



Empowering Citizens: Toward Sustainable Fact-Checking in East and Southeast Asia

EDITED BY

Yuko Kasuya and Sherly Haristya

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Empowering Citizens:

*Toward Sustainable Fact-checking
in East and Southeast Asia*

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Yuko Kasuya and Sherly Haristya

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For inquiries, please contact: ykasuya@keio.jp

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July 2025
Yuko Kasuya

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Chapter 1: Overview

Fact-checking Initiatives in Asia: At the Crossroad

Sherly Haristya¹

The classical yet popular story “Pinocchio” has taught many generations not to spread lies. Unfortunately, we seem to live in a despair world. The widespread use of social media and other emerging digital technologies that make us more interconnected, ironically at the same time bring the rapid spread of various forms of hoaxes. Hoaxes ranging from health, finance, updates during disasters and emergency, science, lifestyles, to rumors about politics colour our day-to-day information consumption. Various research and news reports have showed how those hoaxes are threatening lives, shared reality, societal trusts, and democracy.²

Asia as the largest, most diverse, and most populous continent in the world is also affected with this global turbulence. The Asia-Pacific region records nearly 60 percent of the total 5.24 billion social media users globally in January 2025.³ East and Southeast Asia particularly hold a unique position as regions with high social media use⁴ and at the same time digital divide in terms of Internet access⁵ and digital literacy skills.⁶ With such paradoxical conditions, this report portrays the responses from both regions in fighting the storm of information disorder that started to hit the regions and the world in around 2014-2016 during critical times, such as elections and social movements.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

¹ LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Jakarta, Indonesia

²<https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/un-tackling-%E2%80%98infodemic%E2%80%99-misinformation-and-cybercrime-covid-19>; <https://www.asc.upenn.edu/news-events/news/journalist-and-activist-maria-ressa-facts-truth-trust>; <https://academic.oup.com/joc/article/71/2/163/6252344?login=false>

³ <https://datareportal.com/social-media-users>; <https://www.go-globe.com/social-media-usage-in-asia-pacific-statistics-and-trends>

⁴ <https://www.campaignasia.com/article/global-social-media-users-surpass-5-billion-sea-most-active/494147>; <https://wearesocial.com/id/blog/2023/07/social-media-use-reaches-new-milestone/>

⁵ <https://datareportal.com/global-digital-overview>

⁶<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-05/UNDP-RBAP-Needs-of-Vulnerable-Marginalized-Young-People-on-Digital-Literacy-Safety-Participation-2022.pdf>; <https://asiafoundation.org/addressing-the-digital-skills-gap-in-the-asia-pacific-whats-in-it-for-the-private-sector/>

Around those years, all the chapters in this report recorded that fact-checking initiatives started to emerge in East and Southeast Asia as a grassroots response to fight back the spread of hoaxes and to empower the public, especially vulnerable groups. Various local stakeholders, ranging from concerned citizen groups, academic institutions, and media organisations and journalists, put in their commitments in defending truth. Some concerned citizens started with a small step developing a social media page to empower their parents and other senior citizens, students, and neighbors. While some others with academic and or journalistic backgrounds uphold journalistic values since the early formation of their fact-checking initiatives.

These days, many fact-checking initiatives in the regions have been evolving as a testimony to their resilience and commitment of upholding truth. As this report reveals that all of them showed efforts to improve their governance, legitimacy, and efficacy that include: their organisational structure, funding, claim collection method, fact-checking and classification method, and presentation and outreach strategy. Some went extra miles to ensure their organisational and financial sustainability by delivering various activities and experimenting with several different income resources, such as through subscriptions, training and workshops, donations, crowdfunding, and many other forms. Meanwhile, the majority of income sources of many fact-checking initiatives come from big tech companies.

Aware of the magnitude of shared challenges in tackling hoaxes, some fact-checking organisations join themselves into collaboration and coalitions. For example, “SNU FactCheck” in South Korea is a collaboration between The Seoul National University Institute of Communication Research and 16 media outlets. There is also the “Cek Fakta” coalition in Indonesia that consists of civil society and media based fact-checking initiatives in Indonesia. Cek Fakta was initiated by MAFINDO (Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society), AJI (Alliance of Independent Journalists), and AMSI (Indonesian Cyber Media Association) in 2018. As of August 2024, CekFakta has more than 100 individual fact-checking organizations (CekFakta, n.d.d). They coordinate the division of fact-checking related-roles among themselves to fulfil the needs in the public.

Global crises, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, have highlighted all of those hard work put by fact-checking communities were much needed by the societies. Amidst uncertainties of the unknown disease and cure at that time, fact-checking communities were at the front row battling hoaxes related to COVID-19, managing crises, and saving lives during the pandemic.⁷ Accordingly, the role of fact-checking initiatives in the regions to some extent gained acknowledgement and support from the governments (see the Japan chapter)

STRENGTHENING FACT-CHECKING TODAY, EMPOWERING CITIZENS IN THE REGIONS TOMORROW

While fact-checking initiatives in East and Southeast Asia are progressing to some extent, on the other hand, some chapters in this report also revealed the challenges faced by and the contestations directed

⁷ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/20563051211069048>; <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/how-covid-drove-the-evolution-of-fact-checking/>

to fact-checking initiatives in the regions. The following part is therefore written with a hope to spark further reflections from concerned readers to rethink the future roles of fact-checking initiatives in the regions, but also globally amidst the increasingly complex information ecosystem these days.

Emerging technologies and the roles of fact-checkers: What do we mean by falsehood?

Generative AI and other emerging technologies are increasingly being deployed in our daily lives, including during crucial events, such as elections. While bringing some benefits to ease the production of content for many people, at the same time various research show that the deployment of generative AI has increased the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation during elections.⁸ Some fact-checkers in the report perceived the dynamics of our information society amidst the fast-paced technological development and adoption make the fact-checking activities become a never-ending battle. With the flood of hoaxes, the key question here is what do they fact-check?

The 2024 presidential election in Indonesia, for example, experienced the widespread use of AI-generated cute caricature as the online campaign strategy of candidates. The political branding strategy⁹ targeted the 52% youth voters at the election. Meanwhile, critical citizen groups, who witnessed or were aware of the massive human rights abuse in the 1998 riots that led the country to reform era, perceived the use of cute caricature of candidates as an effort to wrap the past dark histories of political candidates. Some were in limbo on how to define and categorise the new forms of falsehood that they never knew before. They were trying to find the appropriate and accurate name to label the new addition to the disinformation family. Some titled it as toxic positivity.¹⁰ Some others called the strategy as the tip of an iceberg that covered other manipulative communication.¹¹ Some even considered it as a propaganda.¹²

The situation in Indonesia provides an opportunity to reflect and rethink the landscape of falsehood these days. Is the categorisation of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation still relevant with the rapid changes happening in our interconnected and complex information ecosystem? How can fact-checkers verify AI-generated cute caricature, if it is indeed considered as falsehood? Consequently, what is the future role of fact-checkers in

⁸ <https://akademie.dw.com/en/generative-ai-is-the-ultimate-disinformation-amplifier/a-68593890>;
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877050924027145>;
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/generative-ai-already-helping-fact-checkers-its-proving-less-useful-small-languages-and>

⁹ <https://journals.telkomuniversity.ac.id/liski/article/view/7565>

¹⁰ <https://aji.or.id/informasi/ross-tapsell-prabowo-uses-toxic-positivity-2024-election>;
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/indonesia>

¹¹ https://engagemedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/140125_Buku-EngageMedia_Revisi-Proofread-compressed.pdf

¹² <https://scholarhub.uny.ac.id/informasi/vol54/iss2/12/>

the more complex information landscape with the rapid deployment of emerging digital technologies? Are debunking direct hoaxes still relevant to today's needs of the societies?

Towards accountable, sustainable, and Impactful fact-checking initiatives.

Fact-checking initiatives are in the business of trust. Fact-checking initiatives need to build and maintain their legitimacy and credibility by strengthening their internal governance mechanisms. This may include, for example, increasing the transparency of their finance and their mechanisms for selecting, debunking, and categorizing claims. That way, they will gain public trust to use their fact-checked content and other services.

As they were improving their internal governance for the above purpose, some of the fact-checking initiatives in this research tried to report their progresses to be registered in the International Fact-checking Network (IFCN). The acknowledgement from international community may serve as a means to strengthen their legitimacy and credibility as accountable fact-checking initiatives. Additionally, the acknowledgement would also allow for funds from social media company Meta (the parent company of Facebook, Instagram, and Whatsapp) as an official 'third-party' fact-checker to be channeled to their organisations.

Some fact-checking initiatives, however, took such acknowledgement in a more critical perspective. For example, the Malaysia chapter explains that fact-checking initiatives in Malaysia have been pondering the need to balance between fulfilling quantitative and qualitative goals of fact-checked articles as required by IFCN and needed by their local communities. They questioned, for example, the obligation for IFCN signatories to write eight stories per month in relation to the production of investigative and impactful stories that may take more time.

This report comes at a time when several major geopolitical changes are pressuring the global ecosystem of communications and information. On January 7, 2025, Meta announced its decision to stop its fact-checking program and loosen the content moderation policies on its platforms.¹³ In other words, Meta challenges the fact-checking initiatives that it once highly praised and supported. Meta now stated that fact-checking has contributed to censorship. Thus, Meta will just rely on community reporting mechanisms to mitigate the spread of false information. Meanwhile, international multistakeholder communities (ranging from academia with their research, various governments with their regulatory interventions, and civil society groups) around the world have pushed for more responsibility and transparency from social media companies in tackling problematic content in their platforms.¹⁴ This decision has caused outrage and criticisms among the international communities. While the decision was starting in

¹³ <https://about.fb.com/news/2025/01/meta-more-speech-fewer-mistakes/>

¹⁴ <https://turkiye.un.org/en/236022-un-chief-calls-new-era-social-media-integrity-bid-stem-misinformation;>
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/01/freedom-speech-not-freedom-spread-racial-hatred-social-media-un-experts>

the U.S., many saw the potential ramifications to the information ecosystem in Asia and the rest of the world.¹⁵

Moreover, on April 18, 2025, the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) announced its changing priorities and the termination of “awards that are not aligned with NSF’s priorities..., including but not limited to those on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and misinformation/disinformation.”¹⁶ In the announcement, the NSF cited an executive order signed by Donald Trump on his first day in office aimed at “Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship.”¹⁷ Reportedly, there are at least 402 grants on the above topic as part of the cuts.¹⁸

In addition to the funding issues, there are still plenty other challenges faced by fact-checking initiatives. This include, for example, the safety and security of fact-checkers on the ground and the legal and political pressures that impeded the existence of fact-checking initiatives positioning their work as being politically biased (see the South Korea chapter).

By reflecting on the latest withdrawal of support from social media companies, the NSF, and the U.S. to fact-checking practices and research, countries and regions covered in this research to rethink the importance of trusted information and communication ecosystems for their societal lives. Stakeholder groups in the regions are in a position to take their place in shaping the global ecosystem of communication and information that will ensure robust societal foundations at the local level. Governments in the regions can play their part in supporting and empowering fact-checking and digital literacy initiatives in their areas. Universities and think tanks in the regions should reflect on their research priorities and impact, especially on the topic of tackling mis/disinformation. Fact-checking entities need to reflect on the sustainability of their fact-checking and to explore alternative sustainable and accountable fact-checking business models, such as donations, crowdfunding, or partnerships with industries.

The magnitude of challenges and the shrinking resources in our shared information ecosystem are a wake-up call for us to collaborate, coordinate, and maximise our impact in defending truth and empowering humanity beyond our continent.

¹⁵ <https://www.nus.edu.sg/newshub/news/2025/2025-01/2025-01-17/META-st-17jan-pB2.pdf>;
<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/singapore-monitoring-impact-of-metas-move-to-end-fact-checking-programme>

¹⁶ <https://www.nsf.gov/updates-on-priorities>

¹⁷ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/restoring-freedom-of-speech-and-ending-federal-censorship/>

¹⁸ <https://www.niemanlab.org/2025/04/national-science-foundation-cancels-research-grants-related-to-misinformation-and-disinformation/>

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Chapter 2: Hong Kong

Small Non-profit and Academic Initiatives Leading the Way

*Masato Kajimoto*¹⁹

The landscape of fact-checking initiatives in Hong Kong has undergone noticeable transformations since their emergence about a decade ago, shaped by political events, technological advancements, and changing societal needs (Kajimoto, 2023). The origins of dedicated fact-checking efforts can be traced to 2014, especially during the two-month-long civil disobedience campaign called Umbrella Movement that brought this form of journalistic work to public attention. They were primarily community-driven and concentrated on Facebook, the dominant social media platform at the time (Agur & Frisch, 2019; Chu, 2018; Lee, 2016; Lee, So & Leung, 2015). Notable projects included Kauyim Media, which amassed 178,000 followers, and Live: Verified Updates, established by University of Hong Kong journalism students, which gained over 100,000 followers overnight.

A major upward trend in this field emerged between 2019 and 2021, catalyzed by the prevalence of misinformation during the year-long street protests in 2019 and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic (Banjo & Lung, 2019; Chan & Blundy, 2019; Lew, 2019; Yeung, 2019). This period saw the launch of numerous new initiatives by various stakeholders, including news media outlets, working journalists, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and concerned citizen groups (Kajimoto, 2023).

FactWire, a renowned investigative journalism outlet, began its dedicated fact-checking operation in April 2020 (but ceased operations in June 2022). Factcheck Lab was established in May 2020 as a project funded by the Cultural and Media Education Foundation. It became an independent not-for-profit entity in April 2022 under Media Literacy Research Center Limited. Academic institutions also played a crucial role. Annie Lab, a dedicated on-campus newsroom at the University of Hong Kong, was founded in October 2019, integrating fact-checking into journalism education

¹⁹ Professor of Practice at the University of Hong Kong

through the online media outlet that later became a verified signatory of the Code of Principles by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) in January 2022. Similarly, HKBU Fact Check at Hong Kong Baptist University was launched in May 2021.

International organizations also contributed to the fact-checking landscape in Hong Kong. Agence France-Presse (AFP) has maintained a team focusing on Hong Kong since 2017. The US government-funded Radio Free Asia launched Asia Fact Check Lab in 2023, covering multiple countries in the region, including Hong Kong, although it closed its Hong Kong office shortly afterwards in early 2024, citing security concerns. Initially, the fact-checking community in China's Special Administrative Region has exhibited a collaborative nature; they not only linked to each other's work often but also cross-published the content through partnerships with other local media outlets and platforms.

However, these partnerships have become less observable in recent years. The enactment of the National Security Law (NSL) in mid-2020 has had a notable impact on the media landscape (Lau, 2021; Foreign Correspondents' Club Hong Kong, 2021; Hong Kong Journalists Association, 2021) while several news outlets and initiatives, including FactWire and Kauyim Media, essentially closing down or leaving Hong Kong in its wake.

As of July 2024, three local fact-checking organizations regularly produce news content at the professional level — namely, Annie Lab, Factcheck Lab, and HKBU Fact Check. They are all verified signatories of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), along with AFP's global news wire service. Kauyim Media resumed its operation in August 2024, but it remains a user-driven Facebook page with no publicly available organizational details.

The following sections, therefore, examine the current state of the three local fact-checking organizations and discuss ongoing challenges in maintaining their operations and effectiveness in an increasingly complex information environment. The information provided in this document mostly comes from the author's personal communications with the organizational representatives, supplemented by their past IFCN signatory applications (International Fact-Checking Network, n.d.), except for Annie Lab, which was established and run by the author himself.

It is worth noting that despite the challenges of observably eroding press freedom in the Special Administrative Region of China (Reporters Without Borders, 2024), none of the three organizations stated that the city's political climate has not affected its operations or editorial independence thus far. They expressed the view that political non-partisanship and neutrality can still be maintained in the field of fact-checking in Hong Kong.

INDIVIDUAL FACT-CHECKING ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR CHALLENGES

1. HKBU Fact Check

URL: <https://factcheck.hkbu.edu.hk/>

Representative: Stephanie Jean Tsang | stsang@hkbu.edu.hk | comm_fcs@hkbu.edu.hk

The organizational structure and working methods of HKBU Fact Check

HKBU Fact Check was launched in May 2021 as a university project at the School of Communication at Hong Kong Baptist University. The School's motto is "Truth is virtue." In line with this spirit of journalism education, the fact-checking project aims to combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

HKBU Fact Check also conducts research to study the information disorder while fulfilling the university's social responsibilities. The organization said it strives to reduce the level of misinformation and disinformation in mass media, increase the public's media literacy, and facilitate academic research. It was accredited as a signatory of the IFCN's Code of Principles on Dec. 15, 2022.

The project is fully funded by the School of Communication. It runs on the undisclosed lump sum, which was allocated to the project at the beginning. The organizer states that its current funding will run out in one to two years. It was also awarded a Global Fact Check Fund Grant in the Engage category (funded by Google and YouTube, administered by IFCN) and received 100,000 U.S. dollars in early 2024 (International Fact-Checking Network, 2024).

It runs as a university project, which involves two full-time and two part-time fact-checkers as of June 2024 besides several faculty members in the management (Hong Kong Baptist University, n.d.). Its fact-checkers typically hold a master's degree from the university. To prevent staff from directly being involved in political parties and advocacy organizations, everyone involved in HKBU Fact Check, including fact-checkers and management team members, is required to sign a declaration form.

It publicly solicits questionable content from the public, but the organization says many submissions contain no fact-based claims or material that is fact-checkable. It does not have an automated system for monitoring online discourses, but it used CrowdTangle to monitor certain social media platforms until the service shut down in mid-2024. WhatsApp groups and Google Trends are other tools it uses to identify potential falsehoods. There are no written guidelines for the staff.

It adopts five labels: True, False, Partially False, Misleading, and Unsubstantiated. Stories are not categorized by topics, however. Each story's editor has the final say on the classification.

HKBU Fact Check targets the general public and writes both in Traditional Chinese and English, although they produce more stories in Chinese. It publishes two to three stories per week on average. Its stories appear on its website, Facebook page (4,800 followers), Instagram (1,395), and sometimes X (254) and LinkedIn (144).

Staff members conduct fact-checking workshops for students to promote fact-checking practice, and provide media literacy training online and offline. It organized a public exhibition in 2024 on campus for similar purposes. Academic publications, conferences, and networking with industry partners are other ways to engage with stakeholders in the field.

The challenges faced by HKBU Fact Check

The organization says sustainability is the biggest challenge due to diminishing funding. It has not felt any political pressure on its editorial decisions, meanwhile. On the technical side, the closure of CrowdTangle makes it harder to monitor and select claims. Another hurdle mentioned by the organization is finding “self-motivated,” full-time fact-checking staff who are fluent in Cantonese (note: the university’s master’s degree students are predominantly Mandarin speakers).

Generative AI is not seen as particularly challenging because traditional fact-checking and journalistic methods, such as image search, source tracking and so forth, are reasonably reliable at the moment.

2. Factcheck Lab

URL: <https://factchecklab.org>

Representative: Cheng Ka Yue | editor@factchecklab.org

The organizational structure and working methods of Factcheck Lab

Factcheck Lab was launched as an independent fact-checking project by the Culture & Media Education Foundation, a tax-exempted charity in Hong Kong, in May 2020. However, the project became an independent media outlet in April 2022 when its ownership was transferred to a newly registered Media Literacy Research Center Limited, a private company set up to run Factcheck Lab.

The organizer says it aims to counter the spread of false information widely circulating online. It was accredited as a signatory of the IFCN’s Code of Principles on Oct. 30, 2021. Subsequently, it signed an agreement with Meta and joined the Third-Party Fact-Checker (3PFC) program for Facebook and Instagram the same year.

According to the organization, Factcheck Lab’s annual budget is below 100,000 US dollars. It was awarded a Global Fact Check Fund Grant in the Grow category (funded by Google and YouTube, administered by IFCN) and received 50,000 U.S. dollars in late 2023 (International Fact-Checking Network, 2023).

Its revenue sources include Patreon subscriptions and speaker fees for training and workshops. As a registered company, it files annual tax return, which is publicly accessible in Hong Kong. Legally, it is a for-profit company, but the company’s articles of association currently do not allow the distribution of dividends or profits, making Factcheck Lab more like a not-for-profit media in operation.

It has two full-time staff. Both have a professional background in journalism and have worked for various news outlets in Hong Kong as an editor and a reporter. Neither of them has any political affiliations with any party or organizations.

It solicits questionable content from the public, but the organization says it doesn't get many anonymous submissions. Factcheck Lab says it looks into the claims if there is similar content on the same issues and topics. It does not have automated systems for monitoring online discourses, but it used CrowdTangle to monitor popular Facebook pages and groups until the service shut down in mid-2024. It relies more on manual search with keywords. The company does not have a standardized manual for its operation.

It does not adopt a labelling system, but story headlines often contain expressions such as “no evidence,” “false claims,” “missing context,” and alike. The two staff members decide what to fact-check and must agree on the conclusion. There are no topic-based categories.

Factcheck Lab publishes its stories in Traditional Chinese only and targets the general public in Hong Kong. Their social media presence includes Facebook (25,000 followers), Instagram (4,800), Discord (250), Patreon (160), Telegram (540), Mastodon (341), and Threads (2,000). Its fact-checking stories are also cross-published on Inmedia HK (獨立媒體).

On average, it publishes three to four stories every month. Besides fact-checking articles, it also writes explainers on issues related to misinformation and fact-checking. The two staff members also occasionally give offline talks and media literacy workshops to engage the audience.

The challenges faced by Factcheck Lab

Financial sustainability is the biggest issue mentioned by the organization. New political reality in Hong Kong is not seen as a major editorial challenge at the moment.

The organization says the emerging generative AI technology is more challenging for the audience than for fact-checkers at this stage; therefore, they discuss how to deal with it in their talks and workshops. Since there are no reliable tools for gen-AI detection and debunking, they employ the usual journalistic caution and methodology.

3. Annie Lab

URL: <https://annielab.org>

Representative: Masato Kajimoto | contact@annieasia.org

The organizational structure and working methods of Annie Lab

Annie Lab was launched in September 2019 as a student-driven, fact-checking media outlet housed within the Journalism and Media Studies Centre (JMSC) at the University of Hong Kong. JMSC has been teaching fact-checking since 2012; its public-facing online publications of their students' work in this field have gone through a couple of iterations, including, most notably, “Live: Verified Feed” on Facebook during the 2014 civil unrest dubbed Umbrella Movement (Kajimoto, 2023), before it established the daily newsroom operation.

It is called Annie Lab because the founder (the author of this report) also registered a not-for-profit educational organization called ANNIE (Asian Network of News & Information

Educators) in Hong Kong. It aims to facilitate a network of educators, journalists, media professionals, policymakers, and other stakeholders in the field of media and information literacy across Asian countries, developing and sharing teaching and learning resources.

Annie Lab is designed to serve as a training ground for the students and a pedagogical lab for educators. It was accredited as a signatory of the IFCN's Code of Principles on Jan. 20, 2022, and became a certified member of the Vaccine Safety Net established by the World Health Organization in November 2023.

Annie Lab is tied to university courses offered by the JMSC. It has not received any extra funding from the university, which is a publicly funded tertiary institution. Meanwhile, ANNIE independently raises funds for its news literacy education activities in Asia, including Annie Lab. Through the not-for-profit organization, Annie Lab received about 192,500 U.S. dollars between 2019 and 2023, mostly from Google News Initiative, which was used mainly to hire teaching and research assistants at the university who work as editors in the newsroom.

All editors are faculty members at the university. Students work as reporters under the supervision of the editors. On average, three to four editors guide 15 to 20 student reporters every semester. All faculty members involved in Annie Lab have working experience as professional journalists before joining the university. The majority of the students major in journalism as well.

It solicits questionable content from the public through its website and social media channels. It does not have automated systems for social listening, but it instructs each student reporter to set up his or her own monitoring systems personally, using tools available on different platforms, including the ones in mainland China. Detailed guidelines and instructions are given to reporters in the relevant university courses, some of which are publicly available through ANNIE's website (ANNIE, n.d.)

It uses a variety of labels to classify the content. Its website explains each as follows:

- a. **False:** The claim/statement is demonstrably false. The photo/video has been doctored. Stories prove that the information is not substantiated with facts or totally made up. Stories investigate the factual validity of the claim and/or the authenticity of the photo/video.
- b. **Misleading:** The claim is accompanied by non-altered evidence, but it is used out of context or in a demonstrably misleading way. The key evidence may be fact-based, but the claim and information associated with the evidence are not true.
- c. **No evidence:** The claim cannot be substantiated with evidence in any way. Used when the information is very likely made up, or a group of information does not constitute evidence logically in any fashion, often with unsubstantiated causal associations or cherry-picked partial facts).
- d. **Investigation:** The story looks into a series of misinformation and/or its ecosystem on a specific topic. It tries to verify multiple claims and/or examines a larger narrative.
- e. **Analysis:** There are two types of analysis. 1) Although the claim may be based on facts or unaltered visual material, the evidence indicates the overall narrative is false or

misleading; 2) a series of fact-checks on the same or similar topics (when one label does not fit all investigations).

- f. **Explainer:** The story tries to explain a complex background history and other relevant information surrounding persistent misinformation.
- g. **Verified:** The claim has been independently verified. We have evidence to prove the claim is accurate.
- h. **Just in case:** This label is used when a claim is clearly fiction, satire, opinion, or personal commentary (not a factual statement), but some users are observably mistaking it as fact.

Annie Lab does not categorize the topics except for health-related fact-checking, which is given its dedicated page on the website.

Annie Lab publishes its stories mostly in English. A selected few are translated and published in Traditional or Simplified Chinese every month as part of reporters' training. Since the primary goal of the campus newsroom project is to educate students, it does not focus on audience engagement, unlike other fact-checking outlets. It has a modest social media presence on Facebook (938 followers), X (1,421), and Instagram (546). Some of the stories in Chinese are cross-posted on Yahoo! News Hong Kong. On average, the website has been publishing two articles per week since its inception in 2019.

The challenges faced by Annie Lab

Staffing stability has been the main issue. The junior staff turnover rate at the university (teaching and research assistants assuming the roles of guiding editors) is chronically high in Hong Kong. The necessity to train a new batch of student reporters every semester makes it difficult to maintain the quality and standard of fact-checking, although the project is established and designed for that purpose primarily.

Generative AI is not seen as a key challenge at the moment. Annie Lab also says traditional fact-checking and journalistic methods, such as image search and source tracking, are reasonably effective at the moment.

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Chapter 3: Japan

Emerging Fact-checking Initiatives and Challenges in an Insular Media Landscape

*Kayo Mimizuka*²⁰

HISTORICAL AND GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN JAPAN

The development of fact-checking activities in Japan has been slower compared to neighboring Asian democracies like South Korea, where the term “fact-check” has become part of everyday language. Over the past several years, however, a handful of initiatives have emerged in response to global concerns over the spread of misleading information (misinformation, disinformation). In 2017, researchers and journalists launched a nonprofit called FactCheck Initiative Japan (FIJ), with an aim to support news organizations in their efforts to curb the spread of misleading information. The establishment of FIJ encouraged four news outlets, including BuzzFeed Japan, to launch projects to fact-check claims related to the 2017 national election as part of the FIJ coalition. FIJ led a similar project in 2018 during the high-profile local election in Okinawa Prefecture. Around the same time, a few community-driven initiatives also emerged. These include a one-off verification project during the 2017 election led by Japan Center of Education for Journalists (JCEJ) and a research team from Hosei University; and Wasegg, a fact-checking initiative established in 2018 by journalism students at Waseda University.

But these initiatives have fallen short of creating momentum for further growth in the field. This is often attributed to factors such as Japan’s insular media environment and relatively low levels of

²⁰ The University of Texas at Austin

political engagement online, which experts say have shielded the country from the full impact of mis- and disinformation (Kobayashi and Ichihara, 2024; Kuwahara, 2021). Another major factor is the traditional media organizations' reluctance to invest in fact-checking. According to a survey of 22 major newspapers and broadcasters conducted in 2023, eight of them (five newspapers and three broadcasters) said they were 'regularly' conducting fact-checking as part of their daily news production, while only one of them had a dedicated fact-checking beat (Saito et al., 2023). The surveyed organizations cited a lack of personnel, resources, and necessary expertise as reasons for not engaging in fact-checking activities. Although FIJ has tried to encourage more news organizations to come together in combating the spread of misleading information, the Japanese media have been generally reluctant to collaborate with their competitors beyond organizational boundaries.

Japan has not been affected significantly by large-scale foreign disinformation campaigns targeting voters or a wide proliferation of misleading information created for financial gains, but that does not mean the country is fully immune from the spread of such information. The country has been particularly vulnerable to the spread of rumors and false content during natural disasters, while various other forms of misleading information, including conspiracy theories, saturated the online information space during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Against this backdrop, the government's expert panel raised concern about a lack of fact-checkers and public awareness about the importance of fact-checking, highlighting the need for a more sustainable model of fact-checking initiative (Ministry of Internet Affairs and Communications, 2022). In tandem with the heightened call for more fact-checking activities, and with the mainstream media largely remaining reluctant to promote fact-checks, a few local initiatives have emerged from the nonprofit sector in recent years. As of August 2024, there were a total of three verified signatories of International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN); Japan Fact-check Center, Litmus, and InFact. The following sections will discuss the three core initiatives in Japan, as well as FIJ, highlighting their focuses and challenges they face amid a lack of resources and funding.

COORDINATING BODY OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN JAPAN

FIJ has functioned as a platform for promoting fact-checking activities in Japan. It was established by a group of 10 academics, journalists, and nonprofit organization directors to address a lack of actors combating the spread of misleading information in the country. The founding members include Hitofumi Yanai, who led media watchdog GoHoo (which has been disbanded), Waseda University Journalism Professor Shiro Segawa, Tohoku University Professor and computer scientist Kentaro Inui, and Atsuo Fujimura at Smartnews, a popular Japanese news curation app (Fujishiro, 2017). FIJ's funding sources are a mix of donations, annual membership fees, and grants. Its corporate members include LY Corporation, the operator of the LINE messaging app.

FIJ itself does not engage in conducting fact-checks: its aim is to provide support for independent fact-checking organizations and media outlets that conduct fact-checks as part of the FIJ coalition. FIJ's support for fact-checkers is built on three key pillars: promoting collaborative projects with media organizations and citizens; providing a database and tools for fact-checking; and creating public awareness about fact-checking through various events.

The organization has initiated a series of fact-checking projects during high-profile elections. At the time of the 2021 lower house election, for instance, a total of six fact-checking organizations and media outlets, including the Mainichi Shimbun and BuzzFeed Japan, joined the coalition. FIJ assisted their fact-checks by providing transcripts of major televised debates between political party leaders, a list of verifiable claims, and a platform to curate and publish their fact-checks. However, FIJ has struggled to foster a genuinely collaborative environment for fact-checkers due to media organizations' reluctance to cooperate with their competitors. Unlike overseas projects like France's CrossCheck that brought fact-checkers together beyond organizational boundaries, the fact-checkers and journalists who joined the FIJ election projects worked independently in the actual verification process. Most mainstream Japanese newspapers and broadcasters have not joined the FIJ coalition.

