THE WAR OF THE PLATFORMS AGAINST PL 2630

APRIL, 2023
Platforms cheat their own advertising rules

- We found ads by Brasil Paralelo and by Google itself against PL 2630 (Fake News Bill) in Google searches, which, because they were not flagged as being about political and social issues, do not have transparency information in the platform’s political advertising center.
- In addition, we identified Google ads being served on Spotify, which, according to its terms of use, does not allow advertising of political issues, prohibiting ads about referendums, votes and legislative, judicial and political proposals.
- Google also advertised on Meta platforms against PL 2630 and did not self-label as a sensitive or political ad, which is why the ad is not available in Meta’s ad library.

Google uses search tool to attack regulation

- We gathered evidence that Google has been presenting biased search results for users who search for terms related to the bill, implying that searches are for “PL da Censura” (Censorship Bill), which is the name given by the opposition against the regulation of platforms, and not by the official name “PL 2630” or the name used by the press “PL das Fake News” (Fake News Bill).
- Google put a message against the PL on its home screen, warning all users that the PL would “increase the confusion between what is true and false in Brazil”.
- These different strategies suggest that Google has been taking advantage of its leadership position in the search market to propagate its ideas and negatively influence users’ perception of the bill in favor of its commercial interests, which may account for an abuse of economic power.
Google has used its official blog to publish texts attacking PL 2630, written by some of its main representatives in Brazil.

**Fabio Coelho**, president of the company in Brazil, undersigned two of them between March and April 2022, when the project was debated with a view to the **general elections**.

Coelho's central argument is that the subject has not yet been debated enough by the population and that the law, if approved, would help to **promote more disinformation** and force platforms to make **private and strategic information public**.

More recently, **Marcelo Lacerda**, Director of Government Relations and Public Policy at Google Brasil, accused the bill of **protecting producers from misinformation and harmful content**.

However, when searching for “pl 2630” on Google on April 29, users came across an **ad from the platform itself**, whose title refers to the project as “PL da Censura” (Censorship Bill).

As **Google's ad system is not very transparent and does not provide any data** on paid content that is not published by candidates and political parties, it is not possible to know how many ads like this may be being served in the search tool, not even the **amounts invested, the ad segmentation nor the number of users reached** for this particular ad.

The text also appeared as an organic result on the first page for searches made **anonymously**, with a **VPN**, simulating a generic Brazilian user with no history, between the **23rd and 28th of April**. In the search tests, Google's blog appeared among the top results, along with news sites about PL 2630 and official websites of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.
Brasil Paralelo announces on Google against the PL

In a search for “pl2630”, performed on April 30 on Google, the first result was a paid ad by Brasil Paralelo.

The ad can be found on Google's Ad Transparency Center. However, as it was not published as a political piece, it is not possible to access information about targeting or spending.

The page leads to a publication categorized as “news” on the producer's website. The site gives voice to the arguments of the opposition, which claims that the PL means the “end of freedom of expression”. The text also exposes Google's positioning and guides its publication against the PL.

Ignoring its own rules, Spotify runs Google's political ad

Google ads against PL 2630 were also served on the streaming platform Spotify. In its terms of use, Spotify tells customers that it does not allow paid content that deals with political issues.

Like most providers and platforms, Spotify also does not have an ad library or advertising transparency report for society to access and find information about the ads served on its platform. Therefore, it is not possible to know the number of servings, the amounts spent and the audience impacted by this Google ad against PL2630.
Google advertises without labeling on Meta against the PL

On Google’s page in Meta’s ad library, we found **three identical ads** about the bill, which ran between **April 20th and 26th**.

In these, the company stated that the project would not be “**ready to be voted on**” and invited Brazilians to participate in the debate, in an attempt to contain the progress of the discussion and to close it down.

The ads led to the **same article on the Google blog** signed by Marcelo Lacerda, as previously cited. Lacerda alleges that the law, if passed, would jeopardize **freedom of expression**.

