

Profile of Applicants for Access to Information Requests: Analysis with Data from the Fala.BR Platform from 2012 to 2021

O Perfil dos Solicitantes dos Pedidos de Acesso à Informação: Análise com os Dados da Plataforma Fala.BR de 2012 a 2021

El perfil de los solicitantes de acceso a solicitudes de información: análisis con datos de la plataforma Fala.BR de 2012 a 2021

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to analyze the profile of applicants of requests for access to information based on data from the Fala.BR platform. As theoretical support, the literature on information-seeking behavior was used, in addition to aspects of the Access to Information Law (LAI), transparency and accountability. The methodological tool used was the archival research. Data collection was carried out in May/2021 and considered the period from 2012 to 2021. More than 260,000 observations, including individuals and companies, were examined using descriptive statistics. The results showed that the profile of the applicant – individual is generally characterized as male, aged between 21 and 40 years, with higher education, public servant or academic and residing in the Southeast region. As for the applicant – legal entity, most are Brazilian, located in the Southeast region and small or medium-sized. Despite these findings, it is pertinent to point out that the profile of the applicant – individual has been changing in recent years. There has been substantial growth in requests from female and high school graduates. Future investigations may assess the reasons for the increase in requests by individuals with these characteristics.

Keywords: Information; Request; Transparency; Public sector; Informational behavior.

Resumo: O objetivo deste estudo foi analisar o perfil dos solicitantes dos pedidos de acesso à informação a partir dos dados da plataforma Fala.BR. Como suporte teórico, foi utilizada a literatura sobre o comportamento de busca informacional, além de aspectos da Lei de Acesso à Informação (LAI), transparência e accountability. A ferramenta metodológica utilizada foi a pesquisa de arquivo (archival research). A coleta de dados foi realizada em maio/2021 e considerou o período de 2012 a 2021. Mais de 260.000 observações, incluindo pessoas físicas e jurídicas, foram examinadas por meio de estatísticas descritivas. Os resultados apontaram que o perfil do solicitante – pessoa física, em geral, é caracterizado por ser do sexo masculino, com idade de 21 a 40 anos, com ensino superior completo, servidor público ou acadêmico e que reside na região Sudeste. Quanto ao solicitante - pessoa jurídica, a maioria é brasileira, está localizada na região Sudeste e é de pequeno ou médio porte. Apesar destes achados, é pertinente apontar que o perfil do solicitante – pessoa física vem se alterando nos últimos anos. Houve um crescimento substancial de pedidos feitos por pessoas do sexo feminino e com ensino médio. Futuras investigações podem avaliar os motivos do aumento dos pedidos por indivíduos com estas características.

Palavras-chave: Informação; Pedido; Transparência; Setor público; Comportamento informacional.

Resumen: El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar el perfil de los solicitantes de acceso a solicitudes de información en base a datos de la plataforma Fala.BR. Como soporte teórico se utilizó la literatura sobre comportamiento de búsqueda de información, además de aspectos de la Ley de Acceso a la Información (LAI), transparencia y *accountability*. La herramienta metodológica utilizada fue la investigación de archivo (*archival research*). La recolección de datos se realizó en mayo / 2021 y consideró el período de 2012 a 2021. Se examinaron a través de estadísticas descriptivas más de 260.000 observaciones, entre particulares y empresas. Los resultados arrojaron que el perfil del solicitante - individual, en general, se caracteriza por ser masculino, de entre 21 y 40 años, con título universitario, funcionario o académico y residente en la región Sudeste. En cuanto al solicitante - persona jurídica, la mayoría son brasileños, ubicados en la región Sudeste y son de tamaño pequeño o mediano. A pesar de estos hallazgos, es pertinente señalar que el perfil del solicitante - individuo ha ido cambiando en los últimos años. Hubo un crecimiento sustancial en las solicitudes realizadas por personas del sexo femenino y con estudios secundarios. Las investigaciones futuras pueden evaluar las razones del aumento de solicitudes de personas con estas características.

Palabras clave: Información; Solicitud; Transparencia; Sector público; Comportamiento informativo.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Civil House of the Presidency of the Republic (2018, p. 16), “public governance comprises everything that a public institution does to ensure that its action is directed towards objectives aligned with the interests of society”. As it plays a key role in the allocation of taxpayers’ resources – which include individuals and legal entities –, the administration of public entities has a duty to provide information on their performance. In addition, access to information is, admittedly, a fundamental right of citizens, which is supported by national and international bodies (CONTROLADORIA-GENERAL DA UNIÃO, 2011; SASSO et al., 2017), such as the Organization of the United Nations (UN).

In this debate, transparency and accountability of public sector entities are topics that have been gaining more notoriety and importance (SCHILLEMANS, 2015). And, consequently, efforts have been made to ensure compliance, especially in the last two decades. For example, there was the launch of the Federal Government Transparency Portal (BRASIL, 2021b) in 2004 and the implementation – and its subsequent amendments – of Law No. 12.527, 2011), also known as the Access to Information Law (LAI). The responsibility for monitoring compliance lies with the Office of the Comptroller General (CGU).

As its name suggests, the LAI came to reinforce the right of access to public information in Brazil through transparency, which can be categorized into active and passive (PERES et al., 2020; SASSO et al.,

2017). Active transparency refers to readily available information that usually occurs through voluntary disclosure in electronic channels (PERES et al., 2020; SASSO et al., 2017), and it may or may not belong to the basic set that must be disclosed according to the determination of the LAI. Passive transparency occurs when information is not readily accessible to citizens, but can be obtained through specific requests and that must be made available to the applicant within deadlines stipulated by law (MICHENER; CONTRERAS; NISKIER, 2018; SASSO et al., 2017).