To facilitate fact-checking, FIJ has also built a database system using artificial intelligence and natural language processing technology. Its Fact Checking Console (FCC) system was developed to automatically analyze and detect claims posted on X (formerly Twitter) and predict the likelihood of errors. These claims would then be monitored and sorted manually by a team of student and citizen volunteers. Potentially misleading claims are then shared with fact-checkers through a database called ClaimMonitor. FIJ offers the database free of charge for organizations that publish fact-checks on a regular basis. After Twitter discontinued offering free access to its API, however, the database's utility has significantly declined.

FIJ has also worked to popularize fact-checking activities in Japan by holding various events. One of such efforts is Fact Check Awards that honors high-quality fact-checks. In 2023, a total of 39 works were self-nominated for the awards. In addition to these activities within Japan, FIJ has also partnered with fact-checking organizations abroad, including Taiwan FactCheck Center and Hong Kong's Annie Lab, collaborating in research and promotion of fact-checking.

INDIVIDUAL FACT-CHECKING ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR CHALLENGES

1. Japan Fact-check Center

Website: <https://www.factcheckcenter.jp/>

Editor-in-Chief: Daisuke Furuta

Secretary General: Susumu Yoshida (Executive Director, Safer Internet Association)

The organizational structure and working methods of Japan Fact-check Center

Japan Fact-check Center (JFC) was established in October 2022 under its parent organization, Safer Internet Association (SIA), a coalition of internet companies promoting internet safety and digital media literacy. JFC's creation followed a series of multi-stakeholder discussions led by SIA on how to accelerate efforts to curb the spread of misleading information within the private sector in Japan. In 2023, JFC became a verified signatory member of the International

Fact Checking Network (IFCN). It distributes significantly more fact-checks than the other two signatories combined.

JFC's fact-checks cover a wide range of trending issues and current events that can impact the public. Reflecting recent major global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the largest area of fact-checking in recent years has been healthcare and medicine (21.8%), followed by international issues (19.7%). JFC's focus also includes verifying claims related to politics (12.6%) and natural disasters (12.6%) (Japan Fact-check Center, 2024). According to JFC Editor-in-Chief Daisuke Furuta, JFC is also working to fact-check more claims related to marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ individuals, ethnic minorities, and feminist groups, which often go unchecked in Japan but pose serious threats to these communities. Media reports are not within the scope of JFC's fact-checking activities because JFC and its parent organization SIA believe that the media has its own mechanisms for keeping their ethics in check e.g. Japan's Broadcasting Ethics & Program Improvement Organization (Japan Fact-check Center, n.d. -a; SlowNews, 2024).

JFC has primarily relied on funding from major tech companies such as Google.org, Meta, and Yahoo Japan Corp. In fiscal 2022, the year JFC was established, its total income stood at approximately 124 million JPY (1.2 million USD), which includes approximately 100 million JPY from Google.org and 20 million JPY from Yahoo Japan Corp. (Japan Fact-check Center, n.d. -b, c). Although JFC has received substantial support from these corporations so far, it is seeking to diversify its funding sources to achieve long-term sustainability. As part of such efforts, JFC has launched in 2024 a certification program for aspiring fact-checkers, which anyone can enroll with an application fee of 1,000-2,000 JPY. However, JFC says income from such educational programs is unlikely to be a major funding source.

The organization has established mechanisms to ensure its accountability and independence from its funders and to address concerns about their potential influence on its fact-checks. In addition to disclosing its financial reports, JFC has an audit committee, tasked with evaluating any potential conflicts of interest with sponsoring firms (Japan Fact-check Center, n.d. -e).

As of August 2024, JFC operated in a relatively small team; two full-time fact-checkers, two part-time editors, and six part-time interns. The four senior fact-checkers and editors all have backgrounds in journalism. Furuta worked as a journalist at The Asahi Shimbun, one of Japan's major liberal dailies, and served as the founding Editor-in-Chief of BuzzFeed Japan before taking the current position. Other senior members have also worked at mainstream media organizations such as The Asahi Shimbun and The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK). Without a physical office, the team holds online editorial meetings every day and meets in person once every three months.

According to its website, JFC selects claims to verify based on three criteria: breadth (the breadth of people affected), depth (the severity of the impact), and closeness (the proximity of the impact) (Japan Fact-check Center, n.d. -d). JFC monitors online content through three main methods: (1) manual search by team members using various search engines and digital tools, (2)

a database provided by FIJ, and (3) receiving reporting from users via its LINE account, a popular messaging app in Japan.

Many of the claims to be fact-checked are identified through staff members' manual searches, supported by digital tools such as Google Search, Google Alerts, and social monitoring tools. JFC monitors a variety of social media platforms, including X, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube. Many claims are identified through X, given the platform's popularity in Japan. FIJ's Claim Monitor database also aids fact-checkers to identify claims. JFC fact-checks through the LINE account. The chatbot responds by providing links to JFC's existing fact-checking articles that are most relevant to the users' questions. If the content has not yet been fact-checked, the JFC team adds it to the list of potential items for verification. Furuta noted that while JFC recognizes the need to monitor LINE more frequently and systematically to address conspiracy theories and unverified information in the closed spaces, the chatbot is not yet a primary channel for identifying claims. As of August 2024, JFC's LINE account had 544 subscribers.

JFC uses five ratings for its fact-checks: (1) True (no errors, no critical elements missing); (2) Almost True (contains some errors, but the majority of the discourse, including important parts, is correct and accurate enough), (3) Baseless (no or insufficient evidence and impossible to verify the facts), (4) Inaccurate (some parts are correct, but there are errors or omissions in important parts, or misleading); and (5) False (there is a serious error, or an important element is largely missing) (Japan Fact-check Center, n.d. -d).

The verification process often involves collaboration between student fact-checkers and senior fact-checkers/editors. During editorial meetings, team members first share and discuss their ongoing work and specific topics they wish to address. Once the team agrees on the topics of focus, fact-checkers pitch the claims they want to verify and present their preliminary judgments based on evidence they have gathered so far. According to Furuta, about half of the pitched claims are eventually selected for fact-checking. Senior members supervise and collaborate with student fact-checkers throughout the process, from selecting a claim and conducting the verification work (e.g. which sources to consult) to the writing phase. This system is modeled after Annie Lab, a fact-checking project at the Journalism & Media Studies Center at the University of Hong Kong, according to Furuta.

Fact-checkers at JFC employ a multitude of means for verification, including traditional methods such as phone calls, interviews, accessing government or administrative documents, and online searches. JFC also leverages Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) in its fact-checking activities. However, fact-checkers at JFC primarily use OSINT as a supporting tool to corroborate evidence gathered through other methods and to strengthen the persuasiveness of their fact-checking messages.

JFC publishes an average of 20-30 fact-checks per month. Each article typically includes a thumbnail showing the claim being verified and the verdict, allowing readers to grasp the main points at a glance. Fact-checking articles are structured into three sections: the subject of fact-checking, the verification process, and the judgment.



Figure 1. A screenshot from JFC's website²¹

Fact-checks by JFC are accessible through various channels, including its website and social media accounts. X is one of these platforms, with approximately 22,000 followers as of August 2024. JFC also uses Note, a Japanese blogging platform, which had around 1,950 followers.

While JFC's fact-checks are aimed at a broad audience, it customizes its content for different platforms to reach various demographics. For example, JFC publishes fact-checks on TikTok in video format to engage younger audiences. TikTok's penetration rate in Japan more than tripled between fiscal years 2018 and 2023, with 70 percent of teenagers in the country using the video-sharing service in fiscal year 2023 (Statista, 2024).

One question JFC has frequently faced is about its relationship with SIA, its parent organization. Founded in 2013 by Yahoo, information technology company Alps System Integration, and online reputation monitoring and management firm Pitcrew (ITmedia NEWS, 2013), SIA was established with the goal of promoting "Internet freedom and ensuring a safer internet environment for all" (Safer Internet Association, n.d.). SIA operates a project dubbed "Safe-line," aimed at addressing potentially illegal or harmful content online. If content is deemed harmful or illegal, SIA will ask internet providers to remove it or file a police report (Safer Internet Association, n.d.).

JFC states on its website that its fact-checking operations are independent from SIA's activities. However, it also states that JFC collaborates with SIA, leveraging the parent organization's extensive experience and expertise in handling harmful online content (Japan Fact-check Center, n.d. -e). Specifically, SIA researchers assist JFC fact-checkers with online research; they do not, however, participate in selecting claims for fact-checking or in the

²¹ https://www.factcheckcenter.jp/fact-check/politics/false_shinjiro_koizumi_grandfather/

publication of articles. To ensure its independence and impartiality, JFC has established a steering committee composed of academic researchers and a journalist. This committee evaluates whether JFC maintains its impartiality and fairness in its fact-checking activities.

Some experts, however, have raised concerns about a lack of transparency in how JFC's relationship with its parent organization might impact its fact-checking activities. At a working group meeting on information integrity in digital spaces held in May 2024, one expert pointed out that SIA had undertaken projects for Japan's National Police Agency and collaborated with the communications ministry. The expert questioned whether these relationships between the parent organization and government agencies could influence JFC's fact-checking activities. In response, JFC's Furuta stated that SIA's contract with the National Police Agency had ended before JFC's establishment, while pledging to further increase the transparency of its activities (Ministry of International Affairs and Communications, 2024). When JFC's IFCN signatory status was approved in 2023, an assessor commended the JFC fact-checkers for being "meticulous in their details and work, and adhering to most of the IFCN guidelines," but also noted that they need to be more explicit in demonstrating their independence from their parent organization, which includes large corporations (IFCN, 2023).

The challenges faced by Japan Fact-check Center

Like many other organizations worldwide, fact-checkers at JFC face several challenges, including a lack of sustainable funding sources, according to Furuta. Although JFC has received substantial funding from tech companies so far, it has struggled to further expand their activities due to uncertainties about the sustainability of these funds. For instance, Furuta sees monitoring and verifying content disseminated within closed spaces, such as Telegram, an important issue that needs to be addressed, but JFC has been unable to pour more resources into monitoring these encrypted spaces due to a lack of personnel.

Challenges also include coping with the increasing number of AI-generated fake content. In Japan, the proliferation of so-called "cheap fakes"—deceptive content created with accessible software and techniques like Photoshop (Paris and Donovan, 2019)—has so far been a more prevalent issue than "deepfakes" that require more advanced processing technologies. However, JFC anticipates an increase in more sophisticated AI-generated content in the Japanese language as access to AI tools improves.

Fact-checkers at JFC have utilized some AI detecting tools to address AI-generated fake content, but they see such tools as supplementary to other verification methods due to their imperfect accuracy. Furthermore, these tools, often developed in Western countries, are not always useful in the context of the Japanese media environment or compatible with languages that are underrepresented in training models, such as Japanese. Furuta noted that while the development of AI tools to counter sophisticated AI-generated fake content is necessary, the lack of multi-stakeholder approach has slowed progress in addressing this problem.

Nevertheless, JFC has actively worked to educate its audiences about AI and other emerging issues in the information space. In addition to fact-checking articles, JFC publishes

educational videos on its YouTube channel, covering topics such as identifying AI-generated fake content and trends in its development, thereby promoting digital media literacy.

2. Litmus

Website: <https://litmus-factcheck.jp/about/en/>

Chief Editor: Tomoya Ohtani

Office Address: Shinjuku Entre-Salon Bldg. 2F, 2-12-13, Shinjuku, Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo, Japan

The organizational structure and working methods of Litmus

Litmus is a non-profit, citizen-driven fact-checking initiative. Its inception dates back to 2011, when Tomoya Ohtani, now Litmus Chief Editor, began posting fact-checks on Twitter (X) in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake. His personal Twitter account attracted over 8,000 followers. In December 2021, Ohtani launched the fact-checking initiative Information Verification JP (情報検証 JP), which was renamed Litmus in June 2022 (Litmus, n.d. -a). It became an IFCN signatory in 2023.

Litmus's fact-checks cover a wide range of topics, including domestic and international politics, elections, global conflicts, natural disasters, science, and health. Litmus primarily focuses on verification of digitally circulating content. It also verifies media reports if they are widely disseminated on digital platforms.

Litmus relies on a mix of funding sources, such as donations, crowdfunding, and funds from a tech company. For the two-year period between January 2022 and December 2023, it had a total revenue of around 8 million JPY (80,000 USD). Its main funding sources during this period included approximately 5 million JPY from private donations and crowdfunding, and 2 million JPY from Meta (Litmus, 2024). There is no record of Litmus receiving funds from any governments, politicians, or political parties. It plans to continue soliciting support through private donors and crowdfunding, which Litmus sees as a means to build trusted relationships with its audiences.

The Litmus editorial team comprises seven members. All staff members work part-time. Led by Ohtani, there are four assistant editors and two researchers on the team, who have unique backgrounds in fields such as medical office work, sociology, filmmaking, and art. Unlike its Japanese counterparts led by journalists, none of the fact-checkers at Litmus have worked at mainstream media organizations.

Before launching his own fact-checking initiative, Chief Editor Ohtani wrote for InFact, another Japanese fact-checking organization, under a pen name. One of the assistant editors, Hiroshi Torii, had worked as a researcher for one of FIJ's election fact-checking projects before joining Litmus. Meanwhile, one of the researchers, Haruko Nishimura, promoted fact-checks at FIJ and at a nonprofit that used to operate Japanese media watchdog GoHoo before joining Litmus.

A primary source of misleading information tracked by Litmus is X. Litmus says focusing on X, a popular platform in Japan where many false claims from other platforms end up circulating, has been reasonably effective. But Litmus recognizes the need to expand its monitoring to other social media and digital platforms going forward, such as YouTube and TikTok, given the prevalence of misleading video content.

Rather than employing a systematic method of tracking, monitoring is largely left to the discretion of each fact-checker, who conducts manual searches whenever they find time. Occasionally, Litmus receives tips from its audience through its X account or contact form, but user reporting is not a main source of identifying misleading information. Like its two Japanese counterparts, Litmus also utilizes ClaimMonitor, FIJ's database for fact-checking.

With its staff members scattered across Japan and overseas, the team meets online approximately once a week to discuss what topics to focus on and to collaboratively work on verification. At least three editorial team members are involved in generating an article, and the chief editor oversees all of the articles Litmus publishes. The most commonly used methods by Litmus fact-checkers include online research and OSINT techniques, such as geolocation and images search.

The ratings employed by Litmus, based on standards suggested by FIJ, are classified into nine categories: (1) accurate; (2) mostly accurate; (3) misleading; (4) inaccurate; (5) unfounded; (6) false; (7) fabrication; (8) suspended; and (9) ineligible (Litmus, n.d. -b).

While Litmus prioritizes verifying viral claims by public figures and addressing issues that may directly affect people's lives, such as disaster-related misinformation, it also actively corrects viral misleading information consumed for entertainment purposes, classified under the "Buzz" category. Although such content may not necessarily have severe societal or political impacts immediately, Litmus corrects it to raise awareness about fact-checking and digital media literacy. "Some people think it doesn't matter if the content is funny. They might spread false information that can have serious societal impacts just because it's entertaining. We [created the 'Buzz' category] to highlight that even funny content people disseminate without a second thought might include false information," said Ohtani.

On Litmus's website, fact-checks are presented with headlines and graphics that immediately inform readers whether a claim is accurate or misleading, followed by detailed explanations why the fact-checkers reached their conclusions. On TikTok and YouTube, fact-checks are presented in short video formats, but these accounts have posted only a small number of videos, and the number of followers has yet to grow.



Figure 2. A screenshot from Litmus website²²

The challenges faced by Litmus

Due to the time-consuming nature of crafting fact-checking articles and a chronic shortage of staff, Litmus currently publishes one article per week. Within limited resources, Litmus is actively trying to engage with its audience: its fact-checks are available on various social media platforms and online news portals. To reach as wide an audience as possible, it publishes articles not only on major platforms such as X, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Threads but also on newer avenues including Mastodon and Bluesky. As of August 2024, Litmus's X account had around 3,000 followers.

Despite its steady efforts to increase its reach, Litmus struggles to attract a wider readership. At the same time, Ohtani noted that Litmus has received consistent support from members of the public who may have distrust in institutional press because of the grassroots and citizen-driven nature of its initiative. "Litmus began as my personal project on the internet...we are a citizen-driven media, and what I hope to achieve is to show that fact-checking can be done not only by mass media but also citizens," said Ohtani.

3. InFact

Website: <https://infact.press/>

Founder and Executive Director: Yoichiro Tateiwa

Street Address: #707 Asahi Plaza Ogimachi, 1-1-22 Doshin, Kita-ku, Osaka-shi, 530-0035 Japan

²² <https://litmus-factcheck.jp/2024/08/4130/>

The organizational structure and working methods of InFact

InFact is an independent, nonprofit organization that engages in investigative reporting and fact-checking. It began in 2013 as i-Asia, which focused on investigative reporting in Japan and neighboring Asian countries. i-Asia changed its name to Seeds for News (ニュースのタネ), establishing a dedicated fact-checking unit in 2019. In 2020, the nonprofit started operating as InFact and became Japan's first signatory organization of IFCN in May 2023.

InFact's fact-checking unit has primarily focused on political issues and health-related topics, including elections in Japan and the COVID-19 pandemic. While InFact does verify online claims, Founder and Executive Director Yoichiro Tateiwa noted that the organization's primary focus is on monitoring and fact-checking claims by influential figures, including politicians, official government announcements, and media reports. Tateiwa said this focus is crucial because, in Tateiwa's view, Japanese mainstream media organizations tend to rely heavily on politicians' statements and official sources for their reporting, often without critically assessing them. InFact also publishes investigative articles that may not be categorized as a traditional fact-checking of a particular claim but can be considered fact-checks in broad terms. For instance, InFact has published a series of articles investigating whether there was sufficient transparency in the Japanese government's promotion of COVID-19 vaccines.

Since its foundation, InFact has primarily relied on individual donors for funding. In 2023, the organization raised around 2 million JPY from donations (InFact, n.d. -b). In 2024, InFact received a total of around 1.5 million JPY in donations from two Japanese corporations, the largest amount of funds it received since its establishment, according to Tateiwa. The organization received a one-time cash benefit from the Japanese government in a "rare case" due to a decline in donations and difficulty sustaining its activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (InFact, 2024). However, its basic policy is to not accept funds from any political parties or governments to ensure its impartiality and fairness. Like many other global fact-checking organizations, InFact has struggled to secure sustainable funds for its activities. Tateiwa himself donates to InFact to cover the necessary costs.

None of InFact's staff members are full-time employees: the organization's activities are supported by part-time student fact-checkers and volunteers. As of August 2024, InFact's website listed nine core members in the editing team. Leading the fact-checking unit is Tateiwa, a journalist who previously worked for The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) and engaged in investigative reporting, including Panama Papers. The team also includes two chief editors, a journalist and a lawyer, respectively, one fact-checker with a background in journalism, two student fact-checkers, a correspondent, a photographer, and a professor who serves as a special advisor. In addition to the core members, dozens of college students support InFact's activities. The student fact-checkers typically receive merit-based compensations.

For digital content, fact-checkers at InFact mainly focus on monitoring X. While other social media platforms are not entirely outside the scope of InFact's fact-checking activities, the organization prioritizes X because it is one of the most popular platforms in Japan where a lot

of unverified digital content end up circulating, according to Tateiwa. Student fact-checkers primarily handle the monitoring of content circulating on X by utilizing ClaimMonitor, a database provided by FIJ. Identifying and fact-checking politicians' claims, particularly during elections, and media reports are mostly left to senior staff members with journalistic backgrounds, who monitor debates between political party leaders and broadcast news programs.

Once fact-checkers identify potential subjects of fact-checking, they share these claims and discuss on Trello, a project management tool the team utilizes for internal discussion and editing. The team also meets online once a week to decide on which claims to work on. A senior staff member collaborates with student fact-checkers to determine which content to fact-check based on several criteria, such as the claim's potential impact on broader society and the resources it would require to fact-check the claim (student fact-checkers are usually given a week maximum to conduct research and verification). Multiple student and senior fact-checkers are always involved in the verification and editing process to ensure quality fact-checks.

Tateiwa noted that one of InFact's key priorities in fact-checking is ensuring that its readers can verify the organization's work themselves. This stance—that anyone should be able to replicate the findings easily—guides the fundamental methods the organization's fact-checkers rely on. Whenever possible, the fact-checkers leverage traditional journalistic methods, including accessing public data and documents and interviewing government officials who can be reachable by readers if they wish to. This approach allows the fact-checkers to avoid reliance on information from their personal network or digital tools that are difficult for the general public to access or use.

When presenting its fact-checking work, InFact uses the rating system recommended by FIJ: accurate (factually accurate and not lacking significant elements); mostly accurate (the main elements are factually accurate, but there are some minor or significant errors); misleading (does not contain a factually inaccurate element, but has a high possibility of misleading audiences); inaccurate (lacks overall accuracy, but is a mixture of accurate and inaccurate elements); unfounded (not proven to be factually false, but there is very little or no evidence to support the claim); false (all or core elements are factually inaccurate); fake/fabrication (all or core elements are factually inaccurate, and the speaker or create of the content is strongly suspected of knowing they are inaccurate) (Fact-Check Initiative Japan, n.d.). In an effort to popularize fact-checking, InFact also employs 'Enma-daiō' ratings, inspired by King Enma, a mythological figure who serves as the judge of the afterlife and punishes liars by pulling out their tongues. Claims ruled mostly accurate receive one Enma-daiō, with fake claims receiving the most (four) Enma-daiō's (Tateiwa, 2021).

The primary channel for distributing InFact's fact-checks is its website. A standard fact-checking article on the site includes a headline with the fact-checked claim and its verdict, the platform where the claim was identified, how widely the claim has been shared; and details of the fact-checking process and sources used to reach the verdict. InFact also distributes some of its fact-checks in English and Mandarin Chinese.

InFact also utilizes social media as an avenue to reach wider audiences, but as a relatively small fact-checking division, the number of followers on its social media accounts has yet to grow. As of August 2024, InFact had around 8,400 followers on its X account and around 600 followers on Facebook.



Figure 3. A screenshot of Enma-daiō rating system.²³

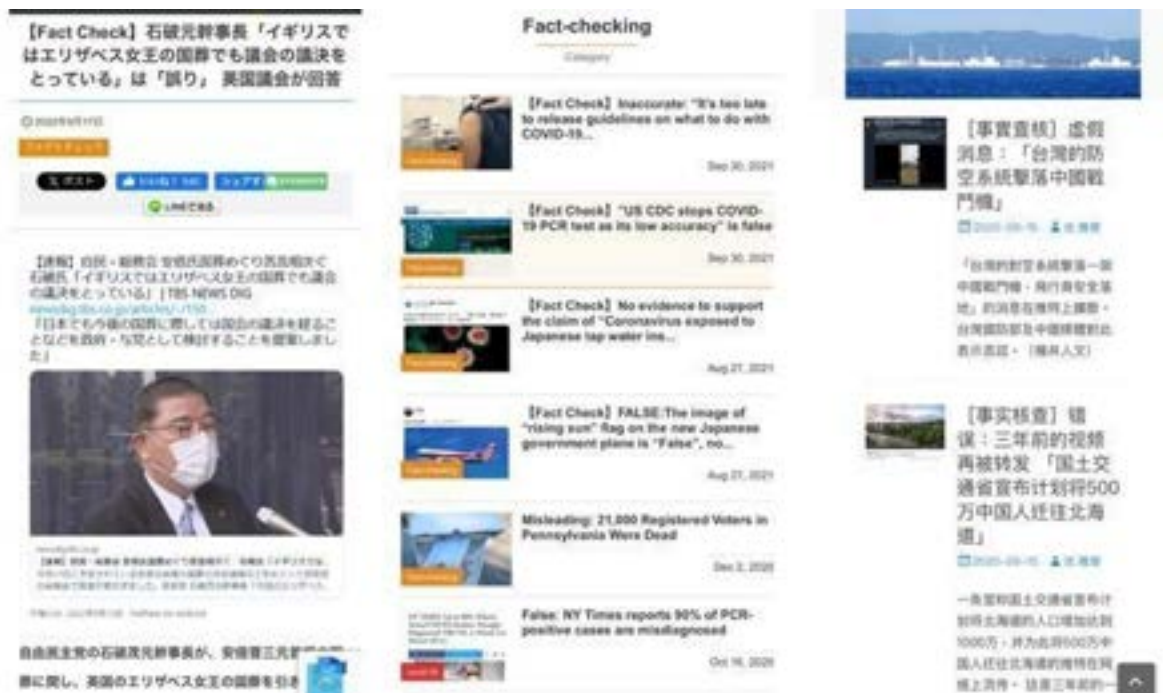


Figure 4. A screenshot that shows InFact's articles in three languages. From the left: Japanese, English, and Chinese.

²³ <https://infact.press/news/news-13915/>

The challenges faced by InFact

Just like many other fact-checking organizations globally, one of the biggest challenges InFact has been facing is a chronic shortage of fact-checkers and financial resources. Due to these limitations, the volume of fact-checks produced by InFact has remained relatively low, and the organization has yet to achieve widespread recognition among the public. For instance, in 2023, it only published 18 fact-checking articles—averaging fewer than two per month (InFact, n.d. - a)—although the volume of fact-checks tends to increase during high-profile elections in Japan.

Another obstacle, according to Tateiwa, is a lack of accessible and effective tools to counter sophisticated fake content created with generative AI, which is expected to have a greater impact in Japan in the future. While InFact has relied primarily on traditional methods to verify misleading information, these methods may fall short when it comes to addressing AI-generated content, as the existing tools are not tailored to the Japanese media environment and language, said Tateiwa.

Despite these challenges, InFact is striving to popularize and raise awareness about fact-checking, particularly among younger generations. Funded by two local corporations, InFact launched a program in 2024 that involves the organization's fact-checkers visiting universities and high schools across Japan to offer free workshops on fact-checking. Additionally, to raise more awareness about its activities and fact-checking in general, the organization has been actively providing a series of lectures on fact-checking for college students. Fostering next generation fact-checkers through these educational initiatives is one of InFact's biggest aspirations, according to Tateiwa.

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Chapter 4: South Korea

Fact-Checking Endeavours Undermined by Partisan Politics

EunRyung Chong²⁴

HISTORICAL AND GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN SOUTH KOREA

The year 2017 is considered the starting point of the popularization of fact-checking journalism in South Korea (Kim and Kim, 2017). During the 19th presidential election, 28 media outlets were classified as fact-checking agencies on the Naver portal site (Chong, 2017).

From its inception, fact-checking in South Korea has been largely driven by traditional media outlets. In 2012, the online newspaper OhmyNews introduced fact-checking with the launch of “OhmyFact,” a service that applied a modified version of the Truth-O-Meter from the U.S.-based PolitiFact (Moon, 2017). In 2014, JTBC Newsroom, the main news program of JTBC, introduced “Fact Check” as a regular segment, airing four times a week, further popularizing the practice. However, the fact-checking boom in South Korea truly began during the 19th presidential election. During this period, a significant amount of fake news, often politically motivated, was circulated, particularly in the wake of the impeachment of former President Park Geun-hye and the subsequent early presidential election. This led to calls from political circles for legal sanctions against such disinformation. In a 2017 survey, 85.7% of South Korean media consumers supported mandatory fact-checking, with 71.5% identifying media outlets as the primary entities responsible for fact-checking, ahead of the government (65.6%), platform operators (55.0%), and educational institutions (49.1%) (Oh and Jeong, 2017).

²⁴ Professor, Semyung Graduate School of Journalism, (Former Director of SNUFactCheck center)

Amid this social context, the SNU FactCheck (factcheck.snu.ac.kr) service was launched. SNU FactCheck is a collaborative fact-checking model between academia and the media (Choi and Yoon, 2017). The Seoul National University Institute of Communication Research developed a platform where media outlets could post fact-checked articles. At its inception, 16 media outlets collaborated with this platform, contributing verified content based on their fact-checking articles (Chong, 2017). As South Korea's first and only fact-checking platform at the time, SNU FactCheck had several unique features in its content, format, and operational methods, which significantly influenced the development of fact-checking practices in South Korean society.

First, despite being launched at a time when legal sanctions against fake news were being discussed and concerns over the harm of fake news were being raised daily in the media, “SNU FactCheck did not specifically focus on ‘fake news’ or ‘false information’” (Choi and Yoon, 2017: 181). Rather than limiting its scope to fake news, defined as deceptive information that manipulates both form and content (Hwang, 2017), SNU FactCheck aimed to verify the truth or falsity of all types of factual claims, regardless of whether they were presented as truthful. Statements of opinion or ideology were strictly excluded from the scope of verification. By defining its scope to include statements by politicians and public figures, SNU FactCheck inherited the focus on political fact-checking that has been prominent in the U.S. media (Dobbs, 2012; Graves, 2016).

Second, the responsibility for verification was limited to traditional media institutions. The selection of facts to be verified and the judgment of verification results were autonomously decided by each partner media outlet or responsible journalist, without interference from the Seoul National University Institute of Communication Research, which developed the platform. This was intended to protect and respect the editorial rights of the media (Choi and Yoon, 2017). By restricting the role of fact-checkers to traditional media outlets, the fact-checking model in South Korea aligns with the expert-based fact-checking systems seen in European collaborations between universities and the media, while also aiming to emulate the journalism model that dominates fact-checking in the United States (Graves and Cherubini, 2016).

Third, the system incorporated a mechanism for ongoing cross-verification between media outlets. SNU FactCheck allows for cross-verification on specific issues, although this is done independently by each media outlet without coordination. While limited, the cross-verification between media outlets on the SNU FactCheck platform represents a form of indirect communication between outlets in the context of the highly partisan nature of South Korean media (Chong, 2023).

The collaborative model of multiple media outlets that characterizes SNU FactCheck introduced modern fact-checking practices to South Korean society, focusing on political fact-checking and adopting an expert-driven model. However, although it appears similar to the U.S. political fact-checking model, its origins are not rooted in an introspective movement within the media but rather in a sense of crisis and external criticism directed at the media.

While fact-checking journalism in the U.S. has evolved as a journalistic reform movement within the community of journalists, fact-checking in South Korean journalism, which expanded rapidly during the 2017 presidential election, was characterized by a sense of urgency to protect citizens from misinformation originating from outside the institutional media (Chong, 2018). This reflects concerns about safeguarding democracy by nurturing an “informed citizen” capable of participating in

democratic processes (Schudson, 1998) and a “public health” paradigm aimed at countering the potential harm of disinformation, which has increasingly gained attention in other countries in the wake of major events such as COVID-19 (Graves, Bélair-Gagnon and Larsen, 2023). In South Korea, a later adopter of fact-checking practices, these two paradigms appeared to overlap from the outset.