Another, aired between April 27th and 28th, pressured the population to “**talk to their deputy on social media**” to pressure parliamentarians for **improvements in the text** that will be forwarded to the Senate. The ad also referred to **another text** by Lacerda, who accused the project of **blurring the lines between truth and lies**.

None of the ads **appear in the library** when searching for terms related to PL 2630, **camouflaging** the content from users, only on the Google page.

Additionally, Google has **not flagged any ads as being sensitive**. Meta, however, re-categorized the latter, making its investment and reach information partially public.

Even after Meta re-categorized the Google ad, stopped it from running and publicized its transparency information, Google ran the same ad again without the correct flag.

In the only correctly categorized ad in the library, we identified a reach of **at least 1 million impressions** in just one day of airing (04/27 to 04/28).

---

**DATA ACCESS OPTIONS ABOUT ADVERTISING IN META ADS**

**API META ADS**
MARKED ADVERTISEMENTS AS SENSITIVE
Currently, Meta provides a public API with data from ads marked as "sensitive"; that is, ads about social issues, politics and/or elections, which are stored for up to seven years, even after they are inactive.

**WEB INTERFACE**
UNMARKED ADVERTISEMENTS AS SENSITIVE
On the library page, it is also possible to access a web interface with all active advertisements, regardless of theme, however, without storing the history and with restricted metadata.
Amid recommendations from legacy media sources and official websites, Google has also been redirecting users to harmful and hyper partisan websites on the first page of search results.

Boletim da Liberdade, owned by former federal deputy Paulo Ganime (Novo/RJ), who has been in an open campaign against the approval of PL 2630 in recent weeks, appears as a result on the first page of Google when searching for PL 2630.

The portal publishes speeches by federal deputy Kim Kataguiri (União/SP) that allude to “generalized censorship” and the “loss of freedom of expression” if the law is approved by Congress, without explaining or supporting the arguments.

Another publication indicated on the first page of Google in an anonymous search for PL 2630 was a text by Revista Oeste, a source considered Bolsonarist and accused of spreading misinformation. In this article, columnist Flávio Morgenstern, a right–wing influencer and former employee of Brasil Paralelo, publishes the PL 2630 Scoreboard, also prepared by Boletim da Liberdade.

The source indicated as a result of the organic search on the first page of Google for the term “PL 2630” was a misinformation portal directed at an evangelical public, Pleno News. In addition to talking about censorship, the text only discloses the positions of opposition parliamentarians, nominally citing the performance of the Partido Novo, of the Evangelical Bench and the Partido Liberal.

In addition to the boosts paid by Brasil Paralelo, the website of an audiovisual producer accused of spreading denialist narratives and disinformation with a text against PL 2630 also appeared as one of the main organic results on the first page of Google search.
YouTubers against the PL 2630 are suggested on the first page

One of the YouTube videos suggested on the first page of the Google search engine was the live broadcast carried out by Bárbara Destefani, an extreme right influencer, who said she was afraid of suffering reprisals from the “Ministry of Truth” when commenting on the bill.

After the news came in of the urgent approval for the bill to move forward, we also found a video by Brasil Paralelo among the suggested results on the first page. The company recorded a broadcast with parliamentarians Nikolas Ferreira (PL/MG), Bia Kicis (PL/DF) and Carlos Jordy (PL/RJ), invited to comment on the “advances of censorship” in Brazil.

Youtube makes “urgent alert” about the “negative impact” of PL2630 for content creators

On Twitter, users reported that YouTube is pressuring content creators on the platform's internal panel with an "alert" that the approval of PL2630 will directly harm them.

In YouTube Studio there is a banner that redirects the content creator to a text published on April 25 (the date of the vote on the urgency of the bill in the Chamber of Deputies) in which the platform takes a position against what it deems to be “hasty legislation”.

In the publication, YouTube places itself as the mouthpiece of the “creators community”. YouTube claims that the law will increase inequality between platform profiles and subject them to “unclear rules” defined for the government.

