**Documents suggest JBS action against journalist Leonardo Sakamoto**

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Legal documents produced after a court order suggest that the companies JBS and 4Buzz promoted paid ads on Google that exposed a defamatory text against journalist and activist Leonardo Sakamoto. Mr. Sakamoto is also a member of NGO Repórter Brasil and writes on a blog hosted by UOL – a company controlled by the Folha Group, which publishes newspaper Folha de S. Paulo.

According to the documents obtained from Google and phone operator GVT, the companies would have sponsored the link “Leonardo Sakamoto Lies”, which came as the first result in searches using the terms “Sakamoto”, “Leonardo Sakamoto” or “Blog do Sakamoto” in 2015.

Meat processing giant JBS owns brands Friboi and Swift, and earned 12.9 billion reais in 2014. 4Buzz is a Ribeirão Preto-based firm hired by JBS in 2015 to counter rumors that a son of former Brazilian President Lula would be the owner of Friboi – among other things.

Targeted by stories published on Repórter Brasil’s website on employment and environmental issues, JBS denies having any connection with the vilifying link. The company’s press office promised an internal investigation on what happened. 4Buzz also denies any connection with the event.

The story linking the two companies to the attack to Mr. Sakamoto began in May 2015, when the website “Leonardo Sakamoto Lies” started to be promoted. The link led Internet users to the text “Sakamoto receives over R$ 1 million to call opponents mercenaries, Luciano Ayan denounces”, hosted on the website FolhaPolítica.org. The website’s owner is unknown and it has no known relation to newspaper **Folha de S. Paulo**. It has 1.1 million followers on Facebook and publishes material unfavorable to the Workers’ Party (PT) as well as false news.

The text against Mr. Sakamoto, which is still on the Internet, is full of corruption charges. It says that Repórter Brasil received “over R$ 1 million a year to praise President Dilma Roussef” and Mr. Sakamoto would have gotten “most of the prize”, and that the NGO “does not develop any physical activity”; it “burns over R$ 1 million a year from the Ministry of Human rights.”

Mr. Sakamoto decided to go to court and ask Google to inform who had hired the ad.

In September, under a court order, Google pointed to “JBS/SA”. It provided the address, a phone number and an email of the company, as well as a list of IPs (Internet Protocols, a sort of web ID), indicating the Internet connections that operated the account that hired it. However, Google did not say who paid for the ad. Later, phone operator GVT informed the Court that almost all IPs belonged to 4Buzz.

The text published by FolhaPolítica distorts information taken from Repórter Brasil’s own website. The NGO’s financial statements include an agreement with the Secretariat for Human Rights (SDH) of the Brazilian government to fund part of project Slavery, no way! *(Escravo Nem Pensar!)*, to prevent slave labor.

In fact, SDH’s total contribution is R$ 499,000 over three years. The project’s largest funding sources are the International Labor Organization and other international agencies.

Although it was not the first defamatory action against Mr. Sakamoto on the web, the spreading of the link “Leonardo Sakamoto Lies” by Google and, as a result, by countless blogs and posts on social networking websites, according to him, had the strongest reach and posed the highest risks.

“In addition to the threats, I was the target of name-calling and even physical assault more often”, he says.

“You’re walking down the street when an unknown person comes and hits you with their shoulder. Another day a car stops and someone swears and spits at you. You go to a restaurant and then photos of you in the place start circulating, with insults”.

Viralization of false news even mobilized federal prosecutors, who started an investigation. Members of NGO Repórter Brasil had to explain details of their activities. In the documents, the investigators found that the public prosecutors’ office itself is an official supporter of project *Slavery, no way!.* The case was filed.

**THE OTHER SIDE’S VERSION**

JBS and 4Buzz deny having hired Google to promote offensive content against journalist Leonardo Sakamoto.

Through its press office, JBS confirmed that it hired 4Buzz for web actions in 2015 and, on occasion, it authorized it to hire Google to promote news related to the company. But none of them, it underscored, involved the name of Mr. Sakamoto or his NGO.

JBS’s press office also said that they respect the work carried out by Mr. Sakamoto and Repórter Brasil and that it would conduct an internal investigation on what could possibly have happened for the company’s name to appear as hiring the ad.

4Buzz partner Rodrigo Vanzon said he would check if there was any record of the vilifying ad in his company’s documents.

Days later, he said that nothing had been found and that he could not explain how 4Buzz IPs were associated with the case.

Google said that its contract with the sponsor of the link “Leonardo Sakamoto Lies” includes confidentiality, which prevents it from informing who paid for the ad.

For the same reason, Google does not report how long the vilifying webpage received higher exposure, the amount of times it was displayed as the first search result, or any other terms that might have been hired to be associated with the link.

Google said its policies may result in the removal of a disrespectful ad after a complaint by any user though an electronic form.

But it also said it could not inform whether the link “Leonardo Sakamoto Lies” ceased to be displayed as the first search result for that reason.

The only way to contact the website FolhaPolítica, whose author is unknown, is an email address. We tried it, but there was no reply.

Months after the defamatory link was displayed on Google, Sakamoto was the target of high-impact false news for the second time. In January, Minas Gerais-based newspaper *Edição do Brasil* published his photo on its front page, together with the headline “Political scientist says retirees are useless to society”.

When Sakamoto denounced that he had never given such a statement, the newspaper took the interview off its website and said it believed it had been a victim of an employee acting in bad faith.

In social networking websites, however, the false statement had already viralized. The case does not seem to be related to the sponsored link.