In November 2020, the open fact-checking platform “FactCheckNet” was launched. FactCheckNet operated under the auspices of the Korea Communications Commission, a government body, with funding provided by the government. A consortium formed by three media organizations—the Korea Broadcasting Journalists Association, the Journalists Association of Korea, and the Korean Producers and Directors Association—along with the social cooperative “Parti,” established a legal entity to undertake the project. Unlike the SNU FactCheck, which was led by media outlets, FactCheckNet aimed to be a citizen-friendly platform that communicated with the public and addressed citizens’ needs (Kim, 2020). FactCheckNet’s fact-checkers were divided into professional fact-checkers and citizen fact-checkers. Professional fact-checkers included journalists and experts from various fields, while citizen fact-checkers were selected from individuals who had completed fact-checking education programs provided by the Korea Broadcasting Journalists Association or won awards in fact-checking competitions. These volunteers were primarily students and citizens recognized for their fact-checking abilities (Jeong, 2021).

Since 2017, which is often considered the year of fact-checking’s mainstream emergence in South Korea, the regulation and sanctions surrounding fake news have been debated in a political context. This discussion has been consistent through both the liberal Moon Jae-in administration and the conservative Yoon Suk-yeol administration.

While fact-checking is globally recognized as a means of combating fake news, South Korea’s fact-checking journalism has faced legal and political pressures. In 2017, the conservative Liberty Korea Party, then the opposition, filed a lawsuit against Seoul National University and its Institute of Communication Research, alleging that the “SNU FactCheck” site had damaged the party’s reputation by uncritically citing politically biased media outlets. The party, having lost the 19th presidential election, claimed that SNU FactCheck had interfered in the election and harmed the party’s reputation, demanding 100 million won in damages. However, the court dismissed the Liberty Korea Party’s claims in May 2019.

The attacks on fact-checking were not limited to lawsuits but also involved cutting off financial support, making continued fact-checking efforts difficult. FactCheckNet, which was operated with government funding as a citizen participation fact-checking service, held a board meeting in 2023 and decided to dissolve the corporation after more than half of its budget was cut compared to the previous year. FactCheckNet had been criticized by conservative parties during each National Assembly audit for employing individuals with excessive political bias in a project funded by taxpayer money, thereby undermining the essence of fact-checking (Kim, 2023). After its dissolution, FactCheckNet underwent an audit by the Korea Communications Commission, which reported excessive personnel costs and referred the former members of the dissolved organization to the police for investigation on charges of violating the Subsidy Act (Bae, 2024).

SNU FactCheck also faced political attacks, despite receiving 6 billion won in support from the domestic platform company Naver over six years starting in 2017. In January 2023, Naver was publicly

accused by lawmakers from the ruling conservative People Power Party of having backed the SNU FactCheck Center and fact-checking projects during the Moon Jae-in administration, with the claim that these initiatives had portrayed the Yoon Suk-yeol administration and the People Power Party as “fake news instigators” (Kim, 2023). Following this political pressure, Naver announced that it would not renew its support agreement with SNU FactCheck beyond August 2023, cutting off funding for both the center and several other projects aimed at promoting fact-checking journalism in South Korea. In addition to halting financial support, Naver discontinued the feature that had allowed SNU FactCheck’s content to be displayed on its news homepage since January 2018, terminating the linkage service on September 26, 2023. Naver cited the reason for the service suspension as needing to avoid political attacks before the National Assembly audit (Park and Geum, 2023), indicating a fear of criticism from the ruling conservative party.

While President Yoon Suk-yeol has publicly emphasized both domestically and internationally the need for a “war against fake news that threatens democracy,” in reality, the fact-checking efforts that should play a critical role in combating fake news in South Korea have been increasingly weakened, and undermined. This situation is not only contradictory but also seen as a step away from the practical goal of combating disinformation (Park, 2023; Lee, 2023).

The SNU FactCheck, the only remaining fact-checking body active with both private and government support until 2024, announced its indefinite suspension on August 18, 2024. After Naver withdrew its financial support in 2023, the platform managed to secure one year of emergency funding from an international public fund, but when this support was not extended, the organization ran out of the financial resources needed to continue operations. In its announcement of suspension, SNU FactCheck stated, “If there are institutions or individuals willing to provide independent financial support that is ‘support without interference,’ SNU FactCheck will resume its activities at any time.” However, given the current political tensions surrounding fact-checking journalism, it seems unlikely that such funding sources will be found, either domestically or internationally. This is because, regardless of the amount of funding, mere involvement in such support could entangle funding sources in the turbulent politics of South Korea.

As of September 2024, there are no organizations in South Korea that are actively organizing or supporting continuous fact-checking operations. News portal sites such as Naver and Daum mechanically gather and display fact-check articles on their homepages based on the formal label of “fact-checking,” but these efforts are autonomously conducted by individual media outlets. Additionally, as of September 2024, the Korean Factcheckers’ Community, a non-governmental organization, remains active as a fact-checking body.

COORDINATING BODY OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN SOUTH KOREA

Basic organizational information

The role of unifying South Korea's fact-checking organizations was taken on by the SNU FactCheck Center, which operated the SNU FactCheck platform. SNU FactCheck was established as an information service by the Institute of Communication Research at Seoul National University on March 29, 2017, with the purpose of informing the public about issues of public interest that had been verified by media outlets. As a non-political and non-profit public information service model based on collaboration between media outlets and academia, the Institute of Communication Research developed the web platform, while the media outlets participating in SNU FactCheck were responsible for providing high-quality, verified content.

The SNU FactCheck Center initially encouraged the participation of 16 media outlets, which eventually expanded to a maximum of 32 outlets. To join SNU FactCheck, media outlets were monitored by the SNU FactCheck Center for over a month to ensure regular fact-checking activities and adherence to the normative principles of impartiality, transparency, and fairness. The results of this monitoring were reported to the FactCheck Committee, the highest decision-making body of SNU FactCheck, which would make the final approval. Withdrawal from SNU FactCheck was freely permitted at the discretion of the participating media outlets.

While participating media outlets were encouraged to follow the unanimously agreed-upon principles of fact-checking, the SNU FactCheck Center did not interfere with the verification process to maintain quality control. The platform maintained a unified format by adhering to predefined rules, but each media outlet independently decided what to verify and how to conduct the verification, thus creating a loosely connected network. While these outlets participated in SNU FactCheck with the goal of providing a public service, there was no direct financial compensation for their activities. This resulted in an unstable supply of fact-checked content, reliant entirely on the goodwill of the media outlets. Despite these fundamental limitations, over 5,000 verification reports were posted over a period of seven years.

The SNU FactCheck Committee, an independent body composed of fact-checking experts from both academia and the journalism industry, was responsible for the highest-level decision-making at the SNU FactCheck Center, ensuring its political autonomy and administrative transparency. Although the SNU FactCheck platform was technically under the purview of the Institute of Communication Research at Seoul National University, the formation of this committee aimed to make clear that SNU FactCheck's activities extended beyond the confines of the university and into broader societal realms. As of August 2024, when SNU FactCheck entered an indefinite suspension, the third iteration of the FactCheck Committee had 13 active members (Choi and Yoon, 2017; Park, 2023).

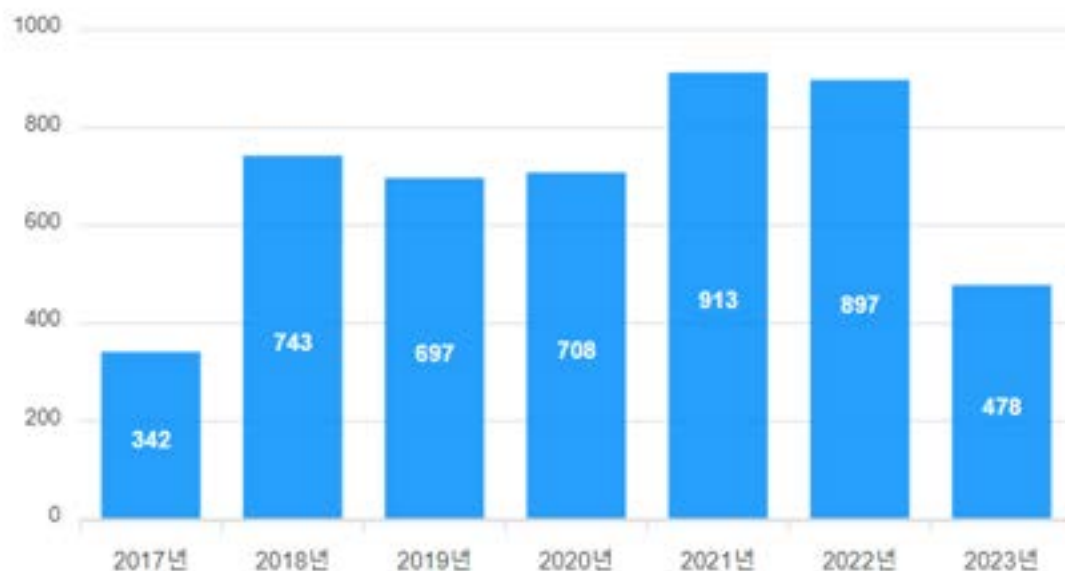


Figure 1. Annual growth of the fact-checking contents on SNUFactCheck

Function and relationship with individual fact-check organizations

As of August 2024, the 30 media outlets affiliated with SNU FactCheck maintained both online and in-person communication. Online consultations were regularly conducted through KakaoTalk, a popular messenger service in South Korea. When the SNU FactCheck Center needed to notify or seek approval from affiliated media outlets on important matters, they would immediately reach out through the messaging service to gather feedback. In addition to these agile online consultations, in-person meetings were also held, where representatives from each affiliated media outlet participated. These meetings initially took place monthly, but the frequency decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic due to prolonged restrictions on gatherings.

SNU FactCheck operated on a model where the SNU FactCheck Center, which managed the platform, and its affiliated media outlets collaborated on equal footing. Although the affiliated media outlets varied in their political orientations and corporate structures—ranging from private to public entities—they reached consensus on significant operational issues through discussions. One notable example is the establishment of the SNU FactCheck Principles. These principles, drafted over several months and finalized on October 24, 2019, were unanimously agreed upon by the representatives of the affiliated media outlets after multiple rounds of review and revisions.

The SNU FactCheck platform itself served as a shared database. Each affiliated media outlet rewrote its fact-checking articles according to the formatting rules set by the SNU FactCheck platform, maintaining a unified format while allowing outlets to preserve their

individual writing styles. Regardless of the stylistic differences, each article posted on the platform was required to clearly state the specific claim being verified, provide a detailed explanation for the verification, and present the evidence used in the process, ensuring transparency for readers. Between March 29, 2017, and August 18, 2024, a total of 5,034 fact-checking articles were published, making this platform the only fact-checking database available in the Korean language.

In addition to managing the platform, the SNU FactCheck Center operated various projects to expand the practice of fact-checking journalism within the Korean media industry. These initiatives included the Fact-Checking Investigative Reporting Support Project, which provided financial support to outstanding fact-checking proposals submitted by media outlets (operated 15 times); the Fact-Checking Internship program, offering aspiring journalists semester-long internships at media outlets (run twice a year, with a total of 12 sessions); and the Fact-Check Diploma program, which provided re-education opportunities for journalists, including participation in the Global Fact conference.

The Center also organized the Korean Fact-Checking Award, which recognized fact-checking reports that rigorously investigated issues of significant public interest (operated 6 times), and the Climate Crisis Fact-Checking Investigative Reporting Support Project, which was the first in South Korea to focus on verifying claims related to the climate crisis (operated twice). Additionally, the SNU FactCheck Excellence Award (20 editions) was presented to the best fact-checking articles posted on the SNU FactCheck website, as selected by the Fact-Check Committee. Furthermore, the Center annually operated the Fact-Check School, an online education program aimed at high school students nationwide, as part of its media literacy education efforts (Choi and Yoon, 2017; Park, 2023).

Individual fact-check organization: Korean Factcheckers' Community (K.F.C.)

Name: K.F.C. (Korean Factcheckers' Community)

URL: <https://mix.campaigns.do/g/factcheck/>,
https://campaigns.do/discussions?template=fact_check

Email Address: contact@campaigns.do

In 2021, the social cooperative Parti, in collaboration with the Korea Broadcasting Journalists Association, the Journalists Association of Korea, and the Korean Producers and Directors Association, developed and operated a crowd-sourced open fact-checking platform called FactCheckNet. After the suspension of FactCheckNet services in 2023, Parti continued to provide a space for citizen-led fact-checking activities on its civic engagement platform, Campaigns, and sustained its fact-checking initiatives by fostering a community where citizens could collaborate.

To support these citizen fact-checking activities, Campaigns launched the Korean Factcheckers' Community (K.F.C.) in May 2023. This community is designed to enable citizen

fact-checkers to collaborate and cooperate in conducting fact-checking activities on the platform.

In addition, Parti has been running initiatives to promote citizen fact-checking, including education on fact-checking practices and encouraging the continuous creation of fact-checking content through the Campaigns team. These efforts were recognized internationally when the project was selected for funding by the International Fact-Checking Network's (IFCN) Global Fact-Check Fund in June 2024.

The citizen fact-checking activities conducted by Campaigns, operated by Parti, are primarily funded by citizen donations. The Korean Factcheckers' Community (K.F.C.), the community of citizen fact-checkers active on the Campaigns platform, does not have a fixed budget. However, in 2023, a small amount of funding was secured through community and citizen meeting support projects, which allowed the operation of fact-checker gatherings and educational programs.

In 2024, Parti received annual support of 20 million KRW from the Roh Moo-hyun Citizen Center, a memorial foundation dedicated to honoring President Roh Moo-hyun, to run the Citizen Fact-Checker Activation Project on the Campaigns platform. Additionally, from July 2024, Parti began receiving an annual grant of 25,000 USD from the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) Global Fact-Check Fund, which will fund the same project for approximately one year.

The funding provided by the Roh Moo-hyun Citizen Center and IFCN comes without any conditions or interference in the fact-checking process, ensuring that the fact-checking activities remain independent and impartial.

With the spread of misinformation across various platforms, the recognition of the importance of fact-checking has also grown in South Korea. Fact-checking activities in the country have traditionally been led by the media, but due to budget cuts in institutions supporting fact-checking, media-led fact-checking efforts have diminished.

The citizen fact-checking initiative on the Campaigns platform, operated by Parti, was established to create a space where citizens themselves could take the lead in fact-checking activities. It also aims to promote a culture of questioning and verifying information before accepting it.

Parti consists of 27 members, including activists, developers, and designers, while the Campaigns team, which manages the fact-checking project, is composed of 6 members. Within the Korean Factcheckers' Community (K.F.C.), one full-time activist from the Campaigns team and two citizen fact-checkers serve as organizers. Currently, there are 31 citizen fact-checkers actively involved, who come from diverse backgrounds, including working professionals, university students, and aspiring journalists.

All members of the Campaigns team are full-time employees, while the citizen fact-checkers in K.F.C. participate part-time. Neither Parti, the Campaigns team, nor K.F.C. has any affiliations with political or religious groups.

Most of the citizen fact-checking activities conducted on the Campaigns platform are based on information that the citizen fact-checkers determine needs verification. Campaigns

also runs fact-checking campaigns where many citizens collaborate to gather scattered facts about a particular event. During the process of participating in these campaigns, any citizen can propose information for verification through comments if they identify content that requires fact-checking. While K.F.C. allows submissions through its website, there has not been substantial participation as of yet.

Campaigns focuses on verifying information that citizens encounter in their everyday lives. It sources information to be verified from social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook, as well as from online communities and current affairs radio shows featuring prominent politicians. For social media, X's real-time trends are often used for searching, while multiple group pages on Facebook that gather supporters of South Korea's two main political parties are monitored for content.

Although any citizen fact-checker can propose information for verification, the three organizers of K.F.C. currently select the majority of the verification topics. Fact-checking activities on Campaigns are conducted based on the principles of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), and a fact-checking guide is provided to ensure that any citizen can participate in these activities.

The fact-checking content on Campaigns is verified through collaboration between Campaigns team members, who have experience operating open fact-checking platforms and citizen fact-checker activities, and K.F.C. organizers, working together with citizen fact-checkers.

Campaigns uses a six-tier classification system to rate the accuracy of the information being fact-checked: "True," "Mostly True," "Half True," "Mostly False," "False," and "Unverifiable." Currently, the platform does not categorize fact-checking content by specific topics such as health or politics.



Figure 2: A visual rating chart by the Korean Factcheckers' Community Note: The ratings are divided into six levels, ranging from "True" to "False." The chart rates the claim that "Access to the petition for Yoon Suk-yeol's impeachment was blocked" as "Mostly False."

The final verification results are decided through discussions among the collaborating citizen fact-checkers. In cases where there are differing opinions among the fact-checkers, these differing views are presented alongside the main verification result with the reasons for the discrepancy clearly outlined. For instance, on a topic such as “Is the amount of tritium in Fukushima’s contaminated water 100 times higher than the EU standard?”, the differing perspectives would be documented for citizens to review and decide for themselves. Additionally, citizens can leave comments to suggest corrections or present rebuttals to the fact-checking content.

Campaigns offers a dedicated page where users can view fact-checking content in a consolidated format. On this page, users can immediately check the verification subject and the result from the list. Individual content pages display a meter that indicates the verification result, the verification subject, and a summary of the findings.

Campaigns is the only citizen-driven platform in South Korea that allows anyone to participate in fact-checking activities and utilize the fact-checking features. All fact-checking content on Campaigns is provided free of charge.

The Campaigns platform has around 20,000 registered members. Over the course of one year since the fact-checking initiative began, 46 pieces of content have been published. The Campaigns team and K.F.C. aim to publish one fact-checking content item per week.

The Korean Factcheckers’ Community (K.F.C.) operates within the Campaigns platform, which is managed by the Parti Campaigns Team. This team is responsible for organizing and managing the K.F.C. as well as running projects to promote citizen fact-checking activities. Parti is a social cooperative in South Korea that develops and operates various democratic platforms, including the Campaigns platform, which serves as a space for citizen participation.

Parti, being a social cooperative in South Korea, along with Campaigns and K.F.C., operates without any partisan influence.

Challenges

The Korean Factcheckers’ Community (K.F.C.) is a non-governmental organization that does not receive financial support from the government. Additionally, because they sometimes fact-check government policies or influential politicians from both the ruling and opposition parties, they inevitably maintain a tense relationship with government institutions. The legitimacy of K.F.C. is contingent upon how much the public trusts their fact-checking activities. Although they publish the results of their fact-checks on their official website, their exposure to the general public remains limited, and as a result, their overall recognition is still relatively low. They are affiliated with an organization called “Parti,” but securing stable funding for fact-checking remains a significant challenge.

Although The Korean Factcheckers’ Community (K.F.C.) is paying attention to the issue of generative AI, there have not been any concrete actions taken yet.

The Korean Factcheckers' Community (K.F.C.) irregularly holds meetings for citizen fact-checkers and conducts ongoing education programs aimed at the general public interested in fact-checking. These efforts are part of their initiatives to strengthen their internal capabilities and foster greater solidarity.

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Chapter 5: Taiwan

The Frontline Fighting for the Truth in the Age of Misinformation

Wei-Ping Li²⁵

HISTORICAL AND GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN TAIWAN

Taiwan's fact-checking efforts have gained global attention since the international community became aware of China's global disinformation campaigns. As part of the information ecosystem, fact-checking is recognized as a crucial tool for combating information influence (Su, 2019; Hsu, Chien & Myers, 2023). Nevertheless, Taiwan's fact-checking organization had been established prior to this, and the impetus for the fact-checking initiatives was more extensive than simply addressing information interference from China. Rather, Taiwan's fact-checking initiative was initiated in response to the necessity of resolving local information issues.

As early as 2015, a year before the “fake news” problem in the 2016 U.S. presidential election caught the world's attention, Taiwanese engineer Charles Yeh established a blog called “MyGoPen” to help his mother-in-law and Taiwanese seniors to identify false information, such as incorrect health advice or online scams. The MyGoPen project quickly gained popularity and expanded to include a website and a LINE chatbot. It now serves a diverse audience who need reliable answers when encountering dubious claims in everyday life.

Cofacts, which arose from a crowdsourcing project launched in 2016, began with the goal of assisting Taiwanese citizens in combating incorrect information prevalent online. Unlike MyGoPen, which was founded in the founder's personal capacity, Cofacts has drawn on the contribution from the

²⁵ Research director at FactLinkResearch Fellow

open-source community and volunteers. Since its inception, the initiative has relied on small donations and the dedication of volunteers to sustain the platform.

Compared with MyGoPen and Cofacts, the Taiwan FactCheck Center (TFC) was founded as part of a “movement” to enhance Taiwan’s media and information environments. Furthermore, it is Taiwan’s first fact-checking effort to consistently stress journalistic values and training from the outset. According to the TFC’s co-founder, Yuan-Hui Hu, the TFC’s mission is to improve the quality of information available to Taiwanese people at a time when the Taiwanese media is afflicted by sensationalism, insufficient verification, and distorted reporting caused by partisanship.

Over the past few years, the three organizations have helped the Taiwanese verify information in many fields of knowledge. Nevertheless, fact-checkers have constantly faced allegations of being politically biased. In the early days, when fact-checking organizations sought to establish their credibility, some intended to steer away from controversial issues, particularly political ones. However, as China’s information attacks and Taiwan’s domestic political fights intensify, fact-checking on political matters, particularly during elections, has become critical to ensuring democracy’s integrity. Fact-checking organizations have since played a more active role during major events, such as elections, to investigate rumors and give people accurate and reliable information.

However, for the Asia Fact Check Lab (AFCL), which was established in 2022 as the latest newcomer joining the Taiwanese fact-checking circle, combating propaganda and disinformation disseminated by authoritarian countries is an essential task. As a part of Radio Free Asia (RFA), the AFCL is funded by the U.S. Congress. Since its mission focuses on fighting against propaganda from authoritarian regimes, the AFCL targets audiences not only in the Taiwanese public but also readers living in and beyond China, Hong Kong, or Macau and covers more topics about geopolitics. Some of the fact-checking reports and analyses are also published in Cantonese and English.

These four fact-checking organizations in Taiwan have also played a part in media literacy education in Taiwanese society. In addition to publishing articles about fact-checking skills, they also hold workshops individually or collaboratively to introduce media literacy knowledge to the Taiwanese public. For fact-checking organizations, workshops are a great opportunity to promote media literacy and to reach out and build up trust among the public by showing who they are and how they fact-check.

Each of the four organizations reported in this chapter, MyGoPen, Cofacts, TFC, and AFCL, has its own focus and expertise. They compete with each other in certain fields but also maintain a friendly rapport. Their relationship is more like a community than competitors. Over the years, being faced with more challenges from domestic and foreign sources, fact-checking organizations and think tanks, media outlets, and NGOs in Taiwan have gradually developed “a frontline of information battles” that defends and endeavors to improve Taiwan’s information ecosystem. This “frontline” has proven its worth on a number of significant occasions, including elections.

However, these fact-checking organizations have faced a common challenge—funding sources. The TFC and MyGoPen have long been Meta’s third-party partners to offer fact-checking services. As Meta ended its collaboration with American fact-checkers (Catalanella and Sanders, 2025), fact-checking partners in other countries, including the TFC and MyGoPen, have also expressed concerns about their partnership with Meta (Li and Chen, 2025). Moreover, political developments in the United States have impacted the operation of the AFCL since, as an initiative under Free Radio Asia, the AFCL

is funded by the budget from the U.S. Congress. During the Trump administration's restructuring of the U.S. federal government, the RFA's federal grant was terminated in March 2025, although the RFA has filed a lawsuit against the administration (RFA staff, 2025). Until the time of writing this report, the fate of RFA and AFCL has remained unclear.

As the fact-checking organizations in Taiwan operate independently (there is no coordinating body for fact-checking organizations in Taiwan), the next section will explain the individual fact-checking organizations in Taiwan.

INDIVIDUAL FACT-CHECK ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR CHALLENGES

1. MyGoPen

Name: MyGoPen

URL: <https://www.mygopen.com/>

Representative: Charles Yeh

The organizational structure and working methods of MyGoPen

Motivated by the urge to help his mother-in-law combat false information, Taiwanese engineer Charles Yeh founded MyGoPen in 2015 as a project to assist senior citizens with online information verification. Since mobile texts have become so common, Taiwan has seen an increase in online false information. Senior folks in Taiwan have fallen prey to frauds and a deluge of false information masquerading as life hacks or health advice. Intending to help seniors identify incorrect information, Yeh created a blog, which quickly became well-known among seniors and evolved into the website MyGoPen. The meaning of MyGoPen in Taiwanese is “don't fool me.”

Over the past nine years, MyGoPen has become one of Taiwan's leading fact-checking organizations. What distinguishes MyGoPen from its Taiwanese counterparts is that it delivers not only fact-checking reports on its website or via LINE chatbot conversations but also human assistance through its LINE account. In other words, users might ask MyGoPen's real-person LINE account questions about suspicious information pieces and obtain replies from MyGoPen staff.

Since many of its early audiences are seniors, MyGoPen generally centers on false information about health, science, lifestyles, etc. However, as it grew from a personal blog website to a full-fledged fact-checking organization, its fact-checking subjects expanded to rumors about politics and international events.

MyGoPen has also developed to include a more sophisticated verification process in its fact-checking methods. It currently employs a number of journalists and has a clear, professional process in place for validating and disseminating fact-checking findings. Since 2020, MyGoPen has met the International Fact-Checking Network's (IFCN) criteria for operation and verification activity, as demonstrated by its verified signatory status.

As part of Taiwan's fact-checking ecosystem, which consists of fact-checking organizations, academic and other non-government partners, social media platforms, and several government agencies, such as the Taiwanese police bureau's anti-scam units, MyGoPen has worked with the community to promote media literacy, such as hosting or attending hands-on media literacy activities or developing resources facilitating media literacy education.

MyGoPen's annual operating cost is roughly 5 million New Taiwan Dollars (approximately 154,445 USD). In the beginning, MyGoPen relied on reader donations and selling LINE stickers to sustain its operations. As MyGoPen grew into a fact-checking organization, it ceased accepting individual donations (MyGoPen, n.d.a). MyGoPen's primary financing sources now include funding from collaborating on media literacy programs with international social media platforms or non-governmental organizations and content authorization fees it charges online portals such as LINE Today and Yahoo! News (Taiwan).

According to the "principles of accepting funding or donations" that MyGoPen publishes on its website, MyGoPen does not accept funding from the government, political parties, or politicians so as to maintain its independence. MyGoPen also discloses its donation records and annual donation reports on its website (MyGoPen, n.d.a).

In the early days of MyGoPen, volunteers had joined the initiative. But as MyGoPen grows, it currently employs seven full-time staff members, comprising Charles Yeh, the editor-in-chief, three fact-checkers, two consultants who responded to users' LINE inquiries, a project manager, and a researcher. Yeh also develops software to enhance the database and LINE chatbot functionality of MyGoPen. The three fact-checkers are either seasoned reporters or communications grads from colleges (MyGoPen, n.d.b).

The primary sources of false information that MyGoPen uses to track the false information circulating in Taiwanese society are user reports of false information to its LINE chatbots and real-person accounts. The MyGoPen team also actively corrects false information reported by Taiwanese media outlets. The most common false information categories that MyGoPen has gathered from mainstream and social media and user reports are phishing posts, frauds, inaccurate information about government policies, and fake knowledge regarding science and health (MyGoPen, n.d.c).

The MyGoPen false information database is a pool of false information gathered from the aforementioned sources. Fact-checkers can use the database to identify trends in incorrect information and flag information pieces that have been widely shared. Factors for prioritizing fact-checking work include whether the information has been extensively distributed and its potential impact, such as whether it will generate immediate panic in society or harm people or groups (MyGoPen, n.d.d).

Figure 2. A screenshot of the homepage of the MyGoPen website.



Figure 3. A screenshot of a MyGoPen's short video that debunked the rumor that wearing masks will increase the risk of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. This video was posted on MyGoPen's Facebook page.

Each of the MyGoPen fact-checkers is assigned to specific fields, such as health and science or international events. After receiving tasks, fact-checkers use multiple tools and methods to verify information. Verification tools such as reverse image search engines, consulting original documents, and interviews with experts are common methods for fact-checkers to debunk information. Under usual circumstances, each fact-checker individually conducts an investigation and writes up the reports, although in some cases, they discuss or collaborate with colleagues. A completed fact-checking report will be reviewed by at least three fact-checkers (including the editor-in-chief) to ensure that the sources, logic, and wording are correct.

Like most fact-checking organizations, MyGoPen uses labels to indicate an information piece's authenticity level. The decision to label the fact-checked piece is collectively made by fact-checkers. The labels include "False" (the piece is completely incorrect), "Partially False" (the piece is mixed with correct and incorrect information), "Scam" (the information is a scam trap), "Easy to be misunderstood" (the piece contains the correct information, but the expression may make it easy for readers to misunderstand), "Misleading" (there is not enough evidence yet, but

the information may lead to incorrect conclusion), “Real-time fact-check” (fact-checking pieces of situation or events that change rapidly, such as breaking news), etc. Yeh pointed out that they modified the labels several times to make them more precise and understandable for readers.

MyGoPen also uses automatic methods to compare recent prevalent rumors or requests submitted by MyGoPen users with those that have been in the database to accelerate the speed of detecting and debunking false information. Once the system finds that new rumors are identical to pieces in the database, the system automatically sends the results back to users who pose the requests.

As of 2024, MyGoPen publishes one or two fact-checking reports per day. In addition to publishing fact-checking reports on its website, MyGoPen distributes its reports via social media platforms and messaging apps like LINE, Facebook, and Dcard (an online platform founded in 2019 and popular among Taiwanese college students). Currently, MyGoPen has 40,000 LINE members and 33,000 Facebook followers. MyGoPen has also granted permission for its content to be distributed via online news portals. As a result, readers may also find MyGoPen stories on LINE Today and Yahoo! News (Tawan).

The MyGoPen website offers more than just fact-checking reports. Furthermore, it can be a useful tool for media literacy. In addition to fact-checking postings, MyGoPen's website features sections on “media literacy,” “debunking scams,” and “practical lessons” that give readers important information about media information, cybersecurity, and even useful life hacks. MyGoPen has also recently attempted to provide fact-checking findings on social media platforms in the form of short videos.

MyGoPen has been a signatory of the International Face-Checking Network since 2020, which means that it is compliant with the IFCN code of principles in terms of valid fact-checking practices, fairness, and independence.

The challenges faced by MyGoPen

As a fact-checking organization that started with a personal blog, it took MyGoPen several years to establish its reputation and legitimacy. Yeh stated that in the early years, when many Taiwanese were still unfamiliar with the term “fact-checking,” it was difficult to explain what information verification was to the experts or government organizations he interviewed and to create trust between interviewees and audiences. However, as the Taiwanese have become more vigilant about the disinformation problem, MyGoPen has gained recognition in Taiwanese society.