Michener, Contreras and Niskier (2018) state that, while public managers can select and treat more desirably the information that is under the umbrella of active transparency, those under the umbrella of passive transparency constitute a more rigorous test when it comes to commitment to the informational access because public bodies and entities are obliged to provide information to unforeseen demands. It is thus observed that the citizen has a crucial role for the implementation of the LAI and other mechanisms that guarantee the right of access to public information. Therefore, this work is particularly interested in passive transparency.

Within the scope of the federal executive branch, CGU is the body responsible for monitoring compliance with the LAI and Decree No. 7,724, of May 16, 2012 (SASSO et al., 2017). As of August 2020, CGU integrated the ombudsman (e-Ouv) and access to information (e-Sic) services into a single platform, Fala.BR – Information Access Module (CONTROLADORIA-GERAL DA UNIÃO, 2020). According to the

Federal Government website (BRASIL, 2021a), this integration of services generates opportunities for improvements and the development of new features that will make life easier for citizens and public managers at all government levels.

Based on this introductory exposition, the objective of this work is to analyze the profile of applicants for access to information requests on the Fala.BR platform from 2012 to 2021. In passive transparency, information users are the ones at the center of the process, and understanding their profile can help to see what kind of audience has the greatest information needs. The period of almost ten years (May/2012-May/2021) includes the validity of the LAI and allows observing whether there have been changes in the profile over time, as well as other comparative analyses. Finally, it should be noted that, to date, Fala.BR has received more than 1.2 million requests for access to information and ombudsman manifestations. This piece of data provides an idea of the relevance of this tool.

The rest of the work is structured as follows: section 2 presents a discussion of the relevant literature; section 3 describes the methodological procedures for carrying out this study; section 4 reports the results and their interpretation; and section 5 presents the conclusion.

2. THEORETICAL REFERENCE

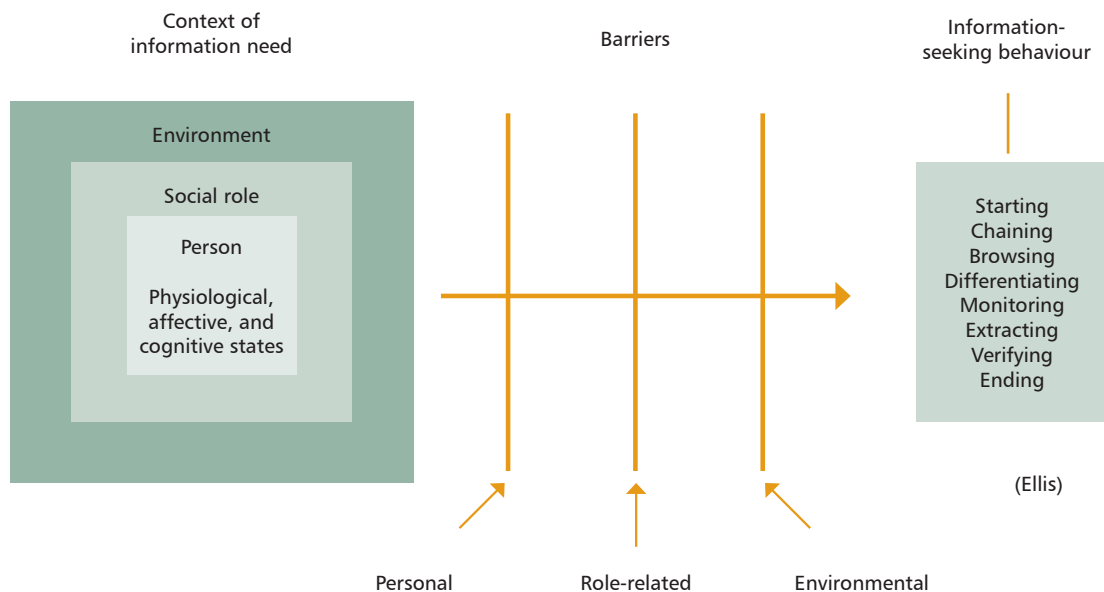
2.1. Characteristics of individuals and search for information

The need and behavior of searching for information are present in multiple areas, such as the management of small and medium-sized companies (JOROSI, 2006), health (HUBER; CRUZ, 2000), marketing (HENRIQUE; BARBOSA, 2009) and music (LEE; CHO; KIM, 2016). Likewise, people need information related to public bodies and entities. “A well-informed citizen has better conditions to know and access other essential rights, such as health, education and social benefits” (CONTROLADORIA GERAL DA UNIÃO, 2011, p. 8).

Different theoretical models were developed in order to explain the search for information and the information behavior of individuals (see HERNÁNDEZ SALAZAR et al., 2007; MARTÍNEZ-SILVEIRA; ODDONE, 2007; WILSON, 1997, 1999). Mainly from the 1980s onwards, studies on the subject began to give more emphasis to the user than to the information system itself (MARTÍNEZ-SILVEIRA; ODDONE, 2007). Although the models may have been built from different theoretical perspectives, the shift in focus from the system to the information user gives more value to individual characteristics. For this reason, examining the profile of the public that requests government information is timely.

Wilson's (1981) revised model of information-seeking behavior is influential in the field of Information Science and has been discussed over time. Among other factors, the model takes into account people's basic needs, such as physiological, affective and cognitive states, as shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 – MODEL OF INFORMATION-SEEKING BEHAVIOR



Source: Wilson (1999, p. 252).

Two assumptions support the model (WILSON, 1999): (i) the need for information is not a primary need, but a secondary need that arises from a need of the most basic type; and (ii) the person is likely to encounter barriers of various types when seeking information to meet a basic need. The most basic needs (physiological, affective and cognitive states) were extracted from the psychology literature and precede the need for information. For example, a deficient condition of the organism (physiological context) produces a need to preserve the health of the individual (basic need), who starts to need to be better informed about the disease (need for information). The social role (work) and the environment of which the person is a part also constitute contexts that produce basic needs that generate informational needs.