Google page appears with message against the PL

On 01/05, Google’s own search homepage started displaying an alert message to all users, stating that the PL would “increase the confusion between what is true and what is false in Brazil”. The message redirects the user to the same text written by Marcelo Lacerda that brings this central argument. Text was also boosted on Meta platforms.
**Google induce search about “Censorship Bill”**

In the results of a search, Google says it indicates questions commonly asked by other users with the same search term to help with the search. Over the last few days, we have noticed that, when searching for “PL 2630”, Google showed questions related to “Censorship Bill” among the results.

After the first question “What is PL2630” Google indicates “has the censorship bill been approved?”, and then “What is the Censorship Bill?” to refer to PL 2630, the name used pejoratively by the opposition moving against platform regulation, not the official name “PL 2630” or the name used by the press “PL of Fake News”.

**SEO information contradicts Google**

However, consulting the SemRush platform, which offers statistics on search engines, the most common questions asked by users on Google related to PL2630 do not use the term PL of Censorship, as shown in the figures below. When cross-referencing the information, the data suggests that Google has been using search results to negatively influence users’ perceptions of the bill.

**Related Questions Searching “PL 2630”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Intent</th>
<th>Vol.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o pl 2630</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o que é pl 2630</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o que significa pl 2630</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o que é a pl 2630</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o que e pl 2630</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o que é o pl 2630</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>como foi a votação da pl 2630</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o pl 2630 pode impactar a internet que você conhece</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o que diz a pl 2630</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quem criou a pl 2630</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a pl 2630 foi aprovada</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Related Questions Searching “PL Fake News”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Intent</th>
<th>Vol.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o que é pl das fake news</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>como votaram os deputados na pl das fake news</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>como votaram os senadores na pl das fake news</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>como votaram os senadores pl fake news</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o que diz a pl das fake news</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o que é a pl da fake news</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o que é a pl das fake news</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o que é pl da fake news</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o que é pl fake news</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qual deputado que pediu destaque no pl da fake news</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quem votou a favor da pl das fake news</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why are platforms against regulation? What is at stake is money.

### BRAZILIAN ADVERTISING MARKET IN 2022 (R$ 46 BILLION)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OFFLINE ADVERTISING</th>
<th>DIGITAL ADVERTISING (TOTAL: R$ 32.4 BILLION)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R$13.6 billion</td>
<td>R$7.6 billion (via agencies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>via agencies</td>
<td>R$24.8 billion (outside agencies, not audited by the advertising market (Cenp))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2023, the platforms declared that Brazilian digital advertising moved R$32.4 billion. By comparison, according to Cenp, advertising in all other media generated R$13.6 billion in 2023, and R$7.6 billion in digital advertising via agencies, adding up to a market of R$21.2 billion. That is, the digital advertising market is twice as large as the entire offline ad market.

The issue here is not the possibility of buying ads directly on the platforms, which is good for small advertisers. The problem is the lack of regulation that creates a regulatory asymmetry in which 2/3 of the total advertising market (referring to digital advertising) does not obey any rules, restrictions or transparency obligations, leaving advertisers and consumers vulnerable to the economic interests of the platforms. Ads promoting gun purchases, coups d’état and financial fraud can easily be served on platforms, which also make money from this type of toxic advertising.

### The business model of digital platforms

Revenue from advertisements is the main source of funding for platforms. Without proper transparency, it is not possible to know what percentage of these amounts come from criminal and irregular advertisements, which would be affected by PL 2630.

**TOTAL META REVENUE 2022**

116.6 BILLION DOLLARS

[Source: Annual advertising revenue of Meta Platforms worldwide from 2009 to 2022 (in US dollars)]

- **97.7%** DIGITAL ADVERTISING
- **2.1%** OTHERS

**TOTAL GOOGLE REVENUE 2022**

279.8 BILLION DOLLARS

[Source: Distribution of Google segment revenues from 2017 to 2022 (in US dollars)]

- **80.2%** DIGITAL ADVERTISING
- **19.6%** OTHERS