Another reason MyGoPen is recognized in Taiwanese society is its outreach to the community. MyGoPen has actively collaborated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies to promote media literacy at various events, including continuing education programs for middle and high school teachers and computer and game expos. MyGoPen's presence at these events also provides an excellent opportunity to showcase their work to the general public and promote the concept of fact-checking.

People in the misinformation research field have growing concerns about AI (Hsu and Thompson, 2023). So do fact-checking organizations like MyGoPen. Although AI-generated disinformation was not prevalent in the 2024 Taiwanese presidential election and had no influence on voting, MyGoPen has witnessed an increase in AI disinformation and is concerned about the challenge AI has posed.

Yeh stated that one of the most significant challenges brought about by AI for fact-checkers is the lack of effective tools for identifying AI-generated texts and visuals. Despite the fact that various tools for assessing images and texts have been developed, the verification results are insufficiently accurate. Yeh is also worried that AI tools would speed up the fabrication and spread of disinformation. For example, AI could reduce language barriers and present disinformation in other languages in the local tongue and style, making false messages more plausible to audiences. It would be fact-checkers' earnest expectation that more verification tools could arrive sooner.

Like many fact-checking sites, MyGoPen was questioned over its political leanings. Yeh noted that although MyGoPen has endeavored to maintain and demonstrate its independence in the fact-checking process and fact-checking reports, some readers still interpret the organization's fact-checking findings in a political light. However, as MyGoPen entered its ninth year, political bias issues became less of a concern. On the other hand, MyGoPen has focused more on fact-checking information about health or daily life, which tends to cause less controversy.

Fact-checking organizations like MyGoPen have also often faced the challenge of financial sustainability. Currently, revenues from content authorization to other media outlets and funding from media literary projects are sufficient to support MyGoPen's operation.

2. Cofacts

Name: Cofacts 真的假的

URL: <https://en.cofacts.tw/>

Cofounder: Billion Lee, Johnson Liang

Office Address: None (The project is coordinated online. However, there will be monthly gathering for volunteers).

The organizational structure and working methods of Cofacts

Developed from a 2016 project leveraging chatbots to fact-check information spread on LINE, a messaging app popular in Taiwan, Cofacts is now (2024) the main platform where Taiwanese people report dubious information pieces to check the accuracy. Unlike other Taiwanese fact-checking initiatives, which mostly operate as non-government organizations or a department inside a media organization, Cofacts is more like a “volunteer community” made up of those who wish to use their programming skills to solve false information problems and those who care about facts.

Cofacts' origin can be traced back to Taiwan's civic tech community, g0v. Concerned by the excessive amount of information in Taiwanese society, a group of g0v (a civic tech community) volunteers launched the project in 2016 to combat false information through technology. In 2017, the group obtained a Prototype Civic Grant to fund the Cofacts initiative's operations. Currently, it is funded by small individual donations, grants from non-governmental organizations, and contributions from community members.

In addition to volunteers, technology, notably Artificial Intelligence (AI), has been an important component of Cofact's platform. Since 2016, Cofacts has employed artificial intelligence to categorize inaccurate information reported by users and automatically respond to readers who inquire about problematic information pieces. More recently, Cofacts has used language models to advise users to evaluate problematic elements of information.

Cofacts has also worked alongside other fact-checking organizations. Fact-checkers from other Taiwanese fact-checking groups, such as the Taiwan FactCheck Center, have used Cofacts' database to identify trends in false information. On the other hand, Taiwan FactCheck Center and MyGoPen share their fact-checking findings with Cofacts, which incorporates the results into its user responses.

Cofacts' 2017 Prototype Civic Grant provided a crucial basis for the project's operation. However, Cofacts is now funded primarily through individual donations. Besides, Cofacts volunteers also contribute money from their own pockets. In addition, they have received grants from non-government organizations, such as the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation, a Taiwanese international humanitarian organization known for its religious charity services. The diverse funding sources have also shielded them from possible influences from third parties.

Cofacts is a decentralized organization. Although several founders continue to be involved in the platform's everyday operations, such as maintaining or improving the database and technology, Cofacts does not have "heads" or "managers." Cofacts members are proud of their open-source belief, which has led them to share the platform's code and data, as well as invite anyone interested in submitting their fact-checking results.

Because Cofacts is a decentralized organization, anyone can send their report and fact-checking results to the site. According to data from Cofacts' website analytics and Billion Lee, one of the co-founders, the platform receives approximately 5,000 messages reporting dubious information each month. The majority of false information queries will be handled by Chatbot, but volunteers will also manually respond to some of them. Volunteers also help to update the platform's programs and functions. Currently, approximately 10-20 volunteers meet regularly to discuss ways to fact-check and add to the Cofacts platform. They come from various backgrounds, including educators, programmers, journalists, and designers.

Cofact relies on users' reports of false information. Users have several options: they could forward the suspicious information by using LINE ChatBot, and the information piece will go through to the Cofacts database. Users could also visit the Cofacts website <https://cofacts.tw/>, post suspicious information, and check if there have been fact-checked results in the database. Users who report suspicious information are anonymized, and no personal information can be identified.

After users report suspicious information pieces, Cofacts' AI would first automatically label the information to make it more efficient for database search. The labels include politics and political parties, suspicious scams, petitions, public policy, health, environment, gender issues, food, and safety, etc. (See Figure 4). In addition to AI, users can also manually add or update the labels.



Figure 4. Cofacts' label page. Users can add or revise the labels for information pieces on the platform.

On Cofacts' website, users can answer the reported suspicious information by submitting verification results. When users write fact-checking answers, they can again choose another kind of label for the now fact-checked information according to the information's level of authenticity. The labels about the authenticity of the information include: "This piece contains incorrect information," "This piece contains correct information," "This piece contains personal opinion," and "This piece is beyond verification."



Figure 5. Users can choose the piece's authenticity level from the dropdown menu when writing up fact-checking posts on the Cofacts website.

Once a fact-checking answer is added to suspicious information, other users may still add verification answers for the same information. The Cofacts community thinks that anyone can be a fact-checker. Hence, there is no need to review or remove any fact-checking answers, even if they are not of good quality. That is why numerous fact-checking entries may exist for a single suspicious information piece. As Billion pointed out in a previous interview in which she explained Cofacts' belief: "We can only respect everyone's freedom of speech and leave all the comments here [on the platform] and let readers evaluate or assess their veracity. We present all the information. We have no right to delete anyone's messages [on the platform]" (Su and Li, 2023:77). The Cofacts community also believes that by giving readers multiple perspectives on facts, users can determine what the facts are.

When users inquire about the validity of a false information piece, the page displays the following information:

- User queries and page views during the past 31 days.
- Other users' responses, including the level of authenticity, explanation, and evidence.
- A panel on the right side of the webpage shows relevant suspicious information.
- Users can give verifications and update fact-checking replies by clicking the buttons on the webpage.



Figure 6. Users can choose the piece's authenticity level from the dropdown menu when writing up fact-checking posts on the Cofacts website.

As previously stated, if LINE users share the information with the Cofacts LINE chatbot account, Cofacts will also offer fact-checking responses via the chatbot.

Cofacts is an open-source and collaborative platform. As a result, anyone can use it for free. Additionally, they provide free access to the database to other fact-checking groups.

According to Cofacts' analytical numbers and Billion, there are about 20,000 website users per day. Take the amount of May 2024 as an example, the website has about 15,000-23,000 users and 20,000-35,000 views per day. As for LINE bot users, the daily active users are between 1,000 and 1600. The users are mostly from Taiwan but also from a wider range of other locations, such as Hong Kong, the U.S., Cambodia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada, and China (Cofacts Analytics, n.d.).

Cofacts is a decentralized group that is not affiliated with any larger organization or connected to any political or religious organizations. It is also not a signatory of the International Fact-Checking Network.

The challenges faced by Cofacts

The Cofacts community believes that anyone can contribute to fact-checking. As mentioned above, they would prefer to present all the fact-checking results and let readers make decisions based on their own judgments.

The Cofacts community has also worked to encourage media literacy and fact-checking skills. For example, they host conferences inviting interested individuals to discuss enhancing fact-checking skills.

Instead of viewing generative AI as a daunting challenge, Cofacts has long used AI to enhance the functionality of its database and LINE bot. In fact, AI technology has enabled the original idea of employing a LINE chatbot to engage with people who need information verified and responses provided. Since 2019, Cofacts has used artificial intelligence to help categorize and label reported suspicious information. In 2022, Cofacts expanded the AI language model to automatically inform users who submit dubious information, suggesting possible flaws in the queried information.

Like in other open-source and crowdsourcing initiatives, volunteers' enthusiasm and participation are crucial to the long-term viability of this project. Billion stated that open systems encouraging everyone's involvement would eventually perish without new participants or a proper operating mode. However, the open system also makes it possible for anyone who wants to continue this effort to take up the mantle. As a result, Cofacts' key task is maintaining contributor support while inspiring new interests.

3. Taiwan FactCheck Center

Name: Taiwan FactCheck Center

URL: <https://tfc-taiwan.org.tw/>

Representatives: Shih-Hung Lo, Chairperson of the Taiwan FactCheck Center, and Eve Chiu, CEO of the Taiwan FactCheck Center

Office Address: #9, 6F-1, Qingdao E Rd, Zhongzheng District, Taipei City, 100, Taiwan

The organizational structure and working methods of Taiwan FactCheck Center

The founding of the Taiwan FactCheck Center (TFC) aligned closely with the aim of improving Taiwan's media ecosystem. Two non-profit Taiwan media watchdog organizations, Taiwan Media Watch and the Association for Quality Journalism, co-initiated the Taiwan FactCheck Center in 2018, hoping to provide the Taiwanese society with a fact-checking service on information related to public interests and improve news quality in Taiwan (Taiwan FactCheck Center, n.d.). As the TFC cofounder Yuan-Hui Hu pointed out, TFC is more than just a fact-checking organization. Rather, it is a part of the “movement” to enhance the health and integrity of the information environment (Hu, 2020; Su and Li, 2023: 73-74).

TFC became a verified signatory of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) in November 2018 and has pledged devotion to the IFCN's Code of Principles, enshrining fairness and objectivity. It has also joined Meta's third-party fact-checking program to help improve the accuracy of information on Meta's platforms (Taiwan FactCheck Center, n.d.a).

TFC made contributions in the fight against disinformation, including those during the COVID-19 pandemic and major national elections, by monitoring Taiwan's information environment and publishing timely fact-checking pieces to stop the dissemination of damaging claims. For instance, it supported the start of the cross-national fact-checking project CoronaVirusFacts Alliance, in which more than 100 fact-checkers worldwide coordinated to refute false information concerning COVID-19 and was among the first fact-checking organizations to alarm the international community about the disinformation threats following the pandemic breakout in China (Taiwan FactCheck Center a, n.d.). During the Taiwanese presidential election, the TFC promptly debunked an altered vote-fraud video and won the TFC the Best Correct Award from IFCN's Global Fact 7 event, which acknowledged outstanding fact-checking works in the international fact-checking community (Taiwan FactCheck Center, n.d.a).

Aside from fact-checking, the TFC has also been devoted to promoting media literacy by educating the public to identify false information. For example, the TFC has created podcasts, published online articles and newsletters, or hosted events and workshops with various non-government groups.

To ensure the independence of fact-checking results and avoid interference, the TFC did not accept funding from the government or political parties. Like a majority of fact-checking initiatives worldwide (Fu, 2024), the TFC depends greatly on revenues from partnerships with social media companies like Meta and Google.

In addition to financial support from social media corporations, the TFC has sought sponsorship from non-governmental groups. For example, in its early years, the TFC drew

funding from private foundations founded by Taiwanese entrepreneurs. Over the years, the TFC has applied for funding to support particular projects. The TFC still hopes to diversify its funding sources. Therefore, it has received donations from readers and people who support fact-checking projects.

Fairness and independence are the TFC's most important values. According to TFC's CEO, Eve Chiu, none of the funding sources have attempted to interfere with the selection of fact-checking items, processes, and results.

Since December 2020, the Taiwan FactCheck Foundation (TFC) has been reorganized as a non-profit foundation. Major operational decisions are made by the TFC board of directors, which is composed of 7-15 members, according to the Charter of the foundation. A chief executive officer, who is nominated by the chairperson of the board and approved by the board, is responsible for overseeing the daily operations of TFC.

As of 2024, the TFC fact-checking team consists of ten members, including the editor-in-chief, seven full-time fact-checkers, and two part-time interns. The fact-checkers have experience as journalists or as assistants in fact-checking projects.

In addition to the fact-checking team, the TFC has a team dedicated to promoting media literacy education and podcast production, as well as another team responsible for international projects and research.²⁶

The TFC recognizes false information from a variety of sources:

- a. The TFC maintains a database that enables fact-checkers to monitor suspicious claims submitted by LINE chatbot and MyGoPen users.²⁷ Fact-checkers can identify information that has been extensively disseminated online and identified as suspicious by users by utilizing the database.
- b. The TFC also closely monitors media coverage and follows news events to rectify errors in media reporting or TV news programs. For instance, the TFC has released numerous fact-checking reports to refute assertions made by talking heads of Taiwanese talk shows.
- c. The public can also suggest TFC fact-checkers to verify suspicious information pieces. Those who spot suspicious claims can report the information by submitting a form provided on the TFC website or through the TFC email address and the TFC LINE chatbot.

TFC fact-checkers would verify claims that are verifiable, broadly disseminated, and relevant to public interests.²⁸ The topics that the TFC covers include healthcare, public policy, education, gender issues, international news events, etc. (Taiwan FactCheck Center, n.d.b).

The TFC, like multiple fact-checking organizations in other countries, has encountered allegations of political bias (Graves, 2016), particularly in Taiwan's polarizing society. Audiences

²⁶ Disclosure: the author of this report also contributes to the TFC as a research fellow.

²⁷ In an interview with the author conducted in June 2024, the TFC editor-in-chief, Eve Chiu, pointed out that MyGoPen has collaborated with the TFC by opening their database to the TFC.

²⁸ Not all claims or rumors are verifiable. For example, a statement expressing an opinion cannot be verified as true or false.

frequently inquire as to whether the TFC's selection of items for fact-checking is predicated on their political preferences. The TFC's approach to demonstrating its independence is to concentrate on political policy and refrain from singling out specific politicians. Additionally, the TFC fact-checkers strive to maintain the highest level of transparency by providing a detailed explanation of the fact-checking process and the resources used, such as the documents and experts consulted.

TFC fact-checkers primarily rely on experts, documents, online sources, or individuals who are said to be involved in the rumors to verify the claims in the case. They also frequently employ digital tools, such as image reverse search and Google Maps, or tools provided by social media companies like CrowdTangle, to identify the route of rumor dissemination and assist in verification.

Each fact-checker is assigned a task during the daily meeting. They frequently operate independently but also collaborate on challenging cases. Before being finalized by the editor-in-chief, each fact-checking report is reviewed by at least three additional fact-checkers.

The TFC has improved the labels for fact-checked claims in recent years to better indicate the authenticity of the claims. The TFC fact-checkers will collaborate to determine the appropriate label for each fact-checked article. At present, the labels consist of:

- a. **False (錯誤):** The information is primarily false. In order to facilitate comprehension of the nature of deceptive information, this category is subdivided into multiple subcategories.
 - i. **False Context (移花接木):** Manipulators implement genuine elements in false contexts.
 - ii. **Scam (詐騙):** The information is intended to defraud individuals of their money or personal data.
 - iii. **Imposter (假借冠名):** Manipulators present forged information that impersonates genuine sources.
 - iv. **Manipulated video and audio (影音變造):** Manipulators deceive audiences by modifying video or audio clips.
- b. **Easy to be misunderstood(易生誤解):** The claim fails to provide adequate context or information, which leads to misunderstandings.
- c. **Partially False (部分錯誤):** The information is a combination of some accurate and some inaccurate facts.
- d. **Clarification of the Facts (事實釐清):** The TFC does not verify the accuracy of the claim. Nevertheless, it offers additional context or information to assist readers in grasping the issues or news events in question.
- e. **Insufficient evidence(證據不足):** The claim is not sufficiently supported by evidence, and it is also not sufficiently refuted by evidence.

The TFC distributes its fact-checking reports, analysis, research, and event announcements through its website, newsletters, online news portal, mainstream media outlets, and social media platforms. These materials target the Taiwanese public. The TFC also

publishes English analyses and studies for international readers interested in TFC's works and Taiwan's information environment.

The TFC website is the main venue where the TFC communicates its fact-checking and reports to the public. The website includes sections such as fact-checking reports [查核報告], analysis of notable disinformation techniques [謠言風向球], in-depth analysis of issues relevant to the currently prevalent false information [議題觀察室], globally trending issues [國際視野], media literacy section [媒體識讀], etc. The TFC published about 50 pieces of fact-checking reports per week.



Figure 7. A screenshot of part of the homepage of the TFC website.

In addition to the website, the TFC also emails subscribers weekly newsletters in Chinese and biweekly newsletters in English, in which editors and fact-checkers summarize the trends of false information over the past week and provide in-depth analyses of the trends.

The TFC also authorizes other mainstream news media to carry its articles with different authorizing agreements. For example, the TFC charges the commercial online news portal Yahoo! News (Taiwan) for carrying the TFC articles on the news portal.

Regarding social media platforms, the TFC has official accounts on Facebook, X, LINE, and Instagram. Since Threads has gained popularity in Taiwan, the TFC has used this platform to reach out to more Taiwanese youth. As of June 2024, the TFC has about 170,000 followers on Facebook, 98,000 on X, 70,000 on LINE, 50,000 on Instagram, and 46,000 on threads.

The TFC has been a verified signatory to the International Fact-Checking Network since November 2018 and has received annually renewed verifications.



Figure 8. A screenshot of part of the homepage of the TFC website.

The challenges faced by Taiwan FactCheck Center

To let more Taiwanese understand fact-checking and win the public's trust, the TFC has made great efforts to reach out to the public through workshops or conferences, introducing fact-checking skills and promoting knowledge about information literacy. The TFC also collaborates with non-government organizations to bring media literacy knowledge to different social sectors and groups. For example, they have worked with the National Association for the Promotion of Community Universities (NAPCU) to introduce fact-checking knowledge to community colleges and adult education.

The TFC has partnered with several Taiwanese research institutions to address the challenges posed by AI, including AI videos and audio recordings. For instance, the TFC has sought the advice of professors at the National Cheng Kung University who specialize in deepfake and machine learning to identify AI-generated products. This type of partnership

between the TFC and research institutions can benefit both parties. On the one hand, the TFC can employ new tools that facilitate information verification; on the other hand, research institutions can enhance their tools by evaluating the cases of the TFC.

Like many fact-checking institutions in other countries, the TFC has faced funding challenges. At present, grants from social media platforms are an essential funding source. Nevertheless, social media funding is not stable, and the TFC still needs to diversify its funding sources.

4. Asia Fact Check Lab²⁹

Name: Radio Free Asia, Asia Fact Check Lab 亞洲事實查核實驗室

URL: <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/afcl> (English),
<https://www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/factcheck> (Chinese)

Director: Chih-Te Lee

Office Address: (Headquarter): Suite 300, 2025 M Street NW, Washington, DC, 20036 USA,
(Taipei): 9F, No.88, 100, Section 2, Zhongxiao E Rd., Taipei City, 100, Taiwan

The organizational structure and working methods of Asia Fact Check Lab

Asia Fact Check Lab (AFCL) was officially established in 2022, and its first fact-checking piece was published on November 15 of that year. Unlike other Taiwanese fact-checking initiatives, which primarily focus on a wide range of local false information relevant to Taiwan, AFCL focuses more on political information spread in simplified Chinese, particularly geopolitics and relations between the United States, China, and Taiwan. However, it looks forward to expanding its geographical scope of fact-checking beyond the Chinese language to further combat propaganda and disinformation disseminated by authoritarian regimes in East and South Asia.

AFCL is a part of Radio Free Asia, a U.S. government-funded organization. Years before the AFCL was launched, democratic countries such as the U.S. were concerned about the information influence campaigns waged by authoritarian regimes. Former Executive Editor Min Lee Mitchell (李弘敏) was worried about the prevalence of false information in Chinese-language media, especially Chinese social media platforms. Around that time, the U.S. Congress also boosted its budget to counter disinformation. With funding from the U.S. government, RFA was set to launch the fact-checking branch.

Based on RFA's mission to provide correct information to Chinese-language audiences, AFCL has focused more on disinformation and misinformation concerning geopolitics. Most importantly, AFCL positioned itself as an organization to combat false information created and spread by authoritarian regimes, such as the Chinese government.

²⁹ As the time when the paper is published, the AFCL has been shutdown on May 30, 2025.

The majority of AFCL's funding comes from the U.S. Congress's authorized budget. The U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) receives funding from Congress and distributes it to the RFA board, which allocates financial support to the fact-checking initiative. The amount of funding varies annually depending on how much of the budget is approved by Congress.

Although AFCL receives financial assistance from the U.S. government as part of the RFA, it upholds the journalistic principles of the RFA to maintain objectivity. As RFA states in its "Code of Journalistic Ethics": "At the very core of RFA's mission is strict adherence to the highest standards of journalism. RFA is funded by the U.S. Congress but retains full editorial independence from the U.S. Government" (RFA n.d.). Moreover, the USAGM, the independent U.S. federal agency that oversees and distributes funds to the RFA, has also codified "firewall" rules into agency guidance to ensure newsrooms affiliated with USAGM remain independent (USAGM n.d.).

Chih-Te Lee, the director of the AFCL, says that the team of the AFCL, as the fact-checking initiative under the RFA, also follows the standards of journalism set by the RFA Code of Journalistic Ethics. The team has never encountered any interference from the U.S. government or other authorities. The editorial room has also been free from any pressure from the board or USAGM.

As of May 2024, AFCL has eight full-time staff members: the director, two editors, three fact-checkers, one translator who also supports the team as a journalist, and one social media specialist responsible for customizing and posting content for social media platforms. They also have a contractor who creates content for short videos.

The director, editors, and journalists are all veteran journalists or editors who have several years of experience in reporting or editing news in Chinese-language news organizations.

Fact-checkers in AFCL manually monitor false information on social media, such as X and Weibo, and mainstream media, such as mainstream Chinese and Taiwanese news outlets and Taiwanese news talk shows. In addition to routinely browsing social media and monitoring traditional news outlets, they follow major news events closely, such as earthquakes or protests, and pay specific attention to the wave of false information that often follows breaking news of current events. During elections, the AFCL also verifies candidates' statements and live fact-checks claims made during presidential debates.

After identifying the problematic information, fact-checkers search for credible and relevant information or conduct interviews with experts, comparing the information they collect with the problematic information. In most cases, fact-checkers work independently. However, if they encounter difficulties, they discuss issues with colleagues.

The AFCL team uses a variety of techniques to check information, including information intelligence systems built by Taiwan's National Institute of Cyber Security and Google data analysis tools like Pinpoint. AFCL fact-checkers have also regularly updated their expertise in open-source intelligence (OSINT) by attending training sessions hosted by organizations that specialize in OSINT investigations. These methods of data analysis are

essential not only for fact-checking but also for tracing how information is spread throughout different forms of media.

AFCL classifies inaccurate information with tags based on how accurate the pieces of information are and the reason that the information is incorrect. In addition to “true” and “false,” there are labels like “out of context,” “insufficient evidence,” and “one-sided/biased.” It is worth noting that other fact-checking websites rarely use the last label. The director of AFCL noted that a “one-sided” item is often seen in items about politics or contentious issues. This type of content does not necessarily contain inaccurate information; nevertheless, it does not provide enough information, either. To alert audiences to this kind of biased information that may mislead audiences, AFCL thus labels the information as “one-sided/biased.”

Members of the AFCL team would deliberate on the labeling of fact-checking posts and decide what labels should be applied to the information in question.

AFCL publishes its fact-checking posts in multiple languages, including traditional Chinese, simplified Chinese, and Cantonese. Some fact-checking pieces that are more relevant to international readers will also be translated into English. AFCL has English web pages hosting these translated English fact-checking pieces.

Currently, AFCL’s primary target audience is Chinese readers, including those who live in China. Although the Chinese firewall restricts residents from accessing many foreign websites, they can still use VPNs to browse the AFCL website. Another group of AFCL’s audience is Chinese speakers who live overseas but still predominantly consume content in Chinese.

A typical AFCL fact-checking post will include the following parts: a label that indicates whether the rumor/information is correct or false, a summary so that readers can quickly grasp the main points of the fact-checking, and an in-depth analysis that parses out the details of the fact-checking.

While some of the Taiwanese fact-checking organizations cautiously avoid extremely political-contentious topics, AFCL does not steer clear of the hot water. In addition to fact-checking posts, it also invests time and resources in investigative journalism to trace the flow of disinformation and propaganda ecosystem, delving into schemes behind malicious rumors. Since the traditional format of fact-checking pieces (such as identifying questionable points, providing explanations, and rendering verdicts) makes it difficult to provide more detailed and comprehensive reporting, the AFCL has tried more versatile genres for presenting in-depth information, such as creating more categories to supplement fact-checking pieces. For example, it provides columns such as “media watch (傳媒觀察),” which explains how Chinese or Taiwanese media outlets cover current events or important topics, and “fact-checking notebook (查核筆記),” which records important information that does not fit into the fact-checking reports, such as the routes of the flow of disinformation.

The following images are examples of the AFCL homepage and fact-checking posts in traditional Chinese:



Figure 9. A screenshot of an AFCL fact-checking piece published in traditional Chinese



Figure 10. A screenshot of the English page of AFCL

Currently, AFCL publishes about four fact-checking pieces per week. These pieces are published on the AFCL website as well as in other online news media or news aggregators, such as Yahoo! News. The director pointed out that AFCL welcomes news outlets and news

aggregators to repost or republish their fact-checking pieces. Since RFA is a non-profit organization, AFCL does not charge any fees for those who republish their articles.

AFCL also promotes its articles through social media, such as Facebook, X, and Instagram. Recently, it has also rolled out short videos explaining some of the fact-checking pieces.

AFCL is part of RFA, which is supported by funding from the U.S. government. AFCL has not yet been a signatory to the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). Although IFCN grants signatory status to an organization “that receives funding from state or political sources to carry out public service journalism if the IFCN assessor determines there is clear and unambiguous separation of editorial control from state or political influence” (IFCN n.d.). AFCL’s affiliation with the U.S. government makes it more difficult to obtain signatory status than other Taiwanese fact-checking organizations that do not accept financial support from governments or political parties.

However, the director of AFCL maintained that AFCL is independent of interference or pressure from any political or private entities.

The challenges faced by Asia Fact Check Lab

AFCL’s investigations into Chinese propaganda campaigns in Taiwan have attracted widespread notice. For example, its investigative report during the 2024 Taiwanese presidential election revealed that the Chinese government had directed a Taiwanese researcher to work with an online news outlet to post fake polls in an attempt to sway the election. This report was extensively reported by various news outlets and resulted in the arrest of the suspects.

The director of AFCL stated that the organization strives to provide audiences with high-quality fact-checking reports and investigations into propaganda and disinformation. The team believes that the professionalism reflected in their work would justify its impartiality, although the funding source is the U.S. government. AFCL has also attempted to engage audiences via social media, offering rapid fact-checking pieces when major events occur and the public requires accurate information. It also intends to create more audiovisual products that can effectively convey messages to audiences.

The director of AFCL agreed that AI has posed a significant challenge to fact-checking. To address this issue, AFCL has searched for useful tools to detect AI-made images and videos. Meanwhile, credentials embedded in AI images or videos showing product information, such as the date and the app used to create the content, will also help fact-checkers identify problematic information.

According to the director, another challenge that fact-checkers encounter is that the currently prevailing fact-checking format has several limitations. For example, focusing on the correction of information sometimes makes it more difficult to convey additional context to the information, such as the paths of disinformation flows and the significance or tactics of the information. AFCL thus publishes investigative pieces in which fact-checkers/journalists can delve deeper into the layers beneath the information, such as the ecosystem of incorrect

information. At the moment, about 2/3 to 3/5 of the AFCL content is purely fact-checking; the rest consists of more diverse genres.

However, the gravest challenge faced by the AFCL is the funding source. As Trump has become the 47th American president in January 2025, he has issued numerous executive orders to freeze or terminate grants to the U.S.'s global media agencies, including RFA. The RFA has already filed a lawsuit against the federal government. On April 22, 2025, a U.S. federal judge found Trump's order illegal (Rosen and Watson, 2025). Nevertheless, it is still unclear how the Trump administration will respond to the federal ruling as the report is being written.

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Chapter 6: Indonesia

When Tackling Disinformation Brings Together Civil Society- and Media-based Fact-checking Initiatives in Indonesia

Sherly Haristya³⁰

HISTORICAL AND GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN INDONESIA

Fact-checking initiatives in Indonesia started to emerge in 2015 as a response to the more central role of social media in Indonesian politics and at the same time the proliferation of hoaxes, particularly political-related hoaxes. Online hoaxes mixed with hate speech that spread through the early use of social media in the 2012 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election deepened the polarization in society (ARTICLE 19, 2022).

The massive spread of online hoaxes culminated in a severe political and societal outcry that happened in 2016. Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (widely known as Ahok), the incumbent Governor of Jakarta and an outspoken political figure with a double minority background (Chinese Indonesian and Christian), was attacked by hoaxes when he was running for re-election in the 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election against Anies Baswedan. A man named Buni Yani edited the video of Ahok's speech so that it looked as if Ahok was vilifying the Koran. The virality of the edited video resulted in a

³⁰ LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Jakarta, Indonesia

massive protest involving more than 1 million people defending Islam and calling for Ahok to be charged and prosecuted. Facing intense pressure, Ahok was eventually jailed for blasphemy (Nuryanti, 2020).

With such background, a Facebook forum called FAFHH (Anti-Defamation, Incitement and Hoax Forum) was created by Harry Sufehmi in 2015 as a response to the emergence of slander, incitement, hoaxes and hate speech on social media. The forum was then inaugurated on December 1, 2016 as MAFINDO (Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society) by Harry Sufehmi together with Judith Lubis, Catharina Widayastini, Aribowo Sasmito, Eko Juniarto, Faisal Aditya, and Septiaji Eko Nugroho (MAFINDO, 2024, n.d.b).

The rapid growth in use and misuse of social media as well as the challenges to govern and regulate social media platforms have shaped further fact-checking efforts in Indonesia. This is especially evident from how three key movements built a joint fact-checking coalition in Indonesia in 2018 called CekFakta.

COORDINATING BODY OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN INDONESIA

Basic organizational information

CekFakta is a collaborative fact-checking project initiated by MAFINDO, AJI (Alliance of Independent Journalists), and AMSI (Indonesian Cyber Media Association). This collaboration was launched at the 'Trusted Media Summit 2018' on Saturday, May 5, 2018 in Jakarta involving 22 online media in Indonesia and a network of hundreds of fact-checkers throughout Indonesia (Damarjati, 2018). As of August 2024, CekFakta has more than 100 individual fact-checking organizations (CekFakta, n.d.d).