The barriers that prevent, or hinder, the search for information originate from the contexts themselves (WILSON, 1999). For example, an illness causes an individual to remain at rest or hospitalized to recover (barrier), limiting his access to information sources. In the context of public transparency, some

of the barriers highlighted by the previous literature belong to users and others to public entities. The obstacles include, but are not limited to, the lack of user skill in handling technology, the lack of preparation processes and training of civil servants, the absence of an effective information management system, and the limited public budget (GAMA; RODRIGUES, 2016; MICHENER; CONTRERAS; NISKIER, 2018). Some studies, such as Freire and Batista (2016), propose improvements to facilitate access to information. In the case of Freire and Batista (2016), such improvements are specific to the Transparency Portal, but they can, to a certain extent, be extended to other virtual platforms of governments at their different levels.

Finally, the model incorporates the seeking behaviors discussed by Ellis (1989). In his third chapter, Ellis (1989) provides an extensive discussion of the behavioral model and information retrieval system design, which includes the following behaviors: starting, chaining, browsing, differentiating, monitoring, extracting, verifying, and ending. Their descriptions are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1 – INFORMATION-SEEKING BEHAVIORS

BEHAVIOR	DESCRIPTION
Starting	The means employed by the user to begin seeking information, for example, asking some knowledgeable colleague.
Chaining	Following footnotes and citations in known material or ‘forward’ chaining from known items through citation indexes.
Browsing	‘Semi-directed or semi-structured searching’ (see Ellis 1989, p. 187).
Differentiating	Using known differences in information sources as a way of filtering the amount of information obtained
Monitoring	Keeping up-to-date or current awareness searching.
Extracting	Selectively identifying relevant material in an information source.
Verifying	Checking the accuracy of information.
Ending	Which may be defined as ‘tying up loose ends’ through a final search.

Source: Ellis (1989) and Wilson (1999).

The application of Wilson’s model (1981) to the public area is useful because it helps to systematize the path taken by the user in the search for meeting his information need. First, the context (personal, social and/or environmental role) generates a basic need (physiological, affective and/or cognitive state) in people, who start to look for information (informational need) to obtain the public service they need. In passive transparency, by definition, one of the main barriers is the unavailability of information. Thus, the person needs to make a specific request to obtain it. At this point, the user is already performing the information-seeking behaviors discussed by Ellis (1989).

Despite its usefulness for public management, Wilson (2020) notes that the model of information-seeking behavior is little explored in this area. The author observed only two occurrences of mention of this model in the public administration area. Based on this result, it is observed that the information-seeking behavior model can be better explored in the public management area. The topic of access to information from municipal, state and federal governments is a fertile field for the use of this model

2.2. Public information and profile of applicants

This subsection gathers important points related to access to public information and the applicant’s profile. The first is about monitoring. Sasso et al. (2017, p. 606) state that “in order to monitor passive transparency, it is necessary to disclose information about requests for information and about

users. If this does not occur, it is not known who or what information about the public sector is being requested”. Understanding the public that accesses these platforms can provide evidence that new – or more detailed – information needs to be disclosed due to greater demand. Therefore, making this new information available would eliminate the access requests that originate from it, putting less burden on public servants. Likewise, it would facilitate access to information by users, who would not need to make specific requests about this information. Therefore, analyzing the applicant’s profile can benefit both the government and the user.

A second point concerns the applicant’s profile. The results of the research by Michener, Contreras and Niskier (2018) indicate that the average user of government information is male and with higher education. Similarly, Freire and Batista (2016) found that most participants in the Transparency Portal Assessment Survey were men, with higher education, high income, public servants and with a mean age of 38 years. This profile, as noted by Freire and Batista (2016), corresponds to that of citizens who have traditionally engaged in public life. Considering these findings, it is desirable that more heterogeneous groups are involved. Diversity of opinion and requests can assist in the amplification of social control, as it would presumably cover a greater range and level of granularity of information regarding a certain public institution.

In a survey on passive transparency with 59 Brazilian federal universities in 2013 and 2014, Gama and Rodrigues (2016) found that the profile of appli-

cants was composed mostly of individuals (98%), mainly students (20%) and professors (7%). Legal entities were the minority (2%), consisting of teaching and research institutes, unions, public bodies and the third sector. These findings suggest that private sector companies can increase their participation and civic duty by requesting additional information from federal public universities. It is emphasized that public and private companies operate jointly, even if they are regulated differently. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that public companies hold information that can be valuable to the manager of the private area, such as those that allow sectoral, longitudinal and tax analyses.

A third and final point is that previous literature indicates that most studies have examined active transparency (MICHENER; CONTRERAS; NISKIER, 2018), at different levels of government (SASSO et al., 2017). For this reason, it is reasonable to assume that there is still substantial room for growth in the literature on passive transparency. Furthermore, although this type of transparency has been observed from different theoretical angles by researchers in the areas of controllership, management and accounting, there are relatively few published studies that consider the Information Science lens. For example, Baldissera et al. (2017) studied it from the contingency theory; Silva and Bruni (2019) from the influence of socio-economic variables; and Peres et al. (2020) from the association of characteristics of individuals. In this sense, the advantage of this research lies in the use of the information-seeking behavior model (WILSON, 1981, 1997, 1999), which is rarely present in the public administration literature (WILSON, 2020).

3.3. METHOD

In line with the purpose of the study, an archival research was carried out. This type of investigation, according to Smith (2015), is characterized by the range of sources used to produce research based on historical documents, texts, articles in academic journals, company financial reports and so on. In the research in question, this research method is compatible with the objective of the study because it aims to evaluate the profile of the applicant together with historical data recorded in a specific platform for receiving requests for access to information.

