], stating that social action for refugees was taking place at the site.

After the bad repercussions of the statement that took place in the middle of the election period, Jair Bolsonaro released a few days later (10/18/2022) a video to apologize, with the following speech:

> *"Dear Venezuelan sisters and brothers, we are outraged by the latest actions of some leftist militants who are shamelessly pressuring Venezuelan women in order to gain political advantage at this time. Even after the TSE's decision, taken as a result of the lie that had been spread about me, these unspeakable people now direct their attacks against these women. The words I said reflected a concern on my part to avoid any kind of exploitation of vulnerable women. The doubt and concern raised were almost immediately clarified at the time by our*

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[2] Excerpt from the video containing the statement: https://g1.globo.com/politica/video/fala-de-bolsonaro-sobre-meninas-venezuelanas-repercute-nas-redes-sociais-11030742.ghtml
[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxeBKaQSBFw&t=5s  (UOL, 2022)

*minister of women, Damares Alves, who went to the site and found that the women mentioned in the Live were workers. My wife Michele, Senator-elect Damares and the Ambassador of Venezuela were with these ladies today, they gave their support and found that they are rebuilding their lives in Brazil. They even help other Venezuelan refugees to find a profession and better integrate into our society. If my words, which, in bad faith, were taken out of context, were somehow misunderstood or caused any embarrassment to our Venezuelan sisters, I apologize since my commitment has always been to welcome better and serve all those fleeing dictatorships around the world."[4] "There was a spark*", 2022a)*.*

Based on the dissemination of *fake news* in the first statement (which insinuated that young women could be "making a living" practicing prostitution when, in fact, they were participating in social action), as well as the change in discourse adopted in the second statement (retraction pronouncement), the concrete social situation will be analyzed in the light of the theoretical aspects of social cognition in its relations between objective self-awareness and the phenomenon of *fake news*, in order to identify in the empirical case the theoretical links proposed in this critical reflection.

## *Analysis and Discussion*

From the information collected from news reports at the time, it was found that the episode occurred on April 10, 2021, in the Morro da Cruz neighborhood of the city of São Sebastião – Federal District. The meeting was recorded in a *Live* broadcast on the former president's social networks, and no mention or suspicion of child prostitution was reported at the time of the recording (and as far as is known, no complaint in this regard was made after the meeting). At the time of the *Live*, Jair Bolsonaro even claims that the Venezuelan women were there "to fix their hair" through the help of a group of Brazilian women [5] (Poder360, 2022). The interview in which the controversial statement took place was given by the former president to the *Podcast* "Paparazzo Rubro-Negro" on April 14, 2022, about a year after the episode (Last Second - IG, 2022). The account of the meeting is told in the interview to illustrate the context of Venezuelan immigration in Brazil, and Bolsonaro even emphasized that there was a *Live* recording of the fact. Hence the first finding: considering the former president's

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[4] Retraction video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRsWpfXvypc&t=1s
[5] Link do vídeo da live: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvfKuIeZVG4

speeches made at the time of the meeting (captured via record in *Live*, in which he stated that the young women were "fixing their hair" through the assistance of Brazilian women), the statement made by him in the *Podcast* about a possible situation of child prostitution does not find evidence with the facts, thus characterizing a case of *fake news*.

One of the strategies for a false message to be accepted as true is to endow it with true facts. This can be seen from the excerpts of the statement given to the *podcast*, underlined below:

> "***I was in Brasilia, in the community of São Sebastião, if I'm not mistaken, on a Saturday on a motorcycle*** *[...]*" **(fact)**
>
> *[...]*
>
> ***There were about 15, 20 girls, Saturday morning, getting ready, all Venezuelans.*** **(fact)**
>
> *[...]*" [6] (*"Painted a mood"*, 2022b)*.

In order to praise the narrative of the situation of vulnerability of immigrants from Venezuela (a country with a populist, left-wing political regime, ideologically aligned with the Workers' Party in Brazil, a great political opponent of it), the distorted statement that young minors would be prostituting themselves in the middle of a Saturday morning seems to emotionally evoke the receiver of the message with something impactful, capable of arousing indignation and reducing the focus to cognitive aspects related to the accuracy of beliefs. In the same sense, the false report also seems consistent with political motivations supported by the "cognition of identity protection," as it aligns itself with the ideological discourse of the extreme right, which fiercely seeks to attribute negative consequences to left-oriented government regimes. In other words, the eventual belief in Bolsonaro's false statements would possibly be sustained by a general (post-truth) belief associated with the notion that left-wing regimes (also generically titled by the extreme right as "communist") are harmful to the population, regardless of any judgment of belief that can be made about the true or false nature of the message.