Founded on 17 August 1994, AJI is an organization of independent journalists with an aim to defend press freedom in Indonesia. Currently, AJI has more than 15,000 journalists from across Indonesia (Ariana, 2024). Moreover, AMSI, which was established on April 18, 2017, is an association of digital media publishers that focuses on advancing the online media industry in Indonesia. Data as of May 2024 records that AMSI members throughout Indonesia have reached 483 media from 28 provinces in Indonesia (Presmedia, 2024). Meanwhile, MAFINDO as previously explained is a fact-checking initiative run by civil society groups.

Google, through the Google News Initiative (GNI), has been the main source of funding for CekFakta since its establishment in 2018 (CekFakta, n.d.a). Funding support from Google continues as it was reported that Google announced that it would provide funding of US\$1.2 million to CekFakta and the GNI Indonesia Training Network, to equip more editors, journalists, and fact-checkers with the skills and tools they need ahead of the 2024 national elections (Google Indonesia, 2022b). In 2022, Google provided funding assistance of US\$815,000 so that more organizations could join the CekFakta network (Google Indonesia, 2022a).

Function and the relationship with the individual fact-check organizations

For writing this report, a focus group discussion (FGD) among key Indonesian fact-checking representatives was conducted during the International Fact-checking Day on April 2, 2024, in collaboration with the Safer Internet Lab (SAIL) of Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia.

While the initial formation of CekFakta faced key questions regarding the readiness and commitment of coalition members, especially those from media organizations, to work together in a collaborative fact-checking entity (Sani, 2018), the FGD pointed out that collaboration and divisions of work are taking place among the CekFakta coalition members. Key representatives at the FGD explained that the CekFakta coalition is coordinating in terms of equipping the networks of AJI, AMSI, and MAFINDO with fact-checking capacity. Meanwhile, the scope of each member's fact-checking duties is determined by each organization/ newsroom's policies (CekFakta, n.d.a).

As a journalist association, AJI plays a role in supporting the provision of journalists with robust fact-checking competencies across Indonesia. To do this, AJI organizes fact-checking training for journalists and training of trainers for journalists who are ready to become trainers. Both training come with standardized modules. AJI also plays a role in training fellow journalists and providing protection to journalists when they receive intimidation from parties who do not like their fact-checked publications.

Within the CekFakta coalition, AMSI plays a role in encouraging online media participation in various regions in Indonesia to join the CekFakta initiative. The coalition considers online media organizations to have a central role in the dissemination of fact-checked content through their fact-checking channels. AMSI also provides fact-checking training and fellowships to the journalist community at the local level to increase their participation in the CekFakta initiative.

Meanwhile, MAFINDO provides pre-bunking training and offline campaigns to its networks of volunteers and grassroots communities. The participation of MAFINDO in CekFakta.com bridges the media and journalist communities with the wider public who also need digital literacy and fact-checking knowledge and skills. Apart from that, MAFINDO also provides technical resources for all the devices needed for CekFakta.com's operations. Its programmers created the CekFakta's website and designed a content management system (CMS) called Yudistira.

The division of fact-checking responsibilities is still coordinated on a limited basis. CekFakta members carry out their fact-checking tasks individually, and if deemed necessary, they voluntarily submit their fact-checked works to the CekFakta's site. This means that other media outlets who are members of the CekFakta coalition can use any fact-checked content produced by a member organization for the benefit of the public (CekFakta, n.d.a).

On special occasions, such as elections and the Covid-19 pandemic, CekFakta's coalition members coordinate and carry out fact-checking tasks. For example, during the 2024 Election

in Indonesia, the CekFakta coalition consisting of AJI, AMSI, MAFINDO, and 16 media members jointly held live fact-checking sessions during the Presidential and Vice-Presidential debates (AMSI, 2024a).

Another ad-hoc coordination also took place between the CekFakta's coalition members and wider media organizations during Election Day on February 14, 2024. The CekFakta coalition along with 131 local and national media conducted monitoring of misinformation and disinformation and fact-checking efforts during the voting day. All the involved fact-checkers from various media organizations have received fact-checking training, but not all their media organizations have joined the CekFakta coalition yet. Editorial teams from AJI, AMSI, and MAFINDO did the final verification for all the fact-checked works done by the other media partners. The fact-checked articles on CekFakta.com are free to be further published by all media partners who are members of the coalition (Tim JACX, 2024).

INDIVIDUAL FACT-CHECK ORGANIZATIONS

In general, fact-checking organizations can be divided into two types, namely civil society and media-based fact-checking organizations. Of all the organizations that are active in carrying out fact-checking activities (as explained in the following section), MAFINDO and The Conversation Indonesia are the two members of CekFakta that represent civil society organizations. The rest are media organizations.

Fact-checking initiatives in Indonesia are supported by a variety of funding and income sources. Civil society-based initiatives tend to rely on funding from multiple entities. Meanwhile, media-based fact-checking initiatives receive financial support from their parent companies. Some media-based fact-checking initiatives have started to develop their own business models.

Moreover, there are only a handful of organizations that provide explanations regarding their fact-checking teams and methods, mostly organizations that have been certified by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN).³¹ Their methods vary from one another as the CekFakta coalition does not coordinate the scope and coverage of fact-checking work of its members. Accordingly, while most organizations deliver their fact-checking work in articles, some have adopted AI to present their output.

There are also fact-checking initiatives that are relatively less active than those discussed in this report. There are early members who initiated the CekFakta coalition, but they do not have a dedicated fact-checking site, such as thejakartapost.com. Meanwhile, some others are not that active anymore in their fact-checking initiatives, such as Republika.co.id (last post on April 27, 2024), Katadata.co.id (last post on August 18, 2023) (Republika, n.d., Katadata, n.d.).

There are also other existing CekFakta's members from national and local media outlets, who have their special fact-checking sites, but tend to be more active fact-checking during special occasions, such as election. They are, for example, Pikiran Rakyat (actively conducted fact-check in the 2024

³¹ They are Cek Fakta of Liputan6.com, Cek Fakta of Suara.com, Tirto.id, Fakta of Tempo.co, and TurnBackHoax of MAFINDO. Meanwhile, the certification for the Hoax or Facts initiative of Kompas.com was last verified in July 2023 and by the time this report is finalized, its certification is still being in renewal process. Periksa Fakta of AFP, which is also certified by IFCN, is part of Agence France-Presse, an international fact-check/ media organization. Periksa Fakta of AFP is not a member of the CekFakta coalition.

election but then only posted 2 fact-checked articles each in June, July, and August) and Tribun News (only posted 1 article each in May, July, and August 2024) (Pikiran Rakyat, n.d., Tribun News, n.d.). There also some local media outlets, such as Kabar Makassar (after the election in February 2024, so far it only posted 1 article between March - August 2024) (Kabar Makassar, n.d.). Their fact-checking sites do not provide any explanations regarding their organizational structure, claims selection, and fact-checking methods.

During the FGD, it was found that there are also media organizations that do not carry out specific fact-checking initiatives within their organizations. However, they define their journalistic work as a fact-checking effort.

A. Civil society-based fact-checking initiatives

1. Turnbackhoax.id of MAFINDO

MAFINDO is a fact-checking organization managed by civil society groups concerned about hoaxes in Indonesia. It delivers its fact-checked work on a site named turnbackhoax.id. MAFINDO's fact-checking operation began as a grassroots debunking effort utilizing a Facebook Forum in September 2015 to respond to the rising volume and severity of hoaxes in Indonesia (FAFHH, n.d.). MAFINDO was officially registered as a formal organization in 2016. It now has 20 offices spread throughout Indonesia (MAFINDO, 2024). It has been a signatory of IFCN since 2018, with MAFINDO renewing its certification yearly (IFCN, 2024b).

MAFINDO has a variety of funding sources. At the beginning of its establishment, it received funding support from volunteers to carry out its activities. As time has gone by, MAFINDO's funding sources have become more diversified. On the IFCN website, in August 2023, MAFINDO reported that they had received funding from the Google News Initiative, Facebook, Love Frankie, WhatsApp, Luminate, IFES, Internews, UNICEF, CDC and UNESCO. MAFINDO also wrote that they do not accept funding from the Indonesian government or any political party (IFCN, 2024b).

Related to the organizational structure, MAFINDO has an Advisory Board (which consists of an Ethics Board and a Supervisory Board), a Presidium (which consists of a chairman and 6 members), as well as a MAFINDO Regional Committee and Coordinator (MAFINDO, 2022). As of September 2023, MAFINDO stated that it has 12 full time staff, about 1000+ local volunteers, and about 95,000 online volunteers (IFCN, 2024b).

There are three types of fact-checkers at MAFINDO, namely, senior fact-checkers, the Kalimasada team, and junior fact-checkers. Data reported by MAFINDO to IFCN as of March 2024, MAFINDO has three senior fact-checkers, fourteen junior fact-checkers, dan six Kalimasada fact-checkers (TurnBackHoax.id, n.d.). The Kalimasada team consists of university graduates based in Solo and Jogja that do fact-checking activities more intensenly than the junior fact-checkers. Junior fact-checkers

are those who previously served as interns at MAFINDO and then extended to become junior fact-checkers.

During the FGD, the chairman of MAFINDO, Septiaji Eko Nugroho, delivered that there was a need to have an editorial function that could cover the work of volunteer fact-checkers at MAFINDO. In contrast to AJI and AMSI's fact checkers who have journalistic competence, MAFINDO works with volunteer fact-checkers who have no journalistic background (Liu, 2022).

MAFINDO selects hoaxes to be examined using two criteria, namely severity and urgency. Hoaxes that are dangerous and need to be responded to immediately will receive priority for debunking. Meanwhile, hoaxes that are harmless and not urgent, such as satire, will be debunked when necessary and if there are resources to do so (MAFINDO, n.d.a). MAFINDO also involves the public in its claim selection mechanisms. It receives input from its volunteer network that the organization has had since 2015 as well as from the wider community who send fact-check requests via email, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram to MAFINDO (IFCN, 2024b).

Another MAFINDO's representative at the FGD also stated that MAFINDO chooses to focus on examining more general issues or perhaps those that could be considered “receh” (meaning coins in English and can be interpreted as something relatively unimportant) when compared to the political hoaxes examined by fellow journalists. However, the MAFINDO representative said that trivial issues can become important when it comes to expanding the segmentation of readers of fact-checking initiatives in Indonesia.

MAFINDO does not specifically list its fact-checking methods on its methodology explanation page. The IFCN page on MAFINDO states that MAFINDO has demonstrated that it has carried out fact-checking methods which have resulted in fact-checking results that meet the principles of non-partisanship, fairness, and transparency. MAFINDO does so by identifying the various primary and secondary sources it quotes in its fact-checking, such as the name, the title/position, and the relevant link to the source. Accordingly, the reader can determine the credibility and relevant interests of the sources that MAFINDO quotes and the accuracy of the evidence that MAFINDO provides (IFCN, 2024b).

MAFINDO utilizes two types of hoax classification systems, namely: general and academic classifications. The general classification is made simple so that it is easy for ordinary people to understand either “true” or “hoax”. Hoax is a term that covers all variations of “fake news”, including half-truths where MAFINDO was inspired by Al-Quran Chapter 2 (al Baqarah) verse 42. Moreover, the academic classification is developed with more precision where MAFINDO adopts the seven categories of hoax from FirstDraft, namely (MAFINDO, n.d.a):

- a. **Satire/parody:** no malicious intent but can be deceptive.
- b. **False connection:** the title is different from the content of the news.
- c. **False context:** content is presented with a false context narrative.

- d. **Misleading content:** content is twisted with an intention to discredit.
- e. **Imposter content:** the names of public figures are profiteered.
- f. **Manipulated content:** existing content is changed to deceive.
- g. **Fabricated content:** 100% fake content.

MAFINDO publishes its works in the form of articles. It has published an average of at least one fact check a week over the course of the six months prior to the date of its IFCN application (IFCN, 2024b).

MAFINDO initially only carried out fact-checking activities. It currently runs many other activities, including digital literacy education for the public, research, advocacy and public engagement, multilateral partnerships, and pre-bunking activities. Its chairman said that MAFINDO is still working on a way to further optimize active public participation in its Facebook group, which currently has approximately one hundred thousand members. MAFINDO has had the benefit of public participation in various regions in Indonesia in directly assisting the fact-checking processes at the grassroots.

2. The Conversation Indonesia

The Conversation Indonesia (TCI) is a non-profit digital media platform that disseminates evidence and science-based information from lecturers and researchers. TCI is part of the global network of The Conversation International, which operates in Australia and New Zealand (Pacific), Indonesia (Asia), the United States and Canada (North America), France, Spain and the United Kingdom (Europe), Africa and Brazil (America South). TCI Foundation was founded on September 4, 2017. TCI's website was launched on September 6, 2017. TCI publishes content on the www.theconversation.com/id platform and social media channels (The Conversation Indonesia, n.d.b).

TCI receives grant supports from various entities, such as the Myer Foundation, the Open Society Foundation, the French Embassy in Jakarta, the Ford Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Indonesian and Australian government partnership program, Knowledge Sector Initiative and Tifa Foundation. These grants support the organization's financial management capacity, expand the scope of content production and promotion, and support the organization's business development (The Conversation Indonesia, n.d.a). Besides that, it also receives pro bono legal consultancy support from the law firm Soemadipradja & Taher and office spaces support at the National Library from the Indonesian Academy of Sciences (AIPI).

Beginning in September 2018, TCI has started fact-checking the statements of Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates ahead of the 2019 Presidential Election (The Conversation Indonesia, 2019a). On January 30, 2019, TCI officially joined the CekFakta coalition (The Conversation Indonesia, 2019b). The CEO and Publisher of

TCI, Proditia Sabarini, explained during the FGD that TCI realized the work of fact-checking is very difficult. TCI does not have a special fact-checking team that checks claims circulating in the community, but it carries out fact-checking only for certain occasions or projects. For example, TCI fact-checked the statements issued by Presidential candidates in the 2019 (The Conversation Indonesia, 2019a) and 2024 Presidential Elections (The Conversation Indonesia, 2024). Its fact-checks are presented in the form of articles and photos.

TCI presents an explanation of its global editorial policies (The Conversation Indonesia, 2021). Its fact-checking methods are not explicitly written down. But it does explain its fact-checking process for the 2019 Presidential Election. It is stated that at that time, TCI asked experts in the field to analyze statements by Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates and that the analysis was then passed to other experts for a blind review (The Conversation Indonesia, 2019b).

B. Local branch of an international fact-check/ media organization

Periksa Fakta of AFP

AFP Fact Check is part of Agence France-Presse, a multilingual and multicultural news agency. AFP's income comes from a variety of sources, such as the French Government, media clients, and online platforms. French government funding to the AFP comes in the form of commercial contracts to provide AFP's services to French government departments and foreign missions, as well as compensation for the costs of the agency's public interest missions. AFP receives revenue from thousands of media clients from around the world who subscribe to AFP's text, multimedia, photo, video and graphics newswires. AFP also has a wide range of cooperation agreements related to several digital platforms. Specifically regarding funding for its fact-checking initiative, AFP has collaborations with the Google News Initiative, Meta, TikTok, and the European Union and various projects related to fact-checking that receive funding from the European Union (Agence France-Presse, n.d.a).

To tackle the spread of misinformation and disinformation online and as inspired by a verification collaboration, CrossCheck, during the French election in 2017, AFP created a dedicated team to conduct fact-checking and digital investigations in the same year. AFP Fact Check has grown as led by 100 journalists in dozens of countries around the world.

AFP fact-checking journalists monitor content and check facts online in 26 languages, one of which is Indonesian. AFP also works with local bureaus in ensuring relevant cultural and political context are included in its reporting (Agence France-Presse, n.d.e). Articles are edited in regional offices, overseen by regional editors in Beirut, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Montevideo, and Washington, DC as well as a digital

investigations editor-in-chief based at AFP headquarters in Paris (Agence France-Presse, n.d.a).

AFP identifies the claims to be investigated by assessing whether the fact-checking process of the claims is in the public interest and whether they can gather clear and sufficient evidence to refute the claims being made. AFP pays close attention to misinformation that can harm people's health or lives, undermine the democratic process, or promote hate speech and SARA. AFP also states that it may publish more fact-checks on sources that consistently spread potentially harmful misinformation. The AFP fact-checking team only checks facts, not opinions or beliefs. If the team cannot find strong cross-checked evidence, then they will not publish it (Agence France-Presse, n.d.d).

Overall, AFP applies the following rules in their fact-checking processes, namely the use of non-partisan primary source material and interviews with independent experts in their fact-checking process, transparency in demonstrating their fact-checking steps, and not using anonymous sources in their fact-checked reports, unless there are special cases where there is a risk to the safety of the source but the information they provide is necessary to refute the claim and has been compared with other open sources (Agence France-Presse, n.d.d).

In delivering its fact-checking results, AFP furthermore takes the following steps to help its readers understand how the investigation process is carried out and so that they can follow the same steps. First, AFP uses non-partisan primary source material collected by their fact-checking journalists, including material verified through AFP's archives and collaboration with AFP reporters around the world reporting directly from the field. If it talks to experts, it will quote them in their fact-checks by identifying who they work for, their areas of expertise, and any conflicts of interest they may have. AFP needs at least two independent sources of information to verify the main claim in one fact-checked content (Agence France-Presse, n.d.c). It also strives to transparently demonstrate the steps taken to refute claims by including links, posts, screenshots, photos and archived evidence to reach a conclusion.

It is stated that the journalists and editors in the AFP global network follow the standards outlined in the AFP Fact-Checking Stylebook, the AFP Editorial Standards and Best Practices and the AFP Charter (Agence France-Presse, n.d.c).

AFP uses the following terms to classify the claims it checks (Agence France-Presse, n.d.d):

- a. **False:** AFP judges something to be false when multiple reliable sources refute it.
- b. **Correct:** AFP judges something to be correct when multiple reliable sources confirm the information is valid.
- c. **Misleading:** When it contains correct information (text, photos, or videos) out of context or mixed with incorrect context.
- d. **Altered Photo:** When a photo has been manipulated with the intention of deceiving.

- e. **Altered Video:** When a video has been manipulated with the intention of deceiving.
- f. **Missing Context:** When a claim has some true elements but could be misleading without further information.
- g. **Satire:** When a claim is false and has the potential to deceive but may not have been originally intended to deceive (examples: humor, parody).
- h. **Hoax:** When an image or incident has been fabricated.
- i. **Deepfake:** When a video or audio recording has been manipulated using artificial intelligence (AI) to create a fabrication that looks real.

The Indonesia's Periksa Fakta - AFP posts around 16 - 24 articles per month from January - August 2024. The Indonesia's Periksa Fakta - AFP presents its works in the form of articles (Agence France-Presse, n.d.f). The global AFP YouTube channel presents its fact-checking work in the form of videos, some of which are shorts (Agence France-Presse, n.d.b).

C. National media organizations

1. Anti Hoax of Antaranews.com

ANTARA or the National News Agency Institute ANTARA is an Indonesian state-owned enterprise which acts as a news agency. ANTARA has 34 representative offices in every province in Indonesia, representatives in several municipalities/ districts, as well as overseas representative offices in Kuala Lumpur, Beijing, and London (ANTARA, n.d.a). This entity was founded on December 13, 1937 as a response to dissatisfaction with social and political news reporting in the Dutch East Indies by the Dutch news agency, Aneta.

ANTARA has several different core products and services, namely Antara News, Antara Foto, Antara PRWire, Antara TV, LPJA Antara Comets, and Antara Photo Gallery and Journalism. Each product and service unit provides audio, visual and multimedia content that is used by their business clients from state and non-state sectors at national and international levels and directed toward wider society.

The Antara news portal (www.antaranews.com) is a form of service from Antara News that targets the wider community. The portal was launched in January 1996 and is shown in Indonesian and English. The Antara portal earns income from advertising (ANTARA, n.d.c).

Antara News has a special fact-checking channel called Anti Hoax (ANTARA, n.d.b). It does not explain its organizational structure nor its fact-checking methodology. From its published fact-checked articles, Antara has used several ratings to conclude its fact-checks include misinformation, disinformation, and hoax, without further explanation regarding the differences between those categorizations. Sometimes, Antara does not provide any concluding category, only an explanation for the selected claims. Antara posts 1 - 4 fact-checked articles a day.

2. Cek Fakta of BeritaSatu.com

Operating since May 2010, BeritaSatu.com is part of one of the largest conglomerates in Indonesia, the Lippo Group. BeritaSatu.com is one of the many media products of B-Universe (previously known as BeritaSatu Media Holding) (Hansel, 2024). Apart from BeritaSatu.com, B-Universe claims to be one of the leading Indonesian-based multiplatform media ecosystems by also operating various media brands, namely BTV, IDTV, INVESTOR.id, JAKARTAGLOBE.id, INVESTOR DAILY, and INVESTOR Magazine (INVESTOR Magazine) (B Universe, n.d.).

B-Universe is under PT (Limited Liability Company). First Media News, which also has many media brands, such as Qtv channel on First Media Home Cable, Suara Selamat, GlobeAsia magazine, and Kemang Buzz (First Media, 2022). Moreover, PT. First Media News is one of a total of 23 subsidiaries of PT. First Media Tbk, a company operating in the media sector, which is one of the many subsidiaries of the Lippo Group. Lippo Group has at least 22 subsidiaries in retail, real estate, technology, media and communications (TMT), healthcare, financial services, and education sectors (Lippo Homes, n.d.).

Berita Satu has joined the CekFakta Coalition since CekFakta was founded in 2018. Berita Satu has a special fact-checking section for the 2024 Presidential Debates (BeritaSatu, n.d.a). However, their fact-checks are delivered as part of the news section of the Berita Satu's site and their media networks, such as the sports portal of Berita Satu (BeritaSatu, n.d.b), wartabancar.com (Banjar is a city in West Java) (Restu, 2024a) and jasakalbar.com (Kalbar is West Kalimantan) (Suara Kalbar, 2024). The titles of their fact-checked articles end with the term “cek fakta” to differentiate them from the other news.

The site does not state the organizational structure or methodology of its fact-checking initiative. Its fact-checks are displayed in the form of articles without any categorization of its fact-checking results. Berita Satu and its network of news portals are an active fact-checking initiative, but they post fact-checked articles irregularly.³²

3. Hoax or Not of Detikcom

Established in 1998, Detik.com is an online news portal that focuses on providing breaking news in Indonesia. It is only available online. It relies on advertising to generate income (Ismujiarso, 2017). Since August 3, 2011, Detikcom has become part of PT Trans Corporation, one of the largest media companies in Indonesia that oversees various business units operating in the fields of media, lifestyle and entertainment (CekFakta, n.d.b). Trans Corporation is a subsidiary of CT Corp. a leading business group in Indonesia that provides

³² For example, wartabancar.com posted only 1 article on September 8, 11, and 12, but it posted no fact-checked articles on September 9 and 10.

financial services, media, leisure and hospitality, entertainment and property, retail and lifestyle (CTCORP, n.d.).

Detikcom built its fact-checking initiative named hoaxornot.detik.com in September 2015 (Detikcom, n.d.c). Detikcom's "Hoax or Not" channel fact-checks social, political and health related news. As of September 2024, Hoax or Not of DetikCom does not have a dedicated organizational structure that manages the site. The team responsible for the detikNews channel also manages the Hoax or Not channel (Detikcom, n.d.b). Previous research noted that such a structure is one of the limitations faced by Hoax or Not channel because it reduces the team's performance to fact-check articles (Ariastiarini, 2017). The site posts 1 - 4 fact-checked articles per month and there were months where it did not publish any articles at all.

They have not stated their data collection, fact-checking, verification, and classification methods on their site. So far, they have only listed their cyber media guidelines in general (Detikcom, n.d.a).

Research from Ariastiarini (2017) shows that the Hoax or Not channel has several criteria for selecting issues to be checked, namely issues considered important, concerning the lives of many, and phenomena occurring in society. The selection of issues requires approval from the editor and managing editor. Sometimes, this approval process creates tension as some news is considered important by the public, but it may not be in the interest of the editorial team for a news story to be covered. Additionally, there were no regular editorial meetings to discuss the coverage of the Hoax or Not channel as is usually done on other channels on detik.com.

4. Fact-checking initiatives of Bisnis.com, Kabar24, Solopos, and HarianJogja as part of Bisnis Indonesia Group of Media (BIG Media)

Bisnis Indonesia Group of Media (BIG Media), is one of the largest Indonesian media organizations. It has 8 national and numerous local media outlets. From a total 8 national media outlets under BIG Media (Bisnis.com, BisnisIndonesia.id, BisnisMuda.id, HypeAbis.id, Context.id, DataIndonesia.id, Solopos.com, HarianJogja.com) (Bisnis.com, n.d.a), there are at least 3 outlets that have their own fact-checking sites: Bisnis.com, Solopos.com, and HarianJogja.com (Solo and Jogja are cities in the Central Java province).

Aside from providing print media, online media, TV and radio services that generate advertising and premium content subscription income (Bisnis.com, n.d.c), BIG Media also has event organizing services and develops the Indonesian Business Platinum Society community with members coming from the Board of Directors and company owners. It also provides corporate services (procuring research, publishing books, creating annual reports, corporate magazines, web and IT solutions, training, travel centers, photographs, and printing) (Bisnis Indonesia Group, n.d.). Meanwhile, they do not state explicitly the funding sources for their fact-checking initiatives.

Bisnis.com has joined the CekFakta coalition since its (CekFakta) early formation in 2018 (Damarjati, 2018). Bisnis.com has two different fact-checking sites, namely Cek Fakta of Bisnis.com (Bisnis.com, n.d.b) and Cek Fakta-Kabar24 of bisnis.com (Kabar24, n.d.). These two sites share similarly fact-checked articles, but with several different articles published exclusively on one site.

Solopos has a dedicated fact-checking site (Espos.id, n.d.). The site does not provide information regarding the organizational structure of its fact-checking initiative, but its fact-checked articles repeatedly mention at least three names of the reporters that fact-checked the articles. It releases fact-checked articles ranging from 1 - 15 articles per month. There were also months where they did not publish any fact-checked articles at all.

HarianJogja.com has its own website dedicated to their fact-checking initiative (Harian Jogja, n.d.b). Similar to Solopos, HarianJogja only mentions the names of reporters that fact-checked the article without providing any explanation regarding its fact-checking organizational structure. It publishes between 3 - 9 fact-checked articles every month. The Harian Jogja newspaper was first published on May 20, 2008. This newspaper is the third community newspaper from the Bisnis Indonesia group after Solopos in Solo, Central Java and Monitor Depok in Depok, West Java (Harian Jogja, n.d.a).

5. Cek Fakta of Kompas.com

Kompas.com is part of PT Kompas Cyber Media, an online media company owned by one of the leading national media groups in Indonesia, Kompas Gramedia Group. The Kompas newspaper, which was founded by the then prominent journalistic figures in Indonesia, Jacob Oetama and PK Ojong in 1920, was the initial product of Kompas Gramedia Group (Erianto, 2020).

Kompas.com's expenses are funded by income from advertising, event production and content marketing business. It publicly displays the expenditures of Kompas.com's fact-checking team. It states that Kompas.com is not associated with political parties, is non-partisan, respects differences and diversity, and upholds human values. Kompas.com also prohibits any employee from being involved in political activity, as regulated by Article 12 of the PT Kompas Cyber Media Company Regulations. The fact-checking work of Kompas.com began in 2016. The Fact Check Team was specifically formed in 2018. In October 2018, the fact check initiative from Kompas was verified by IFCN. As of 2024, the fact-check team at Kompas.com consists of a person in charge, managing editor, deputy managing editor, 9 reporters, and 4 editors.

As stated on its fact-check site, the fact-checking team at Kompas.com choose to examine claims based on three considerations:

- a. **Viral (with certain parameters):** But it does not provide further explanation regarding the parameters being used in selecting viral claims.

- b. **Chain messages:** The team uses monitoring tools to see the spread of misinformation on social media and directly monitors information flow on social media and chat apps' groups.
- c. **Consider the issue and its impact:** The team chooses claims that will have an impact on society and that have the potential to mislead, if not immediately be straightened out.

After monitoring social media or chat groups to identify any widely spread claims, the team then assesses the severity potential of the claims if they are not clarified immediately. Afterwards, the team will carry out verification by searching for related digital data and documents, photos and videos using available online tools, or interviews with authoritative actors to verify the claims. When all the processes mentioned above have been carried out, the fact-checked articles will then be displayed. There are two conclusions resulting from the fact-check processes on Kompas.com, namely “HOAX” if the claim is completely wrong, and “CLARIFICATION” if the claim is not completely wrong, there is something incorrect in the claims that needs to be straightened out (Kompas.com, n.d.).

Aside from corrections, Kompas.com also opens space for the right to reply if there are parties who feel disadvantaged by its reporting. The right to reply is in the form of a clarifying article and corrections to its previous reporting.

6. Cek Fakta of Liputan6

Formed in August 2000, Liputan6.com is part of PT. Elang Mahkota Teknologi (Emtek Group), one of the largest Indonesian technology, telecommunications, and media companies established in 1983 (Emtek, n.d.). Liputan6.com is registered and verified by the Indonesian Press Council (Dewan Pers, n.d.) and is a member of Indonesia Cyber Media Association (AMSI) (AMSI, n.d.).

Liputan6.com initially was a supporting news site for its sister company SCTV, a television station. On May 24, 2012, it became an independent news portal. Since March 14, 2016, Liputan6.com has been a legal entity established as a limited liability company registered with the Indonesian Ministry of Law and Human Rights under the name PT Liputan Enam Dot Com. PT Liputan6.com's revenue comes from advertisements (Liputan6, n.d.a).

Liputan6 claims to have carried out fact-checking initiatives since the 2014 Presidential Election. In 2018, Liputan6.com launched its fact-checking channel. In the same year, Liputan6.com became a member of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) (Aulia, 2023). As of September 2024, Cek Fakta Liputan6.com has six staff members consisting of one managing editor, one researcher, three writers/ editors, and one coordinator (Liputan6, n.d.c).

Liputan6.com reviews claims that have gone viral on social media and messaging apps. It also receives input from readers via email, WhatsApp chatbots, and from their fact-

checking activists. Liputan6.com's fact-checking activists or known as WhatsApp Hoaxbuster is a program developed by Liputan6.com in early 2020 to involve wider societies in the fact-checking activities carried out by the editorial team of Cek Fakta Liputan6.com.

Cek Fakta Liputan6.com's site states that the priority for fact-checking is given to claims that are in the public interest, have the potential to divide unity, and are urgent. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, they prioritized fact-checking claims that have the potential to endanger the lives or health of many people.