Data from applicants for access to information requests were downloaded on 05/22/2021 from the website of Fala.BR -- Integrated Platform for Ombudsman and Access to Information (CONTROLADORIA-GERAL DA UNIÃO, 2021). Fala.BR brought together the ombudsman and access to information services from bodies and entities within the scope of the Federal Executive Branch in a single platform. However, the focus of this work is on the user profile of the latter. It is also recognized that it is relevant for future research to address the profile of individuals and companies that manifest themselves through ombudsman services.

The choice of the Fala.BR platform was made for the following reasons: (i) Sasso et al. (2017) point out that the disclosure of its users is crucial for monitoring passive transparency; (ii) Fala.BR is similarly aligned with the overarching central themes of this work. It is a virtual resource that enhances transparency and accountability on the federal government level and is supported by the LAI. Its update occurs daily; (iii) Fala.BR represents an official platform of the government and, specifically, of the CGU. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that the records are reliable. (iv) the number of observations is another advantage of the Fala.BR database. Over the period 2012 to 2021, hundreds of thousands of observations can be downloaded; and (v) the data are publicly available. Thus, the analyses carried out here come to have higher degrees of verifiability by other scholars.

The population of interest in this study comprises applicants characterized as individuals and legal entities. It was verified that there were missing data in the database. This happens when applicants leave gaps in registration forms or fill them out inappropriately, generating inaccurate data that provides little or no information when analyzed. In this case, it was necessary to eliminate the observations (individuals or legal entities) with missing data or inaccurate data.

For individuals, Table 2 shows the total amounts of data per variable, from which the amounts referring to missing or inaccurate data were deducted and, finally, resulting in the amounts of informational data, which represent the observations effectively analyzed by this study. It is noteworthy that the Profession variable was the only one that did not have missing or inaccurate data. Thus, the amount of informational data is the same as the amount of total data.

TABLE 2 – INDIVIDUALS: TOTAL OBSERVATIONS AFTER EXCLUSIONS

INDIVIDUAL VARIABLE	TOTAL DATA		(-) MISSING OR INACCURATE DATA		(=) INFORMATIONAL DATA	
	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	%
Gender	252.415	100,00	36.530	14,47	215.885	85,53
Age Group	252.415	100,00	55.155	21,85	197.260	78,15
Brazilian Region	252.415	100,00	41.214	16,33	211.201	83,67
Education	252.415	100,00	55.827	22,12	196.588	77,88
Profession	252.415	100,00	0	0	252.415	100

*The exclusions were due to missing data and, specifically for the gender variable, the presence of the “others” category.

Source: Research data.

The same approach was used for the legal entities database, which had 11,819 observations in total. Table 3 contains the characteristics of legal entities, in which it can be seen that the variable Type of Legal Entity did not present missing or inaccurate data. However, the variable Brazilian Region presented a frequency of 6.38% of these. The Informational data column contains the number of observations actually analyzed in this study.

TABLE 3 - LEGAL ENTITY: TOTAL OBSERVATIONS RESULTING FROM THE APPLICANT'S PROFILE

LEGAL PERSON VARIABLE	TOTAL DATA		(-) MISSING DATA		(=) INFORMATIONAL DATA	
	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	%
Type of Legal Entity	11.819	100,00	0	0	11.819	100
Brazilian Region	11.819	100,00	754	6,38	11.065	93,62

Source: Research data.

After these procedures, the applicant's profile was determined through univariate descriptive analysis using tables (not reported) and their respective graphical representations (reported). The computational routine was performed in the R software version 4.6.2 (R CORE TEAM, 2020).

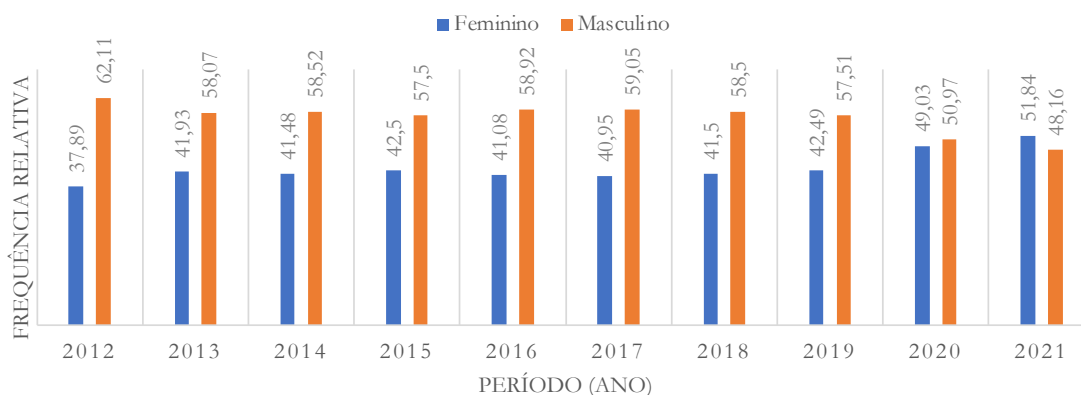
4. RESULTS

4.1. Profile of individuals

In Figure 2, note that male applicants are more frequent than female applicants, considering the period from 2012 to 2019, attaining greater balance in 2020 (50.97% male; 49.03% female). In 2021, the

number of female applicants exceeded that of males. Especially based on the 2020 and 2021 results, there appears to be an upward trend in female applicants. This suggests that the informational need of women has been increasing, particularly for information that is not disclosed by the active transparency of public institutions at the federal level.