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[6] Excerpt from the video containing the statement: https://g1.globo.com/politica/video/fala-de-bolsonaro-sobre-meninas-venezuelanas-repercute-nas-redes-sociais-11030742.ghtml

When analyzing the statements in the retraction video aired by Jair Bolsonaro to clarify the episode, at least two aspects are pertinent from the broadcaster's point of view. First, it is noted that he clearly avoids the exercise of self-awareness, considering that he at no time seems to carry out an objective self-reflection in the sense of acknowledging/pondering the controversial passages of his speech in the *Podcast*: neither about the expression "painted the climate," nor about the insinuation that they were young minors practicing prostitution, reserving only to attest that they were "working women" who "are rebuilding their lives in Brazil." In fact, in this retraction speech, Bolsonaro states that his speech in the *Podcast* reflected a concern of his "to avoid any type of exploitation of women who were vulnerable," something that, in our view, cannot be inferred from his controversial statement (CartaCapital, 2022).

The second aspect here goes against one of the precepts postulated in the OSA Theory: considering that the individual has already consummated his act/behavior, if he is unable to avoid the self-conscious state, it remains for him to reduce the discrepancy between the reference standard and behavior by adjusting the standard. It is even classically observed in moral hypocrisy[7], which stands out – through Batson's empirical studies – for promoting important contributions to the model of Objective Self-Awareness (Silvia & Duval, 2001; Batson et al., 1997). In the social situation analyzed here, the former president's statement had already been made and was recorded and disseminated by the various media (he could not change his consummate attitude), leaving Bolsonaro only to avoid the self-conscious state or adjust his message to a standard that best justified his behavior. Thus, something closer in the direction of an adjustment of the message (adjustment of the standard) can be observed in the excerpt of the retraction video in which Bolsonaro states:

> "[...] If my words, which, in bad faith, were taken out of context, were in any way misunderstood or caused any embarrassment to our Venezuelan sisters, I apologize, since my commitment has always been to better welcome and serve all those fleeing dictatorships around the world. [...]" (CartaCapital, 2022).

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[7] According to Batson, moral hypocrisy can be understood as the motivation "to appear moral in one's own eyes and in the eyes of others, avoiding, if possible, the cost of being truly moral" (Batson, 1999, pg. 525).

As noted, there is an attempt to mitigate the discrepancy under the justification that its message was taken out of context, reinforcing our understanding that self-focus seems to be found in the standards of judgment and not in the consummate conduct (polemical statement) in the light of the *real self*.

**Final considerations**

The social context and its cognitive developments are subjective in their interaction processes, a fact clearly verified by the empirical challenge of dealing with the problem of the accuracy of its variables. Thus, attributing universal truths becomes a complex issue, transcending the psychological field and gravitating millennials in philosophical discussions about morality. As geographical distances have been shortened through communication in digital media, cultural and ideological disparities have made it possible to unveil an extensive palette of truths worldwide. Moreover, despite multiple possible truths, there was a universal principle among them: their link to facts. However, with the advent of *fake news*, the Institute of Truth has freed itself from the rigor of the factual to the detriment of alternative truths - linked to personal ideological interests and those of specific groups - in the form of a post-truth. Thus, the contemporary receiver's role is much more relevant than evidence-based messages, who seems increasingly vested with autonomy to construct his convenient truth.

If, on the other hand, we consider *fake news* from the perspective of the accuracy of beliefs, certainly the volume and speed of the information currently bombarded to the receiver seems to coin a scenario less conducive to the exercise of a cognitive judgment about what is true or false, causing the individual to delegate a significant part of this evaluation process, for example, heuristic resources (often biased towards certain political/ideological positions).

Suppose we understand *fake news* as messages that want to appear trustworthy without the cost of being true. In that case, inferring that they would represent a manifest facet of moral hypocrisy is possible. Thus, in an identical way to such moral deviation, the recurrence of heuristic aspects and ingrained beliefs opens the door to the promotion of self-deception, which would act at the service of a post-truth convenient to the individual and his social group of influence.

Given the considerations, there are still significant challenges in the investigative field of Social Cognition. The brief theoretical links proposed point to the evident potential of this theoretical field in the sense of contributing to a better understanding of the contemporary problem of *fake news*, especially concerning the effect of beliefs and cognitive biases for the construction of post-truth, as well as its relationship with the ideological demarcation of social groups. More specifically, the present work seeks to highlight the relevant role of self-awareness in mediating social phenomena, including those related to *fake news*, and the issue should be better explored in the empirical scope. In this sense, future studies that develop a theoretical triangulation between *fake news*, objective self-awareness, and moral hypocrisy seem propitious.

Finally, we ask ourselves: Did he really *"paint a mood"*? The answer to this question leads us to reflect on another question: *What is the truth that one wants to postulate*?

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