The Liputan6.com's fact-checking team uses the following verification methods in their fact checking process, namely:

- a. Check the source or origin of the claim. If the news source comes from social media, the team will check the account (whether it is a verified account, how consistent the account in spreading similar claims).
- b. Check the claim by comparing it with mainstream media reports, official websites of related institutions, or official social media accounts of related institutions or figures.
- c. Confirm directly with figures or representatives of related institutions and with the authorities.
- d. Contact experts to help interpret the data or context of the problem.
- e. Do not use anonymous sources in verification or verification efforts.
- f. Use available online tools, such as Google Reverse Images/ TinEye/ Yandex to test the authenticity of images, and MapChecking to test claims about human density in certain locations.

Cek Fakta Liputan6.com's channel presents its works in the form of articles that contain the source of the claim, the narrative of the claim, the fact-checking processes, and the conclusions regarding the claims being examined. It uses seven assessment categories in presenting its conclusions: true, clarification, false, out of context, partly true/partially false, unproven, and hoax. It posts an average of more than 11 fact-checked articles per week over the course of 12 months from October 2022 - October 2023 (IFCN, 2024a).

7. Cek Fakta of Medcom.id

Medcom.id is an online media founded in 2017 under the auspices of MEDIA GROUP. MEDIA GROUP also houses Metrotvnews.com, formerly known as Metro TV, the first news television station in Indonesia set up on September 25, 2000 (Metro TV, n.d.).

The fact-checking initiative at Medcom.id officially joins the CekFakta coalition on January 30, 2019 (Hafiez, 2019). Advertising is the main income source for Medcom's umbrella company, PT Citra Multimedia Indonesia. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Cek Fakta of Medcom.id received support from the Journalism Emergency Relief Fund (JERF) from the Google News Initiative (GNI), a funding program that aims to support local media

during the pandemic (Medcomid, 2020). Medcom has one editor and two reporters on its fact-checking team.

The team selects and reviews a claim indicated to be a hoax circulating on social media and messaging apps. It also receives claims as reported by readers through their email cekfakta@medcom.id. It was stated that the team prioritizes fact-checking on issues of public interest and urgent matters. Cek Fakta of Medcom.id claims to implement measurable workflows following fact-checking standards. It also uses various claim detection tools to check and measure the validity of news or information (Medcomid, n.d.a).

In general, Medcom divides its classifications into two categories, namely disinformation and misinformation. These two categories are further divided into seven types of false information that are referred to in the categorization of the First Draft (Medcomid, n.d.b),³³ namely: satire, misleading content, imposter content, fabricated content, false connection, false context, and manipulated content (Medcomid, n.d.b).

As a news video portal, Medcom.id delivers its fact-checks in a multimedia format that includes text, photo, video, audio, graphic, and videographic. Apart from providing regular fact-checking results, it also creates educational articles about fact-checking and weekend summaries of fact-checking work (CekFakta, n.d.c).

8. Cek Fakta of Merdeka.com

The online media merdeka.com was published in 2012 by a technology company that founded various infotainment sites, namely KapanLagi.com, Bola.net, Vemale.com, Otosia.com. In 2014, KapanLagi.com was merged with Fimela Network, a lifestyle beauty network that operates at least three lifestyle websites: Fimela.com, Sooperboy.com, and Muvila.com. The merger is known as KapanLagi Network (Kapanlagicom, n.d.).

Currently, merdeka.com is under KapanLagi Youniverse (KLY) (KLY, n.d.), a subsidiary of EMTEK. Apart from managing Merdeka.com, KLY also owns at least 11 other digital media sites, such as Liputan6.com (See C.3.6), Bola.com, Bola.net, Otosia.com, Fimela.com, and Brilio.net. Even though they are part of the same KLY umbrella, these media outlets have their own editorial rooms and processes. However, when looking for material to report, each editor-in-chief deliberates and discusses the matter together. Furthermore, since the merger with KMK, two news sites, namely Merdeka.com and Liputan 6, have had the same reporters. Whenever there is news coverage, reporters from the two media outlets will send the scripts to Merdeka.com and Liputan 6. The decision on whether the news will be published is then handed back to each media. As a result, both news sites may share similar news articles (Sari, 2021).

³³ A non-profit organization that supports journalists, academics and technology in efforts to eradicate hoaxes in the digital era.

Apart from having a special fact-checking site (Merdeka.com, n.d.a), there are at least 26 other sites on merdeka.com. Merdeka.com operates in Jakarta, Bandung, Malang, Banyuwangi, Tabanan, Semarang and Bitung.

Merdeka.com displays an explanation of its organizational structure, but there is no specific organizational structure that manages its fact-checking initiatives (Merdeka.com, n.d.b). In selecting claims, the editors track viral news circulating in society, and receive input from readers via their email: support@merdeka.com. Furthermore, the editorial team seeks clarifications from competent authoritative actors. In some cases, the editorial team also checks and reviews the statements of authoritative actors by comparing their statements with data obtained from credible institutions, such as from ministries or government agencies, academic research, or reputable NGOs. Its fact-checked works are presented in the form of articles, photos and videos (Merdeka.com, n.d.c).

9. Cek Fakta of Suara.com

Suara.com is an online news portal founded in 2014 under the company PT. Arkadia Digital Media, which also has several other news portals with various focuses such as sports, entertainment, automotive, health. PT. Arkadia Media Nusantara has officially become a public company in Indonesia as of October 2018.

Suara.com states that its funding sources are from advertising revenue and from “other sources that are legal, do not violate the rules, and are not binding.” It also states that there is a clear “fire line” between business and editorial activities. For example, it is stated that Suara.com receives funding “from the government, power holders, or political forces, economic forces and others” but “are guaranteed not to influence its editorial policies or journalistic products, due to the principle of independence which it has held from the start.” As a public company with transparency responsibility, Suara.com as part of PT Arkadia Digital Media Tbk must submit its periodic and incidental reports to the Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) and the Financial Services Authority (OJK) and display those reports on the Arkadia website (Suara.com, n.d.b).

Suara.com's involvement in producing fact-checked content began in May 2018 when it took part in the declaration of the Cek Fakta coalition. Suara.com was then verified as part of IFCN on October 28, 2019 (Hidayatullah, 2019). As of September 2024, Suara.com's fact-checking initiative is being carried out by a dedicated unit within Suara.com's editorial team. The organizational structure of Suara.com's fact-checking team consists of a supervisor, a team coordinator, nine fact-checkers, and two situational cross-desk editors.

The following is the workflow of Suara.com's fact-checking team:

Suara.com's fact-checking team observes any viral claims on social media that need to be checked. The team also receives claims submissions from the wider public through their official contact channels such as email, telephone number, WhatsApp account, social media accounts, or through personal communication channels with Suara.com's fact-checking

team or editorial team. They fact-check claims on various topics, ranging from political, legal, social, health, science and other topics.

The team will then sort the recorded claims based on several considerations, including the potential danger or negative impact of the claims on the public, the status or potentiality of the claims going viral, the importance of the issue to the public interest, as well as the degree of prominence and influence of the figures on the claims.

In its claim selection process, it is stated that the team tries to make sure the process is independent, impartial, and unbiased. The team will ensure there is no tendency for them to only fact-check certain groups. They also ensure that the claims are not just opinions or normative statements and therefore can be fact-checked.

After selecting the claims to be fact-checked, Suara.com's fact-checking team will then identify the existence and sources of those claims, which include whether the claims originated from social media and from which platform, whether from an audio or video recording of a particular event, whether from an official statement from a particular institution or person, and so on.

When the existence of the claims and the sources of the claims have been proven, then the fact checker team begins to carry out research using official documents, trusted news sites, as well as accessible sites that provide official and original photos, official sources, and various credible institutions. They also use techniques such as reverse image search, social media analysis features, and maps. They also conduct fact-checking by utilizing the content produced by Cek Fakta's members (Rahmawan and Adiprasetyo, 2020).

On the Suara.com's fact-checking site, it is explained that the fact-checking team of Suara.com presents their fact-checked articles by (Suara.com, n.d.a):

- a. using clear and unequivocal titles
- b. presenting their brief conclusions using several categories, namely fake, misleading, true, partly true, or cannot be verified.
- c. presenting the headline as a simple explanation of the claims being checked.
- d. explaining the fact-checking process and the related sources.
- e. wrapping up with a conclusive sentence regarding the degree of truthfulness of the claims.

Suara.com also provides an opportunity for the public to submit corrections, criticisms, and suggestions to the works published by Suara.com's fact-checking team.

Suara.com posts its fact-checked articles regularly. For example, it posted 5 articles in July 2024 and 11 articles in August, 2024. The team was more intensive in posting fact-checked articles on Suara.com and Cekfakta.com during the 2024 Election. Its works are presented in the form of articles accompanied by photos and explanations.

10. Cek Fakta of Tempo

Founded in 1995, Tempo.co is a news portal owned by Tempo Media Group, one of the largest media organizations in Indonesia, best known for its critical and investigative public interest journalism. Tempo started their fact-checking initiative in 2018 and received IFCN certification the same year (Monggilo, 2024). As of August 2024, CekFakta-Tempo is managed by the Chief Editor of Tempo.co as the person responsible for the CekFakta-Tempo channel along with nine other fact-checkers.

It is stated that the principles of independence, impartiality, and journalistic code of ethics guard Tempo's editorial staff. To uphold these principles, all Tempo journalists are not allowed to be involved in political activities, become political party administrators or be active in advocating for issues that have the potential to give rise to conflicts of interest, including actively campaigning for support for political candidates.

Furthermore, Tempo assures the objectivity and independency of CekFakta-Tempo's content through several efforts. They seek to draw "a clear line of fire, which limits the production of journalistic information within Tempo's editorial office to business processes outside the editorial office." It is also stated that "Tempo's independence is primarily supported by the fact that there is no majority owner in its shareholding structure" (Tempo.id, n.d.a).

As a public company, Tempo submits its financial reports to the capital markets and presents the reports on its website (Tempo.id, n.d.a). Tempo's funding sources mainly come from advertising and circulation. Additionally, Tempo also has several other businesses such as research, training, event organizers, and a production house for various information services.

The fact-checking team of Tempo uses the following criteria as their claims selection method (Tempo.co, n.d.):

- a. Is the topic important to the public?
- b. Are the claims being asserted as facts?
- c. Have the claims become the subject of widespread discussion?
- d. Has the source of the claims been verified?

Additionally, to support the editorial staff in selecting claims, CekFakta-Tempo's team collaborates with cekfakta.com to produce an integrated hoax database to facilitate joint verification efforts.

After selecting the claim to be verified, the team ascertains the actual substance of the circulating claim through the following steps:

- a. Conducting initial research to determine if the related claims have been reported by the media.
- b. Contacting the source of the claims or any relevant parties to understand the underlying context of the claims.
- c. Conducting further research to look for all open, accessible, and reliable data to check the claims.

- d. If deemed necessary, the editor of the CekFakta-Tempo channel will interview experts to ensure the accuracy of the editorial conclusion regarding the claims.

CekFakta - Tempo uses five categories as their classification method: true, partly true, no evidence yet, false, and incorrect. The Tempo editorial team also handles reports, input, and criticisms from the public about the work of Cek Fakta - Tempo.

11. Fact-checking initiative of Tirto.id

Tirto.id was founded in 2016 as an online media platform that presents in-depth news products, instead of short reports that prioritize speed as offered by many other previously established online media in Indonesia, such as Detikcom. Tirto's initial funding was provided by its founders, three former senior Indonesian journalists. Additionally, Tirto also receives income from advertising, paid content coverage, and media production services, such as content in the form of articles, infographics, photos, and videos (Tirto.id, n.d.a).

Tirto's fact-checking effort began in 2017. It did a live fact-checking for the first time during the Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2017 (Tirto.id, 2018). Tirto is the first media entity in Indonesia to receive IFCN signatory status in 2018.

Tirto's fact-checking unit is part of Tirto, run by the Research Department, which collaborates with the editorial team on its implementation (Tirto.id, n.d.b). Its IFCN page states that as of early 2024, there are three assigned fact-checkers and two editors that manage fact-checking practices in Tirto. Tirto plans to collaborate with health and technology experts to advance its future fact-checking initiative (IFCN, 2024d).

Tirto.id has two kinds of fact-checking activities/ formats, namely “Periksa Fakta” (Fact-Checking) and “Periksa Data” (Data Checking). “Periksa Fakta” is the commonly known type of fact-checking activity where Tirto's fact-checking team checks claims spread online. Moreover, as it becomes more common among Indonesian fact-checking initiatives to conduct live fact-checking during special occasions, such as presidential debates, Tirto's fact-checkers also involve checking the statements of political candidates by comparing them with official related sources. Tirto categorizes its fact-checked articles into several categories, namely false and misleading, altered, partly false, and missing context.

The second type of fact-checking “Periksa Data” can be considered a pre-bunking effort by the Tirto team where they analyze rumors and problems circulating online before being further misinterpreted or misused as hoaxes. Their research team will verify the rumors using official data and then publish short reports twice a week in the form of articles (Rahmawan and Adiprasetyo, 2020).

In selecting claims to be fact-checked, they choose important issues that have a broad impact on society, the relevance of the topics, and the reach of the claims. They also provide an email address factcheck@tirto.id and social media accounts on Facebook, X, and Instagram to encourage users to send in claims for the team to check as well as input and corrections to Tirto's fact-checking efforts (Tirto.id, n.d.c).

They utilize three different sources to verify claims. The first one comprises publicly available government data and company reports. The second type of source includes intergovernmental organizations (e.g., the UN), international institutions (e.g., World Bank, IMF), reputable consultants and research institutions, and top journals. The third source is national news agencies. Tirto concludes when two or more sources state the same facts. With an underlying principle of transparency, Tirto's published fact-checked articles explain the various sources, problems, chronological findings, and open-source tools it uses to fact-check.

Tirto stated that on average it regularly publishes 7 - 12 fact-checked articles each week. Previously from August 2022 to August 2023, it published 305 'Periksa Fakta' articles and 87 'Periksa Data' articles. Tirto presents the results of their fact checks in the form of articles accompanied by photos and explanations.

12. KBR.id

The following fact-checking initiatives, KBR.id, Times Indonesia, and viva.co.id are all members of the CeKFakta coalition. As of 2024, they are still posting fact-checked articles, but only occasionally.

KBR.id is one of the products of KBR Media under the management of PT. Media Lintas Inti Nusantara, a media company providing journalism-based content, which was founded in 1999. KBR Media produces audio and podcast-based news content distributed on various radio and digital platforms. Apart from the KBR.id news site, KBR Media also has two other main products: the KBR Network with a network of 300 radio stations throughout Indonesia and the podcast ecosystem at KBRPRIME.ID. Their business is supported by revenue from advertising and content production as well as funding from international organizations (KBR Media, n.d.).

KBR.id has been a part of the CekFakta coalition since 2018. It has a special channel for its fact-checking initiative (KBR.ID, n.d.b). KBR.id posts fact-checked articles quite consistently; for example, it posted 2 articles in June, 5 articles in July, and 4 articles in August.

Within its editorial structure, it has no specific organizational structure that handles fact-checking initiatives at KBR. Furthermore, KBR.id's fact-checking site only displays the results of its fact-checking work in the form of podcasts, with no explanation regarding the methods for producing those podcasts.

13. Times Indonesia

Launched on August 17, 2015, Times Indonesia is an online news portal managed by PT. Dawai Citra Semesta. This media is registered with the Press Council. Times Indonesia was started as a media research institute and ads and brand consulting agency called INABAGUS

(Indonesia Bagus). TIMES Indonesia has a network of 220 news portals in cities and districts throughout Indonesia and 4 international portals.

Times Indonesia has been involved with the CekFakta coalition since the coalition was launched in 2018. It has a dedicated fact-checking website (Times Indonesia, n.d.b). Times Indonesia displays its overall organizational structure, but there is no specific team that handles its fact-checking initiative (Times Indonesia, n.d.c). Its fact-checking site also only displays its final work in the form of articles. So far, there have been no explanations regarding the methods of claims collection, verification, and categorization.

CekFakta-Times Indonesia tends to be more active in producing fact-checked articles on special occasions, such as the 2024 election. Times Indonesia produces fewer fact-checked articles, around one to four articles per month from June - August 2024. It presents its fact-checks in the form of articles on CekFakta-Times Indonesia's site (Times Indonesia, n.d.b) as well as on the portals of their networks in various provinces, regencies, and municipalities in Indonesia (Times Indonesia, n.d.a), such as Times Jateng (Jateng is the Central Java province) (Times Jateng, 2024) and Times Lamongan (a regency in the East Java province) (Times Lamongan, 2024).

14. Viva.co.id

VIVA.co.id is an online news portal managed by PT. Viva Media Baru, a subsidiary of PT Visi Media Asia Tbk. Launched on December 17, 2008 in Jakarta, this portal was previously called VIVAnews.com. Apart from owning viva.co.id, VIVA Group is also the holding company for national television channels ANTV and tvOne, and owns six other news and entertainment portals (Viva.co, n.d.a).

Similar to KBR.id and Times Indonesia, Viva News has been one of the initial members of the CekFakta.com Coalition since it was founded in 2018. Viva News has its own fact-checking channel which posts approximately 1 - 4 fact-checking articles each month (Viva.co, n.d.b). However, there is no explanation of the specific structure that manages its fact-checking initiatives and the methodology used in collecting and fact-checking claims.

CHALLENGES

Generative AI (the challenges posed by the proliferation of AI-generated hoaxes)

The challenges posed by the proliferation of AI-generated hoaxes have resulted in at least two concerns among the fact-checking community in Indonesia. First, the massive numbers and variants of information disorder are continually evolving. Second, on the ethical aspects of the deployment of generative AI-related apps to produce fact-checked content.

During the FGD, several concerns were found regarding the challenges surrounding the massive distribution of hoaxes in Indonesia, namely: (1). the number and coverage of distribution of hoaxes, (2). the constantly changing variations of tactics, and (3). the increasing variations of narratives faced by the fact-checking organizations.

A representative of AJI stated that the flood of hoaxes was increasing day by day, which was likened to the comic character of Lucky Luke (known as the man who shoots faster than his shadow). The representative furthermore said that it is even not possible to shoot Lucky Luke's shadow. Additionally, these hoaxes circulate not only on public space of social media, but also in unreachable spaces, such as on semi-public discussion groups social media and in private chat messenger applications.

Regarding the increasing variations of tactics in spreading hoaxes, the discussants noted that at the early use of social media in Indonesia from 2012 - 2019, hoaxes were mostly circulated in the form of texts. However, currently, as reflected in the 2024 Election in Indonesia, hoaxes in the form of videos are flooding the information ecosystem in Indonesia. The Chairman of the MAFINDO Presidium in various occasions has repeatedly expressed the same challenges faced by MAFINDO. Fact-checking claims in the form of articles already requires a time-consuming checking process. This becomes even more difficult when fact-checkers need to check AI-based video content (Espos.id, 2023).

Furthermore, fact-checking organizations also face another challenges to understand the evolving forms of narratives that can be categorized as hoaxes. In the 2024 election, Indonesia experienced not only the proliferation of explicit hoaxes, but also the emergence of claims, opinions, allegations, and the so called “toxic positivity” content. Such content is difficult to be fact-checked, but various research pointed out their influence and impact to the election processes and results in Indonesia. Fact-checking organizations are facing the need to revisit and redefine what they mean with hoaxes and their roles in the future.

The challenges in terms of the massive quantity and various forms of hoaxes are closely related to the capacity and number of fact checkers in each organization. A representative of a fact-checking initiative stated that,

“So it seems difficult to deal with all the attacks of hoaxes and misinformation. The fact-check teams in fact-checking organizations and also those within media organizations themselves are not that big to deal with the attacks of misinformation and disinformation.”

Besides increasing the number of fact-checkers, fact-checking initiatives in Indonesia also need to continuously increase the capacity of fact-checkers to have sufficient and updated skills to tackle the dynamic evolution of hoaxes. During the FGD, it was mentioned that AJI as an alliance of journalists is at the forefront in the scope and stages of training for prospective fact-checkers and trainers. On the other hand, MAFINDO is facing their unique challenges to provide strong trainings to non-journalist fact-checking volunteers.

Fact-checking initiatives in Indonesia are also considering increasing public participation in reporting and checking hoaxes. Some discussants however cautioned for fact-

checking organizations not to indirectly play a role in further spreading hoaxes to the societies, if they take any steps to increase public participation. This concern is as reflected in the following excerpts:

“How to enable the grassroots organizations to get the information produced by MAFINDO, AJI and AMSI so that the information can reach the grassroots communities? And vice versa, if there are viral claims, how can the grassroots communities be able to convey those claims and get clarifications right away whether such claims are hoaxes, for example through WhatsApp channels.”

Fact-checking initiatives in Indonesia are also stepping carefully in the use of generative AI related apps to produce fact-checked content. CekFakta-Liputan 6 is starting to use AI-generated news presenters in delivering its fact-checked content (Liputan6.com, n.d.b). Meanwhile, Tempo is still considering the pros and cons of using AI in producing their fact-checked works, particularly in relations to whether the technology will replace the roles of journalists (AMSI, 2024b).

Legitimacy and efficacy

Fact-checking organizations in Indonesia also experience challenges related to legitimacy, which includes transparency and accountability of fact-checking mechanisms to demonstrate the independence of the relevant fact-checking organizations.

This is considering the complexity and challenges faced by the media industry in Indonesia regarding reputation issues where there are media conglomerates owned by a handful of business actors with political aspirations (Nugroho, Putri, and Laksmi, 2012). This is reflected in the decreasing level of public trust in the media industry in Indonesia as reflected in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024 (Steele, 2024). The same concern was delivered by a fact-checking representative during the FGD, in which there is a possible tendency where Indonesian people trust influencers more even though their content may not necessarily be trustworthy compared to trusting the media and journalistic works. The impact of this media reputation issue has an impact on readers' trust in the content checked by CekFakta and its members. For example, the public can ask who is behind the media.

As a response, another representative highlighted that fact-checking efforts must be able to show that they are trying to maintain a balance between freedom of speech and fact checking efforts as shown in the following excerpt:

“So, how important it is for us to always try to maintain the balance between freedom of speech and fact-checking and ensure that the quality of fact checking can really convince all parties. Once again, make sure not to suppress different opinions.”

Moreover, AMSI representatives viewed that CekFakta is part of a business model to gain trust and sustainability in the media industry in Indonesia. In other words, at first glance, CekFakta's efforts may not seem to bring in a revenue stream for the media industry, but in the long term, fact-checking efforts can serve as a capital for the national and local media industry to regain public trust in the media.

To support the legitimacy of fact-checking efforts, standardization of checking mechanisms and training of fact-checking teams is needed. However, the results of the FGD revealed that while all fact-checking organizations admitted that they used IFCN standards in checking facts, a fact-checker who was also a researcher/ academic found that there was no standardization in the form of guidelines/SOPs to conduct fact-checking at the internal level of each organization. Such situation is a gap that weakens the legitimacy and accountability of fact-checking organizations. One of the potential ways forward as discussed during the FGD is to think about or create a guideline or code of conduct or standards that can be mutually agreed upon, for example those related to the fact-checking processes and mechanisms to guarantee independence of fact-checking organizations.

Moreover, the need to increase public participation as explained in section D.1 is related to efforts to increase the coverage and efficacy of fact-checkers' works, to increase public trust in fact-checking works, and thereby increase the credibility and legitimacy of fact-checking initiatives in Indonesia.

The efficacy issue faced by fact-checking organizations in Indonesia is related to how they can present fact-checking content in a more inclusive and impactful manner. What is meant by inclusive is first, how many people have read and trusted the content that fact-checking organizations produced and distributed. In other words, does the content they examine and present answer the needs of the community? So, they need to know what kind of people access their content so that they can deliver content that is easily understood by groups of people with related characteristics. This is also believed to increase the level of public trust and acceptance of the results of fact checking.

Meanwhile, so far fact-checking organizations in Indonesia have tended to present fact-checking results from video content into long article content.

“So, currently we have very little fact-checking content in the form of videos, whether on TikTok, especially in short video format, on Instagram Reels or also on YouTube. Even though currently, most of the hoaxes are videos.”

Research from Multimedia Nusantara University in 2022 and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in 2023 show that Indonesian people tend to prefer fact-check content delivered in visual format, namely short videos and live broadcasts, rather than long text. In other words, there is a need to keep strengthening strategies and evaluations to maximise the effectiveness and impact of the work of fact-checking initiatives in Indonesia.

Apart from that, there is also a concern about how to better disseminate fact-checked content through access to digital technologies, such as chat applications and by using AI as has been used in other countries.

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Chapter 7: Malaysia

New Initiatives Navigating an Uncertain Terrain

Ross Tapsell³⁴ and Harris Zainul³⁵

HISTORICAL AND GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a crucial country to understand the growth of disinformation and fact-checking production. Malaysia has some of the highest uptake of social media platforms, with Facebook, X, TikTok, Instagram and WhatsApp common platforms for political campaigning. ‘Cybertroopers’ are an example of forms of digital labour pioneered in Malaysia and has been a growing problem for the past decade, requiring efforts to ‘counter’ these messages through other forms of digital labour, like fact-checkers. Global disinformation companies like Cambridge Analytica first based their Southeast Asian office in Kuala Lumpur, and although now defunct, professional disinformation creators remain in the form of loose groups of freelancers and those aiming to sow discord or turn a profit. Disinformation produced by foreign actors is also a growing concern in Malaysia. In recent years, Chinese and Russian forms of disinformation production have targeted Malaysian citizens around issues of the Ukraine War and China’s response to protests in Hong Kong.

Malaysia’s first attempt at a national law which addressed disinformation – the 2018 ‘Anti Fake News Act’ - was widely condemned at home and abroad for its vagueness and potential for abuse, and was later repealed. Current legislations used to address disinformation include the 1998 Communications and Multimedia Act, the Penal Code, and the 1948 Sedition Act should the disinformation include elements of race, religion or royalty. The newly elected government led by Anwar Ibrahim has made a number of statements urging the need to negate growing forms of hate

³⁴ The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

³⁵ Institute for Strategic and International Studies, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

speech and disinformation in the country. TikTok is an emerging concern, with many media reports suggesting disinformation production became common on the platform during GE15. In 2023 Malaysia was number one in the world for TikTok take-down requests (Yusof 2024). It is in this context that a number of Malaysian stakeholders believe it an urgent issue to understand, analyse and ultimately mitigate disinformation in Malaysia, of which fact-checkers play an increasingly integral part.

Malaysia was a late adopter to fact-checking organisations, with fact-checking coming to other countries in the region (such as Indonesia and the Philippines) earlier, while in Malaysia they arrived around 2017 and 2018. This aligns generally with the Malaysian media industry, which tends to lag behind its neighbours in innovation and entrepreneurship in the media and digital technology sector. Malaysian fact-checkers gained inspiration from their neighbours' activities, however, and generally see their role as similar to those in the region (see for example JomCheck 2024). That is, to counter disinformation and 'debunk' hoaxes at a time of growing confusion and political unrest. Most founders come from a background in journalism or non-governmental organisations (NGOs), meaning they are well educated, able to work independently, good at networking with each other and in the broader political and media landscape, and know how to acquire funding from the donors. They are regular attendees at regional and international conferences on fact-checking and read widely (in English) the issues pertaining to their profession.

Like most fact-checking organisations in the region, fact-checkers in Malaysia began in English-speaking circles in the capital city, in this case Kuala Lumpur. As a result, some view the organisations as being divorced from on the ground realities, and not represent the rest of the country, which is trending more conservative and where English is not the predominant language. That said, today, there is greater production of fact-checks in Bahasa Malaysia, the language that is most commonly spoken in Malaysia and where much misinformation circulates via Facebook and WhatsApp.

Racial politics permeates Malaysian society, and the country has become more polarised around the issue of race and religion. In the 2022 election, the Perikatan Nasional coalition campaigned on a 'Malay-first' agenda, and its constituent party, PAS [the Pan-Islamic Party] won the most seats. PAS ran on a campaign of promoting Islam and Malay rights, but much content circulating on social media was problematic, racialised and even hate speech (see CIJ 2023; Tapsell 2022).

COORDINATING BODY OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN MALAYSIA

JomCheck (www.jomcheck.org) is a non-government coalition acting as an umbrella for 19 fact-checking organisations operating in Malaysia. The objective of JomCheck is to foster greater collaboration and therefore better effectiveness in countering disinformation. They describe themselves as 'Malaysia's First academe-media-civil society Fact Checking Alliance' and claim to 'build on a partnership model that brings together various stakeholders to work towards fact-checking, combating mis- and disinformation and disseminating fact-checks to the public.' (see JomCheck 2024).

JomCheck is a nonprofit, nonpartisan alliance first convened in 2022 at the sidelines of the APAC Trusted Media Summit in Singapore. JomCheck has been funded by the Google News Initiative, but partners with academics who work on these issues. In particular, Dr Sabariah Salleh from the National University of Malaysia (UKM) is a key founder and figure in JomCheck activities, as is Malay

Mail journalist Zurairi A.R. Others include Imran Noordin from Warta Hidup, Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, Hazwany Jamluddin, Trinna Leong and Khalil Majeed. For this research we interviewed two individuals who are founders and currently active members of JomCheck. These two individuals were seen as the most ‘hands-on’ members of the organisation who worked on the platform on a daily basis, while others are in more ad-hoc or casual roles. .

JomCheck wants to be a ‘collaborative fact-checking alliance where tips/claims received will be openly shared with partners to select for fact-checking’. Some university-based fact-checkers employ undergraduate and postgraduate students to perform fact-checks with lecturers overseeing operations. The idea of linking with universities (and in particular UKM) is to enable greater legitimacy, given the independent nature of university work, and the expertise that Dr Sabariah in particular brings to the organisation. They state that ‘if no partner selects any tips of the day, the JomCheck operational team will undertake the fact-checking work to maintain daily churn of fact-checks’.

Key to this work model is mutual cooperation between partners, as JomCheck does not and cannot impose any editorial rules on its partners. That is, each fact-checking partner abides by their own organisation’s editorial policies. This can be a problem, however, as enforcing engagement and activities upon partners can be difficult, and some of the ‘partners’ and media affiliates are dormant. Non fact-checking partners such as media organisations ideally should help elevate the published fact-checks through sharing with their networks and potentially by publishing stories on their news sites, but in reality this does not always occur, given the voluntary nature of the alliance. Jomcheck founders told us they try to meet regularly with partners and in particular those in media, but there is sometimes little interest from media organisations in engaging with the work of fact-checkers, as some editors and media executives are either preoccupied or fail to see the value in engagement.

Most of the work JomCheck does is in Bahasa Malaysia, and so linking to Malay language media organisations in particular is more difficult, and some were described by JomCheck staff as ‘silent partners’. English language organisations like Malaysiakini and Malay Mail are more responsive, and although they have Malay language content, they are more widely read in English. In an ideal work, fact-checking can allow for more ‘cross sharing’ between media, which ultimately promotes a less competitive media sphere where content sharing is accessible across media outlets.