FIGURA 2 – PESSOA FÍSICA: FREQUÊNCIAS RELATIVAS DO SEXO DOS SOLICITANTES DE 2012 A MAIO DE 2021



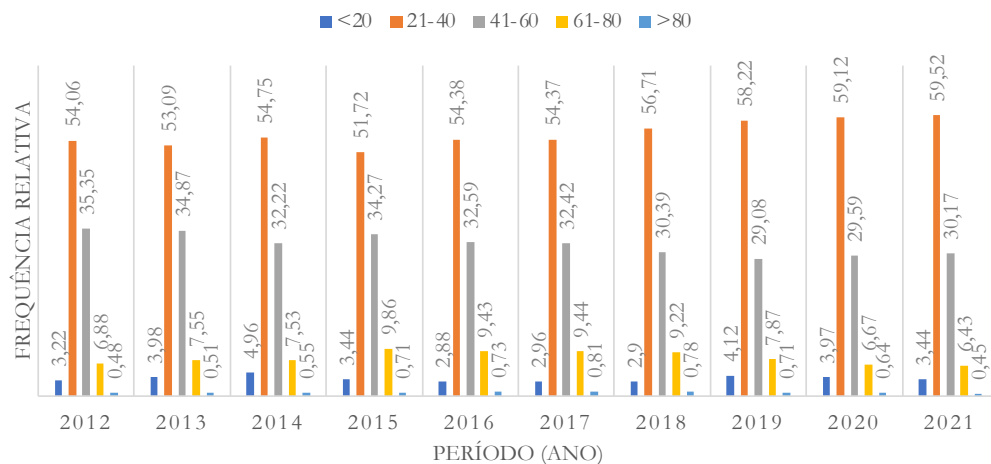
Source: Research data.

As pointed out in previous studies (MICHENER; CONTRERAS; NISKIER, 2018; PERES et al., 2020), the predominant sex is male. But the analysis of the years 2020 and 2021 shows that there is an increase, in proportional terms, in female participation in the request for public information via the Fala.BR platform. It is pertinent to mention that Brazil was, and is still being, deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This point may be one of the reasons why people sought more information from public bodies. Thus, according to Wilson's (1981) model, the combination of personal (gender) and environmental factors (COVID-19) may have generated a greater need for information. Nevertheless, it is worth mentio-

ning that the result for 2021 should be viewed with some caution as it is representative up to the date of data collection (22/05/2021).

In Figure 3, it can be seen that the requests were made mostly by people between 21 and 40 years of age. For all periods, this public represented more than 50%. This result is consistent with the study by Freire and Batista (2016), whose applicants' average age was 38. This age is within the range of highest occurrence of users in this survey. The second largest group in terms of age group was the public between 41 and 60 years old, with the percentage ranging from 29.08% (2019) to 35.35% (2012). Then, people aged 61 to 80 years were the most representative, followed by those aged up to 20 years and, finally, those over 80 years old.

FIGURE 3- INDIVIDUALS: RELATIVE FREQUENCIES OF APPLICANTS' AGE GROUPS FROM 2012 TO MAY 2021



Source: Research data.

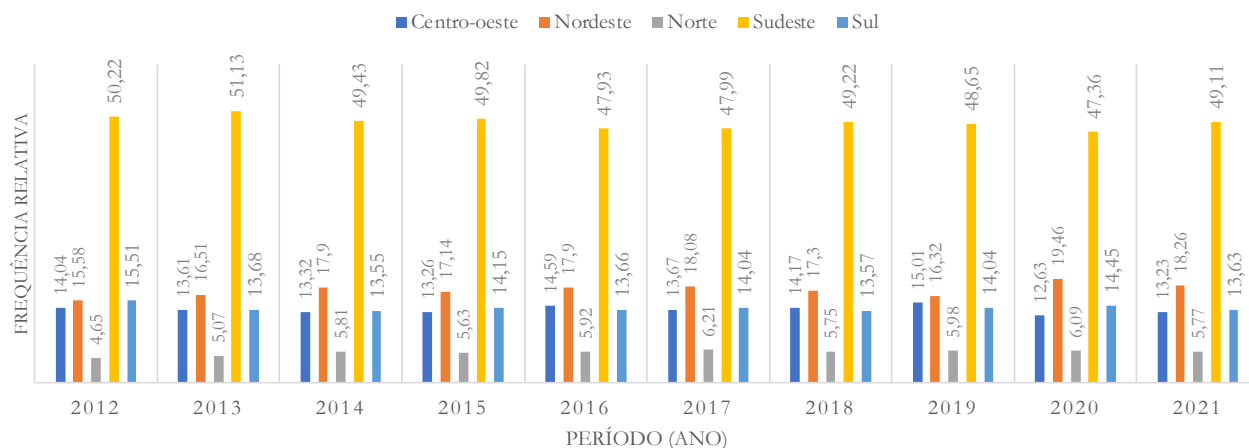
Previous literature explains the relationship between age and public transparency (BIRSKYTE, 2019; PERES et al., 2020). If, on the one hand, older people can be considered more politically active, younger people, on the other hand, are more familiar with new technologies and are able to request information more easily through electronic portals. Considering that most requests are made via the internet, it is expected that younger citizens will find it easier to make them than older ones, especially when there is a high informational need, observed in the 21-40 age group. Even though the Fala.BR platform has been developed and improved based on digital inclusion, some older citizens may nonetheless have difficulty understanding or handling it.

According to the information-seeking behavior model (WILSON, 1981, 1997, 1999), barriers can make it difficult or even prevent individuals from being able to access the desired information. The reduced number of requests by individuals in the higher age groups suggests that technology may have been a barrier to information acquisition. Furthermore, the elderly are in smaller numbers compared to the young population, which also explains the low number of requests.

Jaeger and Bertot (2010) state that the internet had a substantial influence on the way individuals search for information, reshaping their behaviors. However, the authors also note that their access is not equal, in addition to differences in bandwidth access and technological skills (JAEGER; BERTOT, 2010). Thus, the lack of access to the internet and/or the lack of skills to handle technology configure barriers in the search for information, evidenced by the information-seeking behavior model (WILSON, 1981).

Figure 4 shows the result for the applicant's geographic region of residence. It is noticed that around 50% of all requests are from the Southeast region. This result was expected considering that there is a strong population concentration in this region. The second most representative region was the Northeast, whose percentage fluctuated between 15% and 20% over the period of analysis. The North region, in turn, has the lowest participation, reaching a maximum of 6.21% in 2017 and fluctuating between 4% and 7% in the rest of the periods. The South and Midwest regions presented very similar participations and with little variability, being between 13% and 16% throughout the period. Nationality was also analyzed. It was observed that 1% of the requests were made by foreign citizens.

FIGURE 4 – INDIVIDUALS: RELATIVE FREQUENCIES OF APPLICANTS' REGIONS FROM 2012 TO MAY 2021



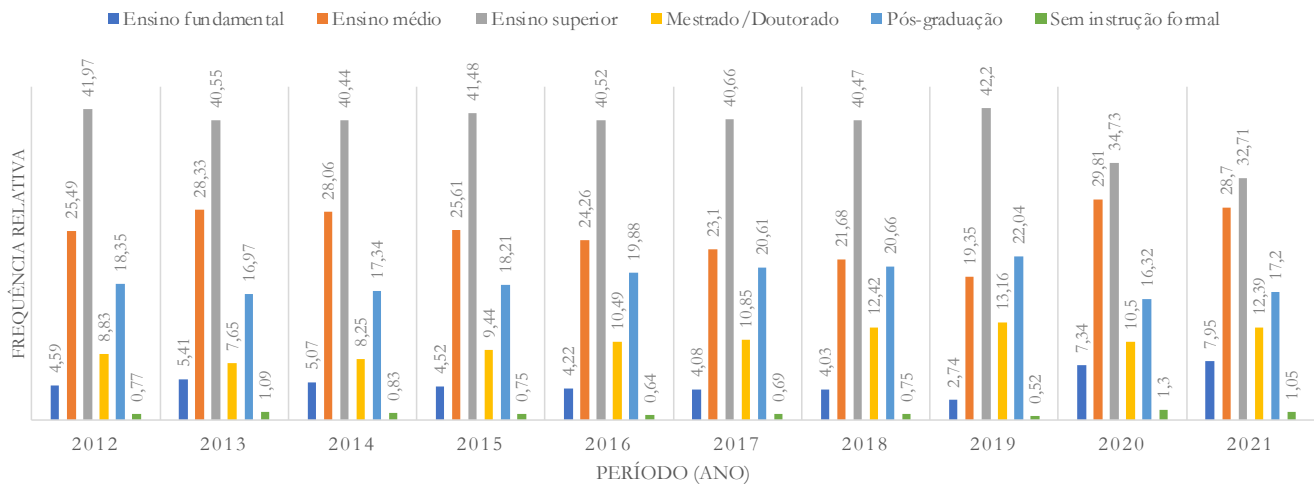
Source: Research data.

The analysis by region is relevant because it also usually represents different cultures. In this way, it can point out how cultural differences influence civic behavior in relation to public transparency. In addition, analysis by territory can show how economic development impacts passive transparency. Economic development and quality of life indices (such as the HDI, for example) are often associated with local public policies. It is assumed that more politically involved citizens exert greater pressure on local governments to meet demands that promote better quality of life. Analysis by territorial jurisdiction is supported by Wilson's (1981) model, since environmental factors can also generate informational needs.

The study by Peres et al. (2020) found no significant association between region and passive transparency, but the authors noted that the geographic region has been little explored and that further investigations can be developed.

Figure 5 shows the results related to applicants' education from 2012 to 2021. It is noted that the requests made by people without formal education showed the lowest frequency, which is compatible with the expectation. Since the request for information requires the requester to write objectively and clearly, individuals with little literacy are less able to write such requests. Observing this aspect from the perspective of the information seeking-behavior model (WILSON, 1981), it can be seen that the lack of literacy or a deficient educational background can constitute a barrier when requesting public information.

FIGURE 5 – INDIVIDUALS: RELATIVE FREQUENCIES OF APPLICANTS' SCHOOLING FROM 2012 TO MAY 2021



Source: Research data.

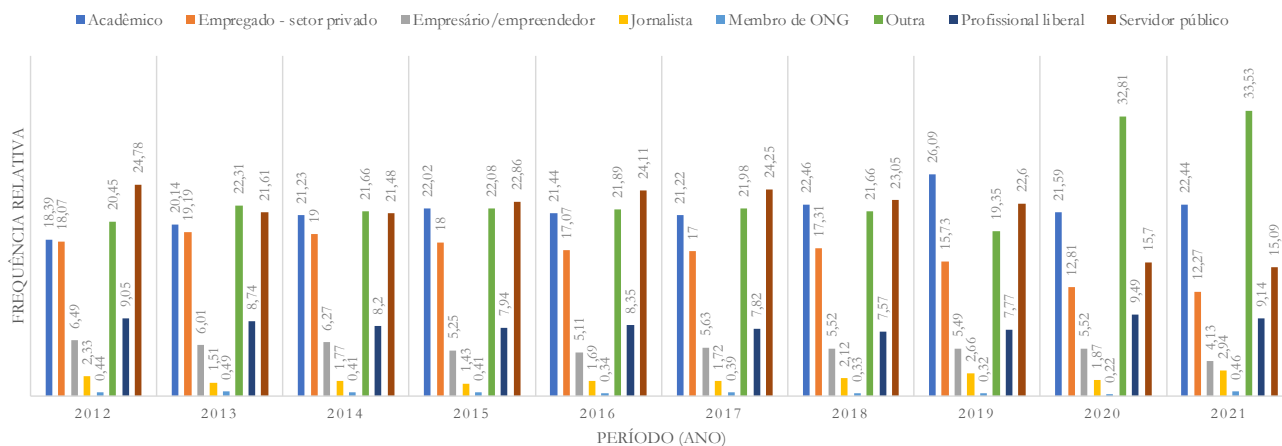
In contrast, applicants with higher education are the ones who made the most requests for public information in all years of the time series analyzed, reaching almost twice as many requests from those with high school or postgraduate education¹. In the last two years, there was a reduction in the number of requests from applicants belonging to the High School and Higher Education categories, differing by approximately 4%. This finding indicates that citizens with high school education are in need of more information than they usually did. One of the potential explanations is, again, the new coronavirus pandemic, a scenario in which health information is

most needed. From this descriptive analysis, other potential explanations should be investigated in the future.