Gaining the buy-in and commitment from television remains elusive, and this is important with the mainstreaming of deepfake videos. In this regard, negating these deepfakes from television news would help. Currently JomCheck has yet to develop a method of detecting deepfakes, although they have begun discussions with a company that can assist with detection through AI.

At present, the majority of requests for fact-checks that JomCheck gets are for scams or fraudulent investment opportunities. With Google largely interested in metrics such as the number of videos produced, reports ‘debunked’ or checked, workshops conducted and the number of attendees, a lot of JomCheck’s activities are in the form of digital literacy workshops explaining to people what are scams and what is a rumour. These workshops are often held in rural and semi-rural areas of Malaysia, including some places of worship, and typically attract around 30 people per workshop. This, the JomCheck staff believe, helps them achieve their overall goal, which one respondent described as ‘for society to be empowered to search for truth and facts themselves, and to learn how to fact-check’.

JomCheck staff claimed the biggest challenge they had was funding, and that they are constantly having to pitch for grants, even though they have received funding from Google.

INDIVIDUAL FACT-CHECK ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR CHALLENGES

1. Faqcheck

Faqcheck, formerly Faqcheck Lab, was established in 2020 by individuals linked with, among others, the University of Nottingham Malaysia campus and UKM. Founded by Khalil Majeed, there are three people working with Faqcheck, which is part of the JomCheck coalition.

They have three years of full funding from an international donor which they do not declare, where the funding was to help for sustainability in the long term. Their website, however, lists a range of partners including Open Society Foundations (OSF), Google, Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) and Internews. Khalil said funding is the biggest challenge though, in his words, ‘when it comes to Malaysia it is in a precarious position. You’re never poor enough for developmental programs – that money (from Google, etc) has really gone to India, Pakistan, South Asia. But there’s no local money here for these kinds of initiatives’.

Faqcheck’s website suggests an interest in non-media clients, claiming the organisation can ‘help business protect their brand reputation from the ever-evolving threat of disinformation’ (see faqcheck.org, 2024). Their biweekly blog on their website ‘is designed to assist companies about trends and potential informational threats that could impact their brand’s reputation’ and ‘maps issues surrounding the complex online content landscape, helping local and international corporations in Malaysia identify and counteract sources of misinformation and disinformation’ (Faqcheck.com 2024).

Faqcheck has seven different media organisations who collaborate with them, but this does not always include traditional media. The reason given for this reluctance being ‘why should we [the media] involve ourselves in fact-checking, when fact-checking is what we do already as journalists?’ Like JomCheck, Faqcheck finds difficulty engaging with the Malay language media.

A question that all fact-checking organisations in Malaysia contemplate is whether they should be registered in the International Fact-checking Network (IFCN), which allow for funds from Meta as an official ‘third-party’ fact-checker. In Faqcheck’s case, Khalil believes that it is not worthwhile doing so, as it would require his organisation to adhere to certain procedures he believes to not be aligned with Faqcheck’s direction, such as being annually audited by IFCN and being obliged to write eight stories per month.

Further, Khalil said Meta’s quota of how many stories they pay for creates a perverse incentive whereby organisations are only incentivised to meet that threshold. This commodification of fact-checking also leads to organisations producing stories which are ‘easy’ to debunk and require shorter churn times, rather than impactful and important stories which may take more time.

An example given is that in Malaysia, a fact-checking organisation can focus on debunking the many scams and fraudulent investment schemes online and grow its metrics and meeting the eight stories per month requirement at the expense of larger stories around race, religion and health disinformation. Further, Khalil also believes that there are cases requiring proactive approaches rather than reactive debunks with limited impact.

Faqcheck is interested in the bigger picture problems and the way disinformation evolves in Malaysia. Khalil notes how the people who produce disinformation are very news-savvy, and are aware of how to tap into a news cycle to incite and enrage the public on a particular issue at a particular time. For example, on a Muslim public holiday, there will be plenty of disinformation around the halal status of certain food. Another example is with the Israel-Gaza war, whereby there is disinformation on alleged supporters of Israeli companies.

Khalil remarked that in Malaysia, racial narratives dominate public attention, and in many ways, racial disinformation reaches bigger audiences rather than religious disinformation. He said ‘Malaysians are still in the teenage phase when it comes to information. Malaysians don’t have a healthy relationship with news and information, and how to interact with it. They know information has value, but they try to see it in a way that benefits themselves rather than to the benefit of others or the community.’ He added that while Malaysians are very entrepreneurial online, with examples given being participation on TikTok Shop and Shopee, they are less concerned about how information is used on other people.

Faqcheck’s endgoal, according to Khalil is ‘for people to make informed choices. That’s the best way to stop people from spreading misinformation. We are never going to win the war against misinformation and disinformation, but we can help people make informed choices without the strong influence of others.’

A key challenge for Faqcheck is the awareness and understanding of the term ‘disinformation’ in Malaysia. From their experience, the term does not resonate in rural areas where ‘fake news’ is more relatable. However, since Trump popularised and politicised the term, Google and other US-based academics (e.g. Wardle 2017) have argued against using the term ‘fake news’ due to its lack of specificity to describe a complex problem. In this regard, a challenge that Faqcheck faces is that they are constantly having to define ‘misinformation’ and ‘disinformation’ to an audience which either finds it confusing or an ‘elite’, urbanised, ‘Kuala Lumpur’ problem that is not readily accepted. This is consistent with findings from other areas of Southeast Asia where understanding key terms and ‘culture’ of disinformation amongst semi-rural and rural participants is important (Tapsell 2018).

2. MyCheck Bernama

Bernama is Malaysia’s leading state-owned, yet autonomous, news organisation, created by an Act of Parliament – the Bernama Act 1967 – and formally established and incorporated in 1968. Despite being officially recognised as an autonomous news agency under the Ministry of Communications, Bernama has long suffered from perception issues. On one hand, it houses professional journalists and produces credible news. Yet, on the other hand, it has often been

viewed, both fairly and unfairly, as an organisation that largely aligns with government positions and rarely is critical against official policies and actions.

In March 2020, Bernama had organised a seminar on fact-checking conducted by FATHM Chief Executive Officer, Fergus Bell, and a month later, MyCheck was established. This coincided with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia, a period where health misinformation was rampant. The organisation was initially helmed by Ali Imran, and has since grown to include four full-time fact-checkers although some hold dual positions in Bernama.

From the outset, the key challenge facing MyCheck was its independence from its parent organisation, Bernama. Questions were raised by the public, such as if MyCheck could fact-check government statements? Officially, MyCheck operates as its own entity and is editorially independent from Bernama. However, due to their close proximity, there is a symbiotic relationship between the two, with MyCheck receiving fact-checking requests from Bernama.

A related question typically posed to MyCheck concerns its source of funding, typically couched to cover aspersions of its lack of editorial independence. Responses to this differ, with some adamant and reiterating that MyCheck is editorially independent from Bernama while others suggest that there is a tendency to self-censor by selecting safer, less controversial stories to fact-check. For example, MyCheck generally avoids fact-checking statements from politicians or are political in nature, unless there is a compelling public interest that justifies otherwise.

Nonetheless, this affiliation with Bernama does pay dividends. The organisation often receives endorsements from the government in the form of advising Malaysians to seek clarifications from MyCheck, rather than blindly accepting information found online. This Bernama-MyCheck relationship also lends itself to being able to reach a broader audience, by virtue of the former being one of the largest news providers in the country. Similarly, due to Bernama's status as Malaysia's newswire, there is potential for the stories that MyCheck collaborates on with Bernama getting republished to reach a wider audience.

In terms of sourcing its stories to fact-check, it operates a tipline on its website, www.mycheck.my, and via a dedicated WhatsApp account. MyCheck has developed a scoring system that accounts for relevancy and potential impact to help it decide which stories to fact-check. In this regard, only if the story meets the predetermined scoring threshold does it proceed and get fact-checked. This system helps ensure that MyCheck's resources are prioritised and achieves the highest impact.

The types of stories that MyCheck typically fact-checks are related to scams and fraudulent investment schemes, along with phishing links and false advertising. This reflects the general information environment that Malaysians are exposed to, where there has been an uptick in the number of scams and fraudulent activities in recent years.

Regarding the challenges posed by generative AI and deepfake content, as it stands, MyCheck has yet to develop any method to detect such content. This limitation is similar to other fact-checking organisations such as Faqcheck, with it being apparent that there is a pronounced absence of technical expertise to internally identify deepfakes. Instead of

approaching the private sector for a solution as with JomCheck, MyCheck is relying on authorities, in this case, MCMC, to take further action.

Also similar to Faqcheck, MyCheck had also contemplated IFCN membership although this would be near impossible due to their status as a government-linked organisation. As a result, MyCheck is unable to participate in third-party fact-checking programmes offered by platforms such as Meta and Google.

Ultimately, like other fact-checking organisations, MyCheck aims to promote digital literacy and empower individuals to fact-check for themselves.

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Chapter 8: Philippines

Emergence of Fact-checking Traditions to Counteract Disinformation in the Philippines

Maria Diosa Labiste³⁶

HISTORICAL AND GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN THE PHILIPPINES

The proliferation of politically motivated false and manipulated information since 2016 has fueled the growth of fact-checking projects that have recently become mainstream or integrated into the content production of several newsrooms. Fact-checking started as an organic journalism practice adhering to the principles of accuracy and verification. Since the techniques and methods of fact-checking are easily taught to non-journalists, fact-checking projects were also started in organizations, coalitions and communities.

This report maps the three prevailing practices of fact-checking in the Philippines, the media, academe, and civil society. Media fact-checkers include Vera Files and MindaNews Fact-Check; the academic fact-checkers are Tsek.ph fact-checking coalition, and Fact-Rakers while the NGO/activist fact-checkers will have ABKD. The discussion will cover their origin, practices, and institutional matters. The first part of this report will discuss the context for the emergence of the three conventions of fact-checking projects. The second part will provide the profile of fact-checkers.

³⁶ Maria Diosa Labiste, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Journalism of the College of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman. She is one of the coordinators of Tsek.ph in the 2019 and 2022 elections. She is also an assessor of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) at Poynter. She has worked with academe-based fact-checking at UP Diliman. She co-wrote and wrote journal articles and book chapters on disinformation, hate speech, and fact-checking. Email: mdlabiste@up.edu.ph

HISTORICAL AND GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN THE PHILIPPINES

Fact-checking is the process of detecting the truthfulness behind claims, images and statements and assessing the degree of their factuality and verifiability. One outgrowth of the process is political fact-checking which focuses on verifying claims of politicians and public figures to determine their veracity and hold them to account for their statements. Political fact-checking could take place at any time, but it is often scaled up during elections.

Fact-checking is organic to journalism's practice of gatekeeping in newsrooms. The latter refers to the process of verifying news for their accuracy and relevance before publication (Muhlmann, 2010: 170). Gatekeeping adheres to journalistic norms of transparency of methods, rigor, and accountability (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2021: 121). However, verification through fact-checking has recently evolved into full-blown journalism projects that are no longer confined to newsrooms.

Fact-checking in the Philippines looks up to the Western models including the way how false information is classified and verified. Accordingly, fact-checking aims to mitigate three forms of information: first, disinformation, which is false information with harmful intent, second, misinformation, which is false information having no malicious intent or distributed without an awareness that it is false, and third, mal-information, which is factual information but intends to mislead, harm, and manipulate (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). The definitions, derived from the 2017 Council of Europe policy study on information disorder, were adapted as categories for fact-checking in the Philippines. Media organizations engaged in fact-checking seek accreditation with the International Fact-Checking Network in the U.S. as signatories to a code of principles (International Fact Checking Network, n.d.). As of 2024, there are six fact-checking organizations in the Philippines that are accredited by the IFCN. They ranged from established or mainstream media, independent news sites, and community media or media organizations located outside Metro Manila.

Although journalists and journalism students in the Philippines tried out fact-checking before 2016, it was only in that year when they have seriously considered fact-checking to be part of the journalism skills set. Rodrigo Duterte became the country's president in 2016 partly due to the strength of networked political trolling. The latter refers to the practice of using the internet and social media platforms, often through anonymous or fake accounts, to spread falsehoods or attack a target (Hannan, 2024: 24). Trolls may act alone but they often behave in sync as a network hired for a demolition job. Duterte's so-called keyboard warriors became a fixture of his administration, with some of them appointed to government posts, primarily to defend him from criticisms. The pro-Duterte trolls make their presence felt whenever his critics need to be silenced. An example is the former senator Leila de Lima who, after she criticized Duterte's violent anti-drug campaign, became a target of online false information and a victim of trumped-up drug charges which landed her in jail for six years (De Lima, 2024). Duterte's claim that the country has three million drug users was without basis but became the underlying reason for the drug campaign that led to the death of some 6,000 individuals per government figures but, according to human rights groups, actually killed some 30,000 persons (PhilRights,

2023). In a way, fact-checking was journalists' way of making Duterte account for his lies, false information, and hateful language, at a time when he and the trolls have been attacking the media.

The online news sites Vera Files and Rappler were early adopters of institutionalized fact-checking. In 2017, they became signatories to IFCN's code of principles which earned them the privilege of becoming third-party fact-checkers of Facebook. This means that they can earn from fact-checking false information on Facebook by monetizing their effort.

Vera Files and Rappler made fact-checking part of their content production and introduced the techniques to other media organizations through training grants they received. Later on, they became the core of media fact-checkers in Tsek.Ph, a collaborative fact-checking project for the May 2019 elections organized by the University of the Philippines' journalism department. Tsek brought together three universities and eleven media organizations to fact-check the midterm elections. In this pioneering collaborative project, two traditions of fact-checking emerged namely the journalism tradition and the academe tradition. The journalism tradition refers to the various fact-checking techniques that journalists use to examine if a particular claim or information is accurate or truthful. If not, the information is debunked as false, partially true, or misleading. Tsek received funds from U.P. and Facebook to operate three months into the 2019 elections. Tsek produced over a hundred fact-checks and showed the way how fact-checking initiatives of media can be broadened to accommodate many organizations and various fact-checking techniques.

As observed during Tsek.ph operation, the academic stream is not much different from the media's fact-checking techniques. The academe fact-checkers were students in journalism majors or students trained by Vera Files and Rappler's outreach project. The Department of Journalism of the University of the Philippines (U.P.) regularly runs a fact-checking class under Associate Professor Yvonne Chua where the latest verification techniques are tried and the students' work are posted in the website FactRakers (<https://www.factrakers.org>). When they graduate, students join media organizations that start their fact-checking projects. While the verification techniques used might be similar, the difference between the academe and media fact-checking is in the degree of independence in selecting the subjects to be fact-checks and the extent through which the debunking will be performed. In other words, some news organizations avoid fact-checking certain topics or personalities for some reasons. Whereas U.P. students, for example, enjoyed autonomy without conflict of interests and editorial restrictions.

The first fact-checking project led by Tsek disbanded a month after the May 2019 elections but some media organizations and fact-checking classes continued on their own. The following year, or during the COVID-19 pandemic, when incredulous claims and conspiracy theories on COVID-19 and vaccines abound, media organizations tried their hand at fact-checking.

In the 2022 national elections, Tsek was revived and had grown bigger with 34 fact-checking organizations as partners. Media and academic fact-checkers were the mainstays but a third group, advocacy fact-checkers, joined the coalition. Tsek's advocacy fact-checkers combined fact-checking with activism. They considered fact-checking as a form of civic participation, mobilization, and dissent. While they learned the tools of the trade from media and academic fact-checkers who trained them they brought a considerable hybridity in their techniques and organization. Thus, in terms of

groups, there are three fact-checking streams or traditions: Media, Academe/Universities, and Civil Society/Advocacy Fact-Checkers.

Even as they all shared the concern for ferreting out the facts, advocacy fact-checkers' work is informed by their political orientation and causes. This is in contrast to media fact-checkers who sometimes assume that it is possible to be neutral during a politically charged election period. As such, facts can be separated from opinion.

The advocacy or activist tradition in fact-checkers can be analyzed using the two frameworks namely alternative journalism and digital activism. Alternative journalism refers to a set of concepts and practices that are produced outside mainstream media organizations, done by amateurs, and carry the voices of unrepresented groups (Harcup 2009). Alternative media redresses the imbalance of media power. Digital activism is a form of counter-discourse for grassroots activists and civil society advocates that informs the way they engage with social media. It is underpinned by two phrases: collective and connected (Fenton 2016: 25).

Unlike journalists and journalism students who think that disinformation is countered by factual rigor, advocacy or activist fact-checkers regard fact-checking as a form of critique and resistance to elites and injustices. Since they are connected with various political movements and causes, fact-checking is just one of the many ways they register activism.

From three streams or tradition, fact-checking work in the Philippines could be further classified into two based on practice: Media and Journalism, and Advocacy/Activism.

The table below shows the difference between journalism and advocacy streams of fact-checking, which is represented by the media and academe in one group, and the advocacy or activist fact-checking in the other group.

Media and Journalism Schools	Advocacy/Activism
Adherence to norms and practices of news media	Adherence to norms of social justice and democratic participation
Fact-checking techniques are methodological	Fact-checking techniques are simple but presented as counter-dis course
Fact-checkers strives to be accountable	Fact-checkers holds sources of lies accountable
Language is neutral, straightforward; lets the readers decide	Language is rhetorical, value-laden, calls out manipulation techniques
Collaborate with social media platforms	No direct collaboration with social media platforms
No direct political calls or advocacy	Includes explicit and implicit political calls

Table 1. Comparison of two fact-checking traditions in terms of practice (revised from Labiste et al. 2023)

There are at least 15 organizations which can be considered activist-fact-checkers but only a handful were part of fact-checking coalitions (Labiste et al 2023). Some of them persisted and continued their fact-checking endeavors on their own. Others stopped and returned to community organizing, publishing, teaching, or media content production, i.e. film, podcast, etc.

In what follows, I will provide a profile of fact-checking organizations that are representative of the three traditions, namely media, academe, and advocacy or activism. They are included in this report because they are the most active ones.. Their activities covered their participation in the Tsek.ph and their subsequent fact-checking activities after the elections. This paper will discuss Vera Files and MindaNews Fact-Checks as two examples of independent media fact-checkers; Tsek.ph fact-checking coalition and Fact-Rakers as two representatives of academe-based fact-checkers, and ABKD as an example of NGO/activist fact-checker.

INDIVIDUAL FACT-CHECKING ORGANIZATIONS

A. Media

1. Vera Files

Website: <https://verafiles.org>

President: Ellen Tordesillas

Vera Files is a non-profit news site in which fact-checking is a major part of its activities, content, and source of funding. It was established in 2008 by a group of Filipino journalists. Vera Files fact-checks are accessible in its website and in Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). They are also found in Viber (4,800 members) and Facebook Messenger (liked by 85,000) where it has bots or automated tiplines to gather content and comments to be fact-checked. In 2022, it started podcasting.

Vera Files, along with Rappler, are early adopters of fact-checking in media in the Philippines. Vera Files experimented with fact-checking in 2016 as part of student output by the class of one of Vera Files' owners, Yvonne Chua, who is a journalism teacher at the University of the Philippines Diliman, and later worked with Vera Files staff, Jake Soriano. Chua's students were verifying the claims of candidates during the 2016 presidential elections using the fact-checking techniques tried out in other countries. Chua led the Vera Files fact-checking project until 2019. In 2017, Vera Files became a signatory of Poynter's International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), which is an alliance of more than a hundred fact-checking organizations. Being an IFCN signatory qualifies Vera Files to become a third-party fact-checker of Facebook (now Meta). Vera Files fact-checks doubtful claims found on Facebook and subsequently monetized this endeavor.

Vera Files fact-checking grants are mainly from foreign sources. Vera Files fact-checking project received grants from the National Endowment for Democracy, Check Global by Meedan, and Internews (USAID), among others. The major funders of Vera Files are NED and Facebook /Meta as shown by two streams of fact-checking projects in operation, one with NED and the other with Facebook/Meta. Vera Files disclosed the project funds it received from NED but not those with Facebook. Vera Files also received grants from Canadian and German embassies in 2023. The six-month Canada grant is to

enhance reporting on issues on the contested South China Sea while the three-month German grant is on monitoring media ownership in the Philippines. Some of Vera Files fact-checks concern the South China/West Philippine Sea. Vera Files also received funds from Open Society Foundation/Asian Democratic Network and various forms of support from the IFCN.

Vera Files has asserted its independence as a fact-checking organization by not taking funds from politicians, political parties, or partisan groups, and ensuring that its trustees and staff are not joining organizations, projects, and activities that might result in a conflict of interest, “whether real or perceived” (Vera Files, 2024). Vera Files states that it adheres to IFCN Code of Principles which encourages fairness through transparency of standards, sources, funding, methodology and a correction policy.

Vera Files’ fact-checking team has 18 members listed on its website, of which eight are editors, senior editors, and peer editors. The rest are researchers and reporters. Two unnamed managers are leading the fact-checking project; one runs the part of the project funded by NED while the other is in charge of the Facebook/Meta third-party project.

Vera Files focuses on political fact-checking. It examines current claims and statements of public officials and figures and, when found false or inaccurate, debunks them with facts. It also monitors reversals of politicians’ public statements. The materials for fact-checking came from direct public statements, news, and social media. The aim of Vera Files’ political fact-checking is to hold public officials and figures accountable for their claims.

Vera Files came up with a five-step method of fact-checking (Vera Files, 2024). The first step is looking for information to be fact-checked and the second step is researching whether the information can be corroborated or debunked by sources as evidence. The third step is writing the fact-check while the fourth step is subjecting the fact-checking to a review by other members of the fact-checking team. The last step is the publication of the fact-check after its approval by Vera Files senior editors. Vera Files fact-checks contained no bylines. Authorship is considered a team effort.

Vera Files fact-checking methodology rests on the assumption that it is possible to arrive at truth based on facts and that facts are devoid of value judgments. For a piece of information to be verified, it should be a “fact-checkable claim” or that which “is categorically claimed to be a fact (Vera Files, 2024). The latter is verified against, or explained through, government records, documents, journal articles, or expert interviews. Vera Files prefers primary sources and provides hyperlinks to sources and information used in its fact-checks. Vera Files uses chat bots and tiplines to gather claims to be fact-checking, showing a level of automation in their work. The information to be fact-checked is also chosen based on its relevance and virality. Relevance refers to the information that is of public interest while virality refers to the traction of the information over social media platforms, i.e. interaction and multiple shares.

Vera Files fact-checks are represented with a format and infographics designed to attract readers. The fact-check immediately provides a summary of the claim and the verdict

of fact-checkers before a discussion. Vera Files has a section of fact-checks in Filipino on its website. In 2018, it came up with its own fact-checking guide to explain how fact-checking works. The guide, which was used in training students and reporters how to fact-check, can be downloaded from Vera Files' website.

While Vera Files' fact-checks are usually rated false, misleading, fake, or flip-flop, its rating system is varied to include unproven, inaccurate, and needs context categories (Vera Files, 2024). However, the definitions of the categories are not definitive because some qualifiers overlap with others. For example, misleading overlaps with needs context while false and inaccurate share many distinctions.

Vera Files encourages its readers to contribute fact-checks and also to call its attention if there are mistakes. It has a dedicated email, appeals@verafiles.org, and promises to respond within twenty-four hours. Alternatively, readers may email IFCN for complaints on Vera Files fact-checks.

Vera Files is one of the active media fact-checkers in Tsek.ph during the 2019 and 2022 elections. Its fact-checking output during the election was referenced as evidence by other fact-checking organizations.

As among its plans submitted to the IFCN, Vera Files intends to come up with video fact-checks, especially on TikTok where disinformation circulates to target young people. It is learning more about artificial intelligence (AI) to improve its verification techniques (IFCN Code of Principles, 2023). Among the audiences it targets to reach through fact-checks are the more than ten million Filipino migrant workers who rely on social media for news and other information about the Philippines. It has also started a fact-checking training for persons with disabilities, especially visually impaired people.

2. MindaNews

Website: <https://mindanews.com>

President and CEO: Jowel Canuday, D.Phil. (oxon.)

Editor: Bobby Timonera

Address: 23C Saturn St. GSIS Subdivision, Davao City Philippines

Telephone Number: 082 297 4360

MindaNews was established in 2001 as a news service of Mindanao Institute of Journalism by journalists based in Mindanao. Its founders were once part of Manila-based media and the decision to establish the institute and the news service is a way of redressing the imbalance of the number of stories and the local perspectives in the news from Mindanao. The institute is a non-profit that engages with news production, training, data bank and research services, which are also its sources of funds. It is headed by a board of directors.

MindaNews has more than twenty editorial staff composed of editors, reporters, correspondents, photojournalists, and a social media manager. It releases news and photographs regularly through its website that commits to framing the stories through the

lens of Mindanao. MindaNews received grants from the National Endowment for Democracy and UNESCO for its operations and for the training of journalists. MindaNews has declared its non-partisanship by not accepting funds from national, and local governments, politicians and political parties. Regardless of funding, MindaNews said it does not allow sponsors to influence its editorial process.

The push to create MindaNews fact-check came in 2021 when Internews(USAID) supported a mentorship program for five media organizations to learn about fact-checking with the aim of making them signatories of the Code of Principles of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) at Poynter (Internews, n.d.; Rappler, 2021). MindaNews joined the Internews incubation project of InterNews, called the Philippine Fact-Checker Incubator project which has Vera Files and Rappler as partners. MindaNews is among the four news organizations that eventually became signatories to IFCN's fact-checking code in 2023.

MindaNews Fact-Check is an example of a fact-checking project undertaken by a community media organization. In the Philippines community media, interchangeable as community press, refers to news organizations based outside the capital of Metro Manila. They are primarily accessible within the city, province, or region that they covered thus their news and content are written for the audience they have in mind.

As an IFCN accredited fact-checking organization, MindaNews qualifies to become a third-party fact-checker of Facebook that pays fact-checkers to verify questionable information posted on its platform. Mindanews received a grant from IFCN's BUILD, which is funded by Google and YouTube, to support global fact-checking projects. Sustainability is an issue that MindaNews Fact Check has to contend with.

Although many community media organizations were introduced or trained in fact-checking, only Mindanews became part of the InterNews mentorship project and subsequently established a fact-checking project. MindaNews was involved with Tsek.ph, a pioneering fact-checking coalition for the 2019 elections but it was not actively fact-checking. Its training with Internews in 2021 made it a more confident fact-checker when it joined Tsek.ph for the 2022 elections.

MindaNews Fact-Check is a lean unit composed only of two staff, its managing editor and its social media manager. The team produces an average of one fact-check a week. Topics of MindaNews fact-checks give priority to issues and public figures in Mindanao. The topics include health, culture, conflict, crimes, history, the environment, politics, and local elections. Since former president Rodrigo Duterte and his family are from Davao, they are the subject of several political fact-checks of MindaNews.

MindaNews' fact-checking methodology is similar to Vera Files' fact-checking techniques. The first step involves looking for sources of questionable information from news and social media platforms. If the information is worth fact-checking, then the second step is looking for evidence. Links to the sources are included in the fact-checks. The third step is submitting the fact-check to an editor for vetting and copy editing. The fourth step is preparing the fact-check by including a rating card or infographics while the fifth or final

step is having a senior editor look at the fact-check before it is posted on the MindaNews website and social media accounts.

The fact-checks are presented in a manner that the reader will immediately know that the information is fake, false, misleading, altered, or has missing contexts. A rating of “Fake” means a claim is fabricated while a false claim contradicts facts, events, and official records, including laws and scientific studies. Altered pertains to manipulated images and videos to mislead the public. Misleading and lacking contexts are categories that have problems with contexts. The fact-checks are written in English and while they include the local languages spoken in Mindanao as quotations and phrases, the lines carry an English translation.

MindaNews Fact Check strives to be accountable to its readers. It assures them that the mistakes in news reporting and fact-checks will be acknowledged and corrected within twenty-four hours. MindaNews provided two clickable forms in case there are mistakes in reporting and in the fact-checks. Readers can notify MindaNews of the mistakes through the forms or through their email and telephone numbers. The fact-checks will then carry an editor’s note, indicating the corrections. These correction measures aim to gain the trust of the fact-checking community but also the readers of MindaNews who were recently introduced to its fact-checking project.

B. Academe/Journalism School

1. Tsek.ph

Website: <https://www.tsek.ph>

Tsek.Ph is a pioneering collaborative fact-checking project between academe, media, and civil society organizations. It was established primarily as a fact-checking project during the 2019 and 2022 elections. It was organized by the journalism department of the College of Mass Communication in the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman.

Tsek was launched in February 2019, or four months into the midterm elections. A midterm election excludes voting for the president and vice president who are halfway through their six-year term. Two other universities and eleven media organizations joined the fact-checking coalition. The following were the partners of Tsek.Ph: University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University, ABS-CBN, Baguio Midland Courier, CLTV 26, DZUP, Interaksyon, MindaNews, PhilStar, Probe, Rappler, and Vera Files. Tsek received funds from UP and Facebook to run the website and live fact-checking on election day.

Fact-checking during elections means examining the candidates’ statements, programs of government, interviews, news, websites and social media posts. To prepare, Tsek held a training of fact-checkers to familiarize themselves with Facebook’s Crowdtangle, which analyzes and reports on the public content on social media.

Crowdtangle also shows viral posts and identifies the so-called influencers in social media. Meedan also trained fact-checkers how to collaborate through an automated platform, Check, that gathers questionable claims and information for verification.

By the time Tsek decided to end its operation almost a month after the May 13 elections, it had produced a total of 130 fact-checks, in which more than half of the fact-checked claims came from Facebook, which has about 64.3 million users at that time or about 55.7 percent of the total population (Napoleon Cat, 2023). Tsek used five ratings in its fact-checks: Accurate – the statement/claim is demonstrably factual and true; False – the statement/claim is demonstrably contrary to available facts; Misleading – the statement/claims gives a vague or different impression; No basis – the statement/claim cannot be verified or fact-checked; and Needs context – the statement/claim needs more facts or clarification because it may be taken out of context (Tsek.Ph, n.d.). At least 60 percent of the fact-checked information was rated false. A pattern had emerged that the false claims favored pro-Duterte candidates and targeted the opposition candidates. Close to half of the false claims and statements appeared as visuals with texts, in the forms of memes, infographics, stand-alone quotations, and photographs. Red-tagging, also known as red-baiting, is a form of disinformation examined by Tsek. Red-tagging labels the opposition, independent candidates, and their supporters as part of or backed by the clandestine communist party, and consequently targets them for vilification and threats. Tsek traced the false claims to police and army social media accounts. Red-baiting is an example of state-sponsored disinformation.

Some media partners of Tsek conducted live fact-checking during widely-watched debates of candidates running for senators. However, pro-Duterte politicians mainly resorted to generalities and were careful in their statements while some of them did not join the debates.

The presence of Tsek offered the public a different role of the media during the election period. While before, journalists would just report whatever the candidates and their supporters said, Tsek fact-checking presents an opportunity to hold the candidates to their words.

Between the 2019 and 2022 elections is the COVID-19 pandemic in which disinformation, hoaxes and conspiracy theories were regular occurrences in social media. Many of those who spread false cures and claims amassed a lot of followers that were able to monetize their online presence and consequently call themselves “influencers.” Some of them have identified themselves with Duterte and the Marcoses, the family of the late dictator, President Ferdinand Marcos.

Thus in October 2021, when Tsek.Ph was revived but with pandemic restrictions still in place, the fact-checking coalition had to contend with networked disinformation in which the so-called influencers with huge following amplified not only disinformation but also defamed and insulated opposition candidates, their supporters, and fact-checkers in the run-up to the May 14, 2022 elections.

The revived Tsek.ph has grown to have thirty-four partners from academe, media, and civil society organizations (Philstar.com, 2022). The latter include multi-sectoral groups, NGOs, election-watch groups, and an association of historians and history teachers. Tsek has twelve media partners, sixteen academic partners, and six partners from civil society groups.

Media	ABS-CBN, Agence France Press, Baguio Chronicle, DZUP 1602, Fyt, Interaksyon, MindaNews, Philippine Press Institute, Philstar Global, Press One, Probe, and Vera Files
Academe	Ateneo de Manila University Asian Center for Journalism, Carlos Hilado Memorial State College, Letran University, Philippine Association for Media and Information Literacy, Trinity University of Asia, Xavier University, University of the Philippines System, UP Baguio, UP Cebu, UP Los Baños, UP Open University, UP Visayas, Fact-Rakers (UP Diliman), Fact-Check Patrol (UP Diliman) and UP sa Halalan 2022 (UP Diliman)
Civil Society	Akademiya at Bayan Kontra Disimpormasyon at Dayaan (ABKD), Barangay Hub, e-Boto, Fact-Check Philippines, IDEALS, and Kontra Daya

Table 2. Fact-checking traditions and organizations

Tsek enjoyed a growth of readers and followers on social media platforms. It produced video fact-checks for TikTok, YouTube, and other social media platforms. Its Facebook page had more viewers, from only 600 at the start of January 2022 to 5,600 days before the elections. Tsek partners also published some of the fact-checks. Tsek was mentioned or became the source of some ninety news stories in local and international media. Tsek produced more than a thousand fact-checks and wrote weekly summaries and three in-depth analyses of disinformation throughout its six months of operation (Tsek.Ph, n.d.).

Tsek fact-checking partners were better trained in 2022 than in 2019. Ten training sessions were held on a variety of topics and techniques. Tsek received funds and technical support from Google News Initiative, Rakuten Viber, Meedan, the Embassy of Canada, and Meta/Facebook. It also received grants from the University of the Philippines.

A distinct disinformation emerged in the 2022 elections: martial law fact-checks (Labiste and Chua, 2022). The latter means false and distorted information that sought to rehabilitate the Marcos dictatorship, to ensure the victory of Marcos' son and namesake, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The false and inaccurate historical information was circulating online through networkers of shares with tens of thousands of followers. For example, the false claims that there were no arrests of critics during the Marcos martial law era (1972-1986) were posted by 194 groups and had 187 million views in February 2022.

Just like in the 2019 elections, the opposition was heavily attacked on social media, such that Leni Robredo and Francis Pangilinan, who were running for president and vice president respectively received vicious, misogynist, and virulent comments from social

media accounts associated with Marcos Jr. and his running mate, Sara Duterte. Marcos Jr. and Duterte won (Chua et al., 2022).

As shown by the election results, it appears that Tsek.ph and other fact-checking organizations cannot plug the hole of the disinformation dam. However, what happened also underscored the crucial role fact-checkers play in a functioning democracy which is to provide informed and accurate information to voters.

Tsek used chatbots and tiplines from Messenger, Meedan, and Viber to automate fact-checking. However, some Tsek partners would gather claims from their own social media networks and communities.

The hard work that fact-checkers have assigned themselves will roll out again in the 2025 midterm elections. With artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning technology on the rise, the work of Tsek will even be more challenging.

2. FactRakers

Website: <https://www.factrakers.org>

Founder: Associate Professor Yvonne T. Chua, Department of Journalism, College of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines Diliman

FactRakers is an example of a student-based fact-checking project. It was initiated by Yvonne Chua of the journalism department of UP Diliman (FactRakers, n.d.). Its website contains the fact-checks submitted by students enrolled in Chua's class for credit. Chua has contributed a lot to the growth of fact-checking in the Philippines, partly through her students who produced fact-checks in her class and later employed in fact-checking projects of media organizations. Its name, FactRakers, was inspired by "muckrakers" alluding to the dogged determination of journalists and fact-checkers pursuit of facts.

FactRakers is listed in the Duke Reporters Lab which has a database of more than four hundred global fact-checking organizations (Duke Reporters' Lab, n.d.). It has an active status probably to mean that it continuously produces fact-checks. In 2020, FactRakers won first prize in the special projects category during the Philippine Journalism Research Conference (Retona, 2020).

Fact-checking started out as an activity in Chua's journalism ethics class but eventually became a full-fledged course for journalism majors. In 2016, using the latest fact-checking techniques available, the class fact-checked the statements of candidates in the 2016 elections (FactRakers, n.d.). Together with journalism lecturer Jake Soriano, Chua edited the fact-checks and shared them with her news organization, Vera Files. Soon, Vera Files created its own Vera Files Fact-Checks staffed with fact-checkers who were once Chua's students.

Students behind FactRakers made up the bulk of fact-checkers of Tsek.ph during the live election day fact-checking in the 2019 and 2022 elections. They also contributed substantially to the Tsek fact-checks' pool. FactRakers was among the 34 partners of Tsek

in 2022. After graduation, many of Chua's students joined media organizations with fact-checking projects.

A dozen fact-checks were uploaded in FactRakers from May to July 2024. The most prominent topics are the defense or military capacity of the Philippines, on government affairs, mainly on issues related to the government of Ferdinand Marcos Jr, including his wife, and the controversial identity of suspended Bambang town Mayor Alice Guo. In other words, the students' fact-checks are timely or in keeping with the news.

FactRakers website does not include a particular methodology on verifying false claims; rather there is a diverse approach tried out on claim sourcing, research, and debunking. However, from the fact-checks posted, the steps appear implicit. First, a questionable claim is gathered from social media platforms, news, websites, or statements of public officials or figures. Then research is done to determine the veracity of the claims. The fact-check is given a rating as a way of debunking a false claim or pointing out why it is misleading. One of the basis for doing the fact-checks is when the questionable information has gone viral or viewed by hundreds, or thousands, on social media platforms where it is circulating. Students, divided into groups peer-reviewed each other's work to ensure that the claims, sources, and presentation were correct before submitting the fact-check to the teacher.

FactRakers used the same ratings found in Tsek (FactRakers, n.d.). These are the following: Accurate: The statement/claim is demonstrably factual and true; False: The statement/claim is demonstrably contrary to available facts; Misleading: The statement/claim gives a vague or different impression; Needs Context: The statement/claim needs more facts or clarification because it may be taken out of context; and No Basis: The statement/claim cannot be verified or fact-checked (FactRakers, n.d.). However, the ratings may be different, depending on the findings and verdicts of fact-checkers. The rating of the fact-check is prominently placed on the infographic of every fact-check.

The presentation style of fact-checks is explanatory or new story-like, with the use of photographs, visuals, or infographics. The sources are supplied in hyperlinks. The presentation follows the "sandwich" style in which the false information is buried between the truthful presentation of the subject. In this manner, the headline immediately debunks the false information, which is then given more explanation why it is false. FactRakers' verification method used, i.e. reverse image search, is mentioned in the story.

FactRakers have started using machine learning/artificial intelligence (AI) in fact-checking in 2024. When fact-checks use AI, its use, along with the app, is disclosed within the fact-check. If a social media platform has tagged the information as suspicious, i.e. altered or manipulated, fact-checkers also include the information in the fact-check. Fact-Rakers also used Crowdtangle, a Facebook/Meta application that tracks interaction data of public content on Facebook and Instagram, and Check, which is a tipline that retrieves information to be fact-checked along with its metadata. They also identify influencers or top sharers of information. In August 2024, Meta shut down Crowdtangle.

Fact-checks of students with FactRakers are posted on Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), aside from the FactRakers website. The latter has also a section, “Snippets,” which contains a one-sentence summary of the fact-checks and a hyperlink to the full story (FactRakers, n.d.). The snippets make the rating easily recalled by readers.

While it does not see accreditation with IFCN, FactRakers abides by the code of principles of IFCN, which encourages, among others, transparency in fact-checking, including having an email address for corrections and feedback. Since Chua started offering the fact-checking class, there were ten cohorts of students who joined FactRakers (FactRakers, n.d.).

FactRakers has an advantage over media fact-checkers in terms of having the time to experiment with the latest techniques and technology, i.e., fact-checking with the use of AI. Academic resources like access to journals, research, and teaching have supported student fact-checking classes. One semester of mentorship can build up a set of fact-checking skills that are not tied with the media industry agenda. This and FactRakers’ contribution to training future fact-checkers for media organizations would ensure fact-checking’s longevity.

C. Civil Society Fact-Checkers

1. **ABKD (Akademiya at Bayan Kontra Disimpormasyon At Dayaan) (Academe and Society Against Disinformation and Poll Cheating)**

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/2021ABKD/>,
<https://abkd.rappler.com/section/fact-check/page/2/>

Coordinator: Francisco Jayme Paolo Guiang

Akademiya at Bayan Kontra Disimpormasyon at Dayaan (ABKD) started as an election project by historians and scholars to counter historical distortion in the run-up to the May 2022 elections. Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the son and namesake of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos, was running for president, with Sara Duterte, the daughter of President Rodrigo Duterte, as his running mate for vice president (Guiang, 2022: 344). It soon became apparent that the Marcos and Duterte tandem resorted to networked disinformation, or the use of social media to massively share false, misleading, and manipulated information in order to shape and influence political discourse and ensure their victory (Garcia et al., 2022: 66). Disinformation that supported the Marcos-Duterte alliance spread on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok via their supporters, social influencers, trolls, and bots.

ABKD was organized six months into the election by the Alliance of Concerned Teachers, a nationwide teachers’ organization that has a seat in the Philippine Congress as a sectoral (partylist) organization. However, ABKD expanded its membership to universities, academic unions and student publications. ABKD’s objectives are embodied

in its name – to go after disinformation and to prevent cheating during the elections. Thus, ABKD organized fact-checking, voters education, and anti-election fraud sub-groups.

ABKD joined two fact-checking coalitions, Tsek.ph, which is organized by the University of the Philippines’ journalism department and FactsFirstPH convened by Rappler. Tsek’s membership is purely voluntary while Rappler gives out funds to fact-checking organizations that joined FactsFirst. From Tsek, ABKD joined fact-checking training and digital verification sessions from where it learned the basics of fact-checking.

ABKD’s fact-checking sub-group is composed of academics, including six professors, along with a research assistant, who have done extensive research in their fields. The latter include scholarly articles and publications that debunk claims about the Marcoses, including the Marcos dictatorship. The fact-checking methodology is akin to an editorial work in an academic research journal. It starts with gathering information from news websites and pages across social media platforms as well as from the tiplines by Check and Viber. The questionable claims and information are entered into ABKD’s database which monitors the publication data, platform, reach, and engagement. The database also contains the sources used to verify or debunk the information, the ratings, and the date of publishing the fact-check. The Facebook administrator of ABKD releases a fact-check at 6 p.m. every day, from Monday to Saturday, during the election campaign period in 2022. Its post-election work could still be considered regular on a twice-a-month basis.

ABKD’s work can be found on Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok as well as in Tsek.ph website. Rappler also hosted a microsite of ABKD’s fact-checks. In its six months operation during the May 2022 elections, ABKD produced 133 text-based fact-checks and 32 comic fact-checks. ABKD said the comics was more popular than the textual fact-checks. All ABKD fact-checks have corresponding numbers. The format of the fact-checks is simple – a claim is posted, a rating is given along with an explanation. Because its fact-checks are meant to be sharp and categorical, ABKD prefers to use the ratings “false” and “inaccurate” rather than ambiguous ones. This Claim-Rating-Debunk format makes ABKD’s presentation easy to read and follow. Of the 133 fact-checks during the election period, 125 were rated false. As of August 21, 2024, ABKD has 432 fact-checks (Garcia et al., 2022: 71). Most of these false claims were found in Facebook and YouTube where the pro-Marcos content are prominent. As of August 21, 2024, ABKD has 432 fact-checks.

ABKD’s fact checks during and after the election pertain to the historical distortions and false claims on the Marcoses and their associates. The topics are: Marcos myth, Marcos legacy, red-tagging, BBM (Ferdinand Marcos Jr.), Leni Robredo, Duterte legacy, 2022 elections, EDSA Revolution, media, and others (Garcia et al., 2022: 72). The preponderance of fact-checks on the Marcoses was due to the topics’ popularity which were either rated to be fake news or deemed conspiracy theories about the dictator Marcos and the martial law he declared. ABKD fact-checks also focused on “red-tagging” or the anti-communist witch hunt of progressive and liberal politicians from the opposition.

As a fact-checker specializing in history, ABKD is an advocacy fact-checker that earned its place in the field dominated by the media. Its metrics, in terms of followers and

interactions, are comparable to the fact-checking initiatives of the media. Within its first six months of fact-checking, its Facebook page has grown popular to have reached some four million users in March 2022, many of whom are 18-34 years old (Garcia et al., 2022: 72). In April, a month before the elections, ABKD reached 2.75 million users but after the elections, users declined to 200,000. As of August 21, 2024, ABKD Facebook page has 23,000 followers. During the peak of its popularity on Facebook, ABKD gained 193,000 interactions; 52,000 comments; and 41,000 shares. ABKD posts on Twitter reached 50,000 viewers while its TikTok page, which has only a thousand followers, was able to gain 212,000 views (Garcia et al., 2022: 76). ABKD translated its fact-checks from Filipino to other Philippine languages to reach more readers outside of Metro Manila and beyond Tagalog-speaking areas.

Both Tsek and FactsFirst fact-checking coalitions considered ABKD a prolific fact-checker that gained a substantial following and online engagement quickly. ABKD attributed this gain to its fact-checking team of academics who are used to doing research and a rigorous peer-review process which they will not compromise to speed. Moreover ABKD fact-checks were used in voters' education drives because the sources are included, complete with academic citations and bibliographic entries to convey credence.

Buoyed by its fact-checking success during the elections, ABKD intends to improve on the techniques and presentation of its fact-checks. It plans to undertake community engagement to bring the fact-checks and the techniques to people who are not within ABKD's online network, including school teachers who could benefit from discussions on history in the fact-checks (Garcia et al., 2022: 79). After receiving feedback that even its comics assume that the readers are middle class, ABKD fact-checkers plan to create content geared towards the masses and their issues of job security, wages, and public health. As a nod to that, ABKD has been writing its fact-checks that are easy to understand but still substantial and enlightening.

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Fact-checking initiatives have been a fixture in the last two elections in the Philippines. While fact-checking has a growing number of adherents, the interest is shortlived and limited by funds. It can be sustained if support is available, in the form of funding from foreign groups like technology platforms, development aid funds, and grants from universities.

Media and universities' predominant use of English in fact-checking makes the content not readily available to some group who have a limited facility with English. Translations are sometimes supplied but not often. Popular forms of delivering fact-checking like video and comics are being tried out but not yet at full scale.

Another concern is the adoption of IFCN standards of fact-checking, to include the categories of verification (disinformation, misinformation, and mal-information) without examining the local and historical contexts of the information ecosystem. The IFCN's accreditation, which qualifies fact-

checkers to become third-party fact-checkers of Meta and makes access to Google funds easier, may have overlooked the particularities of the Asian countries.

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Chapter 9: Thailand

The Fragile Landscape of Fact-Checking in Thailand: Challenges and Transience

Surachanee Sriyai, PhD.³⁷

HISTORICAL AND GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FACT-CHECKING INITIATIVES IN THAILAND

In Thailand, the history of fact-checking activities has been quite fuzzy since most civic-led fact-checking initiatives are short-lived and tend to focus only on particular topics of their interests, such as health and politics. Compared to some Southeast Asian countries, like the Philippines or Indonesia, Thailand's fact-checking culture appears weak. As each organization struggles to survive, the holistic cooperation and knowledge-sharing among domestic entities seems a rarity.

There are several factors that may hinder the proliferation of people-led factcheckers in Thailand. First, I suspect that the initial process of mainstreaming the fact-checking culture to the general public matters, too. It is notable that some of the most longstanding fact-checking organizations in Thailand tend to be state-sponsored—if not wholly then at least partially. For instance, *MCOT*, a Thai public broadcaster that operates a number of radio and television stations in Thailand, launched a *ซัวร์ก่อนแชร์* (lit.trans. “Sure and Share”) initiative in 2015; and it is still active now on all social media platforms, engaging the public through video-based contents and microblogging. Being the earliest effort on factchecking, Sure and Share have established a solid fanbase: 380k followers on Facebook,

³⁷ ISEAS Yusof-Ishak Institute

446k followers on YouTube, and over 1.4 million followers on TikTok. This semi-state *qua* journalistic initiative, however, focuses strictly on apolitical topics such as health-related news and cyber security. Another similar project is the Anti-Fake News Center established in 2019 by the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES). This Center, while claims to focus on combatting disinformation in people's daily lives, it also covers some political issues. Nonetheless, given the consistently low trust in institutions among the Thais in recent years, it is unsurprising that a state-sponsored Center, such as this, is not a popular option for people despite it being around for quite some time. In fact, the website has gathered only a bit over 20 million visits since its creation, averaging at 4 million visits per year—a trivial figure considering that Thailand has over 60 million internet users as of January of 2024 (Kemp, 2024).

Moreover, it seems that the fact checking culture in Thailand ebbs and flows with the domestic political climate. When political conflict intensifies, the public tends to become more aware of the weaponization of dis/misinformation by political actors and see the need for fact-checking; however, when the situation is normalized (i.e., not necessarily means that the situation has improved, but the people have learned to live with it), then people tend to become negligent and feel less need to fact check. From an economic standpoint, then, when the demand diminishes (i.e., people feel less need for a third-party fact-checker), the supply shrinks too (i.e., some organizations struggle to find financial support to continue their work). Therefore, what we usually observe instead is that Thai NGOs/CSOs will periodically step up and act as a fact-checker on topics relevant to their broader missions—as a part of their advocacy work rather than a standalone operation. These fact checking initiatives tend to emerge with an emphasis to fact-check specialized contents in a specific timeframe. For example, when *iLaw* (and their partner organization, *ConLab*) advocated for the rewriting of the Thai Constitution and fielded for signatures to be included in a petition, they also factchecked and debunked some of the dis/misinformation surrounding the issue of constitutional drafting, legal process, and democratic governance. Once they have gathered enough signatures and presented the petition to the Parliament for consideration, the factchecking part of the advocacy work seems to die down as they move on to other topics. The combination of funding constraints and the interspersed, topic-based nature of the NGOs/CSOs-led fact checking initiatives means that there is no coordinating body in the realm of fact-checking.

The transient characteristic of people-led fact checking initiatives in Thailand also modulates their position in the Thai media ecosystem. Specifically, they usually do not stick around long enough to gain trust and credibility among media outlets; be it mainstream or independent media. On some occasions, the media outlets do their own fact checking; thus, making the quality and effectiveness of the process vary across different channels.

The next section presents two illustrative cases of factchecking initiative in Thailand. First, Sure and Share Center, a media-led fact-checker, and CoFact, the only still-standing people-centric fact-checker in Thailand.

INDIVIDUAL FACT-CHECK ORGANIZATIONS

1. Sure and Share Center

YouTube: <https://www.YouTube.com/SureAndShare>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/SureAndShare

Social Handle: @SureAndShare

LINE: @SureAndShare or <http://line.sure.guru>

Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/SureAndShare>

Instagram: <https://instagram.com/SureAndShare>

Website: <http://www.ัวร์ก่อนแชร์.com>, <http://www.SureAndShare.com>

TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@sureandshare>

Contact: Peerapon Anutarasoat (YO) Manager, Sure And Share Center, MCOT

Email: peerapon.an@mcot.net peeraponyo@gmail.com

X: @YOWARE

Mobile: +6681-424-6527

The organizational structure and working methods of Sure and Share Center

Founded in 2016, “Sure and Share Center” established partnerships with organizations, government offices, associations, and experts to create a stronger mechanism in providing reliable and trustful information for the public.

Started as a TV show in Thai News Agency (TNA), the first official news agency in Thailand that is now operating under the umbrella of MCOT Public Company Limited, Sure and Share has been investigating viral information on the internet since 2015. A year later, it expanded its public-facing operations to include answering the number of questions asked by the general public about various fact-checking topics via LINE messaging app and Facebook Messenger. Its social media platform has served more than 1 million followers. Although the organization does investigations on questionable information, it actually does not identify itself as factchecker, per se. Rather, it aims to raise public awareness about dis/misinformation and inform its audience about any false information that could potentially have harmful consequences to them. In this way, Sure and Share’s contents are not designed to “flag” dis/misinformation, but to give the public more context necessary to fully understand a particular topic.

Due to the demands of the public, the Center focuses more on health-related issues, including factchecking about food, medicines and homoeopathy treatments, and lifestyles. It is also notable that while there were some thoughts to fact-check political contents, the fact that the Center was established not long after the 2014 coup means that it was operating in the context wherein political expression and politics-related content were limited. When Thailand held its first post-coup election in 2019, the team then realized that they did not have enough resources (primarily manpower) to fact-check political contents comprehensively enough to meet the standards that they wanted. So, the idea to address political contents was shelved and

now that it has developed credible branding on health-related issues, it does not want to lose its reputation for being seen as “political”.

By structure, Sure and Share Center is a subunit under the Thai News Agency (TNA), which is now operating under the umbrella of Thailand’s media conglomerate called MCOT Public Company Limited. While started off as state-owned media, it is imperative to note that MCOT does not get its budget from the government for the past two decades; it is now, in fact, a public company registered in the Thai stock market. To that effect, it means that MCOT and its subsidiaries, including TNA, are now operating like any other private firms that generate their own revenue streams. For Sure and Share Center, MCOT covers the cost for staff salaries, production, and air time. Other expenses are to be covered by the Center itself through other funding sources that range from project grants, sponsorship, advertorial, to consultancy works. One of the main supporters for this stream of funding is Thai Media Fund (TMF), whose goal is to inoculate the Thai media landscape with high-quality media content (Thai Media Fund, 2016). Two key avenues of collaboration between the Center and TMF are through ads buying and project grants, usually on the topic of enhancing media literacy of the public.

In terms of evaluation and accountability mechanisms, MCOT simply expects the Center to meet the basic KPIs of broadcast media (i.e., gather and maintain viewership in all its outlets in order to generate income). For project-based donors, like TMF, the evaluation is based on the deliverables agreed upon by both parties. Since the Center perceives itself as a social enterprise, it is quite selective about the sources of funding. To ensure impartiality (independence), there is a series of discussion and consultation between the Center and potential partners before taking money as it emphasizes on trust and journalistic ethics as core values. There are occasions when the Center chose to turn down the funding/sponsorship because the requests are not in line with the organization’s core values.

Sure and Share Center is a unit under the Office of Business Development of MCOT, Thailand’s media conglomerate that is also a parent company to Thai News Agency (TNA)—the first official news agency in Thailand. The Center is operated by a team of around 15 people, covering a broad range of activities that also goes beyond factchecking. Team members come from various educational backgrounds, such as journalism, mass communication graduates; they are then trained to become factcheckers. The reason for this diversity in the team is to maximize the human resource. Specifically, since the team is relatively small, it is necessary for each team member to be versatile in their skillset, too. For instance, one of the Center’s recent job posts called for applicants to apply to “fact checker and video content creator” positions.

Primarily, the Center relies on public inquiries that come from its Line OA and Facebook for content; thus, partially counting on reporting from (anonymous) users. When a user contacts the Center, asking for a verification on a piece of information, content admins will respond with the information that they have available in their database. Since most of the inquiries tend to be related to health, the team can address them quite easily since it is usually the same information being circulated and laundered over time. If not, then it serves as an indication that the content requires further investigation. Then, the Center may use the result from further investigation to produce new video content. As for a manual for fact-checkers, the

organization uses, *Fact-checking in Action*, as a manual as it was jointly developed by the Faculty of Communication Arts at Chulalongkorn University, Trusted Media, Sure and Share Center, and the US Embassy Bangkok in 2019 (Chulalongkorn University, 2019).

Sure and Share uses the guideline set out in *Fact-checking in Action* to verify information. However, as aforementioned, the Center produces contents with a goal to give the public more contexts necessary to fully understand a particular topic, not to categorically decide on the veracity of the information. This also means that it does not factcheck opinions. If an information in question requires further investigation, the Center generally seeks inputs from experts.

Uniquely, the Center presents its contents in video format. Therefore, its outlet—first and foremost—was on television before it later expanded to online outlets like YouTube, Facebook, X, TikTok and so on. All of Sure and Share’s content is available to the public free of charge and the number of subscribers on each of its online platforms as of November of 2024 is as follows:

- a. **TikTok:** 1.4M
- b. **YouTube:** 457k
- c. **Facebook:** 380k
- d. **X:** 33k
- e. **Instagram:** 7.2k

Interestingly, there seems to be no fixed schedule in terms of how often the organization posts contents on its platform. As mentioned, its core product under the aegis of MCOT is the mandatory 3-min video clips that broadcasted on MCOT channel daily. Those video clips aired on television are then posted on other outlets along with some other online-only contents. The Center seems to post most frequently, with multiple videos a day, on TikTok; and being on a more consistent scheduling of around two videos per day on YouTube. It is not that active on X, which is a text-based platform that is not necessarily compatible with the visual-based contents produced by Sure and Share. A closer look also reveals cross-platform content variations as well. For instance, the image below includes a screenshot of the Center’s YouTube (top) and TikTok (bottom) page, showing that the latest videos posted on these two platforms are different and not a duplication of one another.

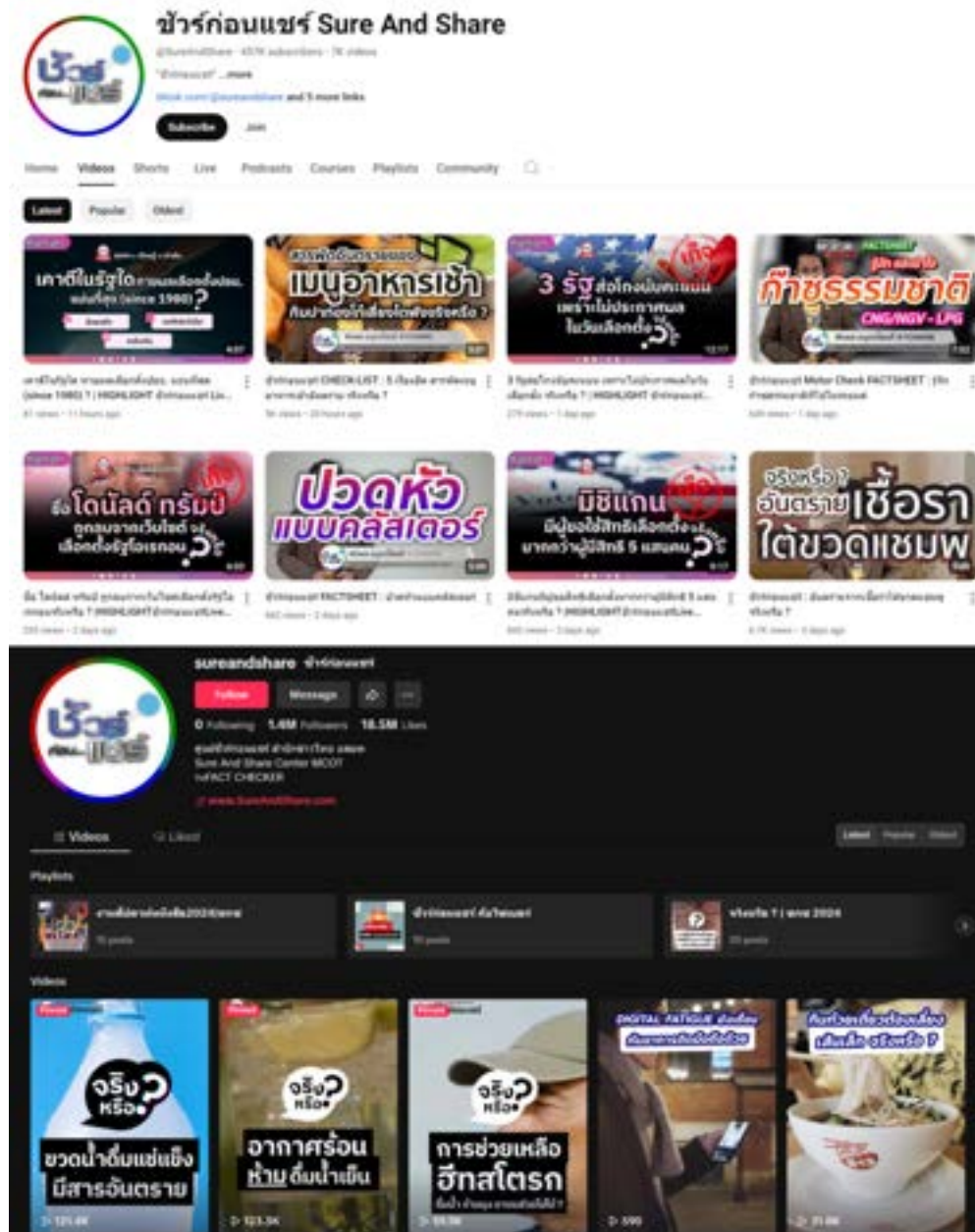


Figure 1. Screenshots as of November 7th, 2024

Sure and Share Center is a unit under the Office of Business Development of MCOT, Thailand's media conglomerate. For Sure and Share Center, MCOT, through TNA, covers the cost for staff salaries, production, and air time for the Center. Other expenses are covered by the Center itself through other funding sources that range from project grants, sponsorship, advertorial, to consultancy works. As a unit in TNA, Sure and Share Center benefits from TNA's cooperation with news networks both domestically and internationally, in both bilateral and multilateral levels. TNA under the name of MCOT is one among 35 members of the exchange news network called ASIAVISION operated under the supervision of Asia-Pacific

Broadcasting Union (ABU). Also, TNA is one of 44 members of the Organization of Asia-Pacific News Agency (OANA).

In terms of accreditations and recognition, the Center is nationally recognized by Thai Media Fund (TMF). Internationally, it has been working with Google News Initiative and YouTube News Partnership. In the future, it has a plan to apply for accreditation with the International Factchecking Network (IFCN)

The challenges faced by Sure and Share Center

While the main priority of Sure and Share Center is not factchecking, per se, people tend to rely on it when it comes to health-related information. As such, the challenge for the organization is not so much about building credibility and acceptance among its audience, but more about maintaining them. The organization cites a