Regarding the profession, Figure 6 shows the results. Before the analysis, it is necessary to mention that some professional categories were aggregated, as they presented low frequency. In this way, municipal, state and federal civil servants were grouped in the Public servant category; national and international NGO members were grouped into the NGO Member category; Researchers, professors and students were grouped into the Academic category; the Self-employed category comprises self-employed professionals and workers; finally, political party members and union representatives were reclassified to the Other (profession) category.

1. Postgraduate applicants not included in the Master's/PhD category.

FIGURE 6 – INDIVIDUALS: RELATIVE FREQUENCIES OF APPLICANTS' PROFESSIONS FROM 2012 TO MAY 2021



Source: Research data.

It is noticed that a relevant portion of applicants reported having a profession that differs from the options offered by the registration form, indicating profession as “Other”, with more than 33% of declarations of this type in 2020 and 2021. Public servants, academics and employees of the private sector² hold the highest frequencies following the Other category. This finding is consistent with the expectation of the authors of this research, since public servants are highly involved in the public sector; academics develop research based on public data; and private sector employees relate differently to federal public entities and have different information needs.

Members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are the ones who made the least requests, with less than 0.5% in all years. While this result was expected, it is also important to note that there is ample room for growth in applicants for this type of organization. Considering that NGOs enjoy tax benefits and government policies, the exchange of information between NGOs and government needs to be closer. And this can be done through passive transparency. It is usual for NGOs not to benefit from public policies due to their lack of knowledge. In this sense, requests for information about the existence of these public policies (or related policies) must be made, as well as other requests that are applicable within the rules of access to information.

In general, the profile of the applicant – individual has remained relatively constant. However, some more recent changes are worth mentioning. First, the representation of females has increased significantly in recent years and even surpassed that of males in 2021. Thus, even though historically the male sex has been predominant, its representation has been decreasing. Another point is the growth of applicants with high school education, also in recent years (2020 and 2021). This may indicate that high school students are more politically and civically engaged. These analyses allow future investigations to seek explanations for these results.

4.2. Profile of legal entities

Legal entities represent the minority of requests for access to information. This result is consistent with that of Gama and Rodrigues (2016), a study in which companies represented only 2% of requests for access to information, while the rest were individuals. This does not mean that understanding their profile is unimportant. The identification of the applicant’s profile – legal entity can help public entities to be better prepared to provide an answer or anticipate common demands to these companies. The analysis of legal entities is another advantage in relation to the previous literature, in which there is a greater concentration of analyses of individuals. Two informational characteristics of the companies that are available in the database of the Fala.BR platform

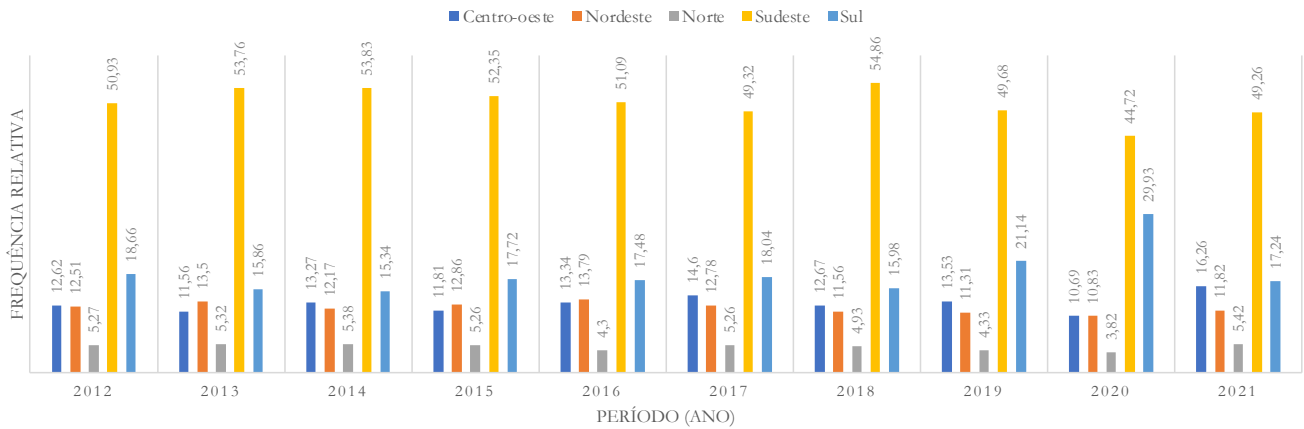
2. Except those classified as NGO members.

are: (i) geographic region from which the request for access to information originates; and (ii) type of legal entity.

Figure 7 reports the result of the Brazilian Region variable. This analysis points to the Southeast region as the one with the highest percentage of participation and the North region with the lowest, similar to what was observed in the profile of indi-

viduals. Likewise, only 1% of requests are from non-Brazilian companies. In the last two years, there has been a notable growth in requests from the South region. Until 2018, the maximum value in this region was 18.66%. In 2019 and 2020, this percentage reached, respectively, 21.14% and 29.93%. In 2021 (until May), the percentage dropped to 17.24%. Still, it is a point of attention.

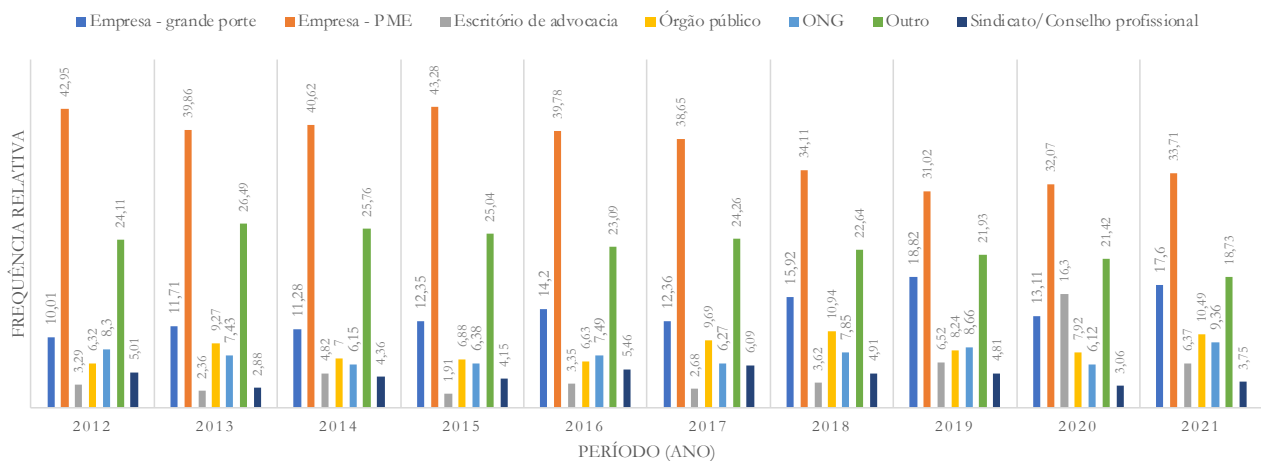
FIGURE 7 – LEGAL ENTITY: RELATIVE FREQUENCIES OF APPLICANTS’ BRAZILIAN REGIONS FROM 2012 TO MAY 2021



Source: Research data.

Figure 8 shows the results for the type of legal entity. Similar to what was done for individuals, some categories were aggregated due to low frequency. The Public body category comprises municipal, state, federal public bodies and public and state-owned companies; Political parties and communication vehicles were aggregated in the Other category; and, finally, the Union category includes unions and professional councils.

FIGURE 8 – LEGAL ENTITY: RELATIVE FREQUENCIES OF THE TYPE OF LEGAL ENTITY FROM 2012 TO MAY 2021



Source: Research data.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) had the highest frequencies of requests for access to information, with more than 30% of requests over time. As SMEs are in greater number in Brazil, this finding is consistent with reality. Large companies represent a relevant share of the total requests, especially in the last four years (2018-2021). Unions and/or professional councils have low percentages of request participation. Law firms also had low percentages, with the exception of the year 2020, in which it is possible to notice a significant growth in requests. Future investigations may explore the reasons for this strong growth in requests.

In general, legal entities that make requests for access to information are predominantly characterized as Brazilian, small or medium-sized and located in the Southeast region. Although these results were in line with expectations, it is important to note that there was a strong growth in orders from large-sized enterprises. NGOs also showed growth in 2021, which suggests an increase in demand for information other than what was being requested.

The information-seeking behavior model initially proposed by Wilson (1981) is also applicable to companies. Companies with different characteristics and inserted in multiple contexts may have different informational needs. The type of information required by a for-profit company may be different from that required by a non-profit one. In addition, the barriers faced in the search for information can also vary depending on the characteristics of the companies. Large-sized companies generally have larger teams and more sophisticated equipment as compared to small businesses. On the other hand, the amount of information required by small enterprises is smaller in relation to that of large companies. Future studies can analyze, based on the information-seeking behavior model (WILSON, 1981, 1997, 1999), the relationship between the characteristics of legal entities and their level of informational need within the scope of LAI.

5.5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this article was to analyze the profile of requests for access to information on the Fala.BR platform from 2012 to 2021. More than 260,000 observations, including individuals and corporations, were examined using univariate descriptive statistics. From the analyses, it is concluded that the profile of the applicant – individual is predominantly characterized by being male, aged between 21 and 40 years, with higher education, who are civil servants or academics and who reside in the Southeast region. With regard to legal entities, most are Brazilian, located in the Southeast region and small or medium-sized.

Throughout the analysis, some trends were identified that deserve further research in future opportunities. The first is the emergence of females in recent years, which surpassed males in 2021 (considering up to the download date). The second is the growth in requests from people with high school education. In recent years, approximately one-third of applications have been made by people with a high school education. Some questions arise from this point: are high school students more politically engaged? Are teachers asking for works that motivate these students to accompany public entities? Future research may try to understand this finding.

As for the limitations of the research, the following can be mentioned: (i) the analyses are univariate. Even so, they are valuable for pointing out points that deserve more detailed exploration; (ii) there is little data available about legal entities. Thus, it was not possible to draw a more complete profile of companies that make requests for access to information via the Fala.BR platform; and (iii) the data were collected in May 2021. Therefore, the results for this period must be analyzed with caution, as they do not cover the full period of the year 2021. Likewise, the year 2012 does not include every month since the LAI went into effect on May 16, 2012.

As an indication of future research, it is important that passive transparency, and particularly the request for access to information, be observed by different theories and theoretical models. The lens through which a phenomenon is seen can generate findings that are complementary to those present in the literature. In this study, the information-seeking behavior model was adopted (WILSON, 1981, 1997, 1999), which supported the data analysis by highligh-

ting the context of the need for information and potential barriers encountered when making requests for access to information. Furthermore, an assessment focused on informational needs is relevant, which may involve aspects other than the applicant's

profile. As a last suggestion, we raise the possibility of associating the applicants' variables with each other, such as, for example, gender and region of the country, type of person (individual or legal) and region of the country, gender and age group, and so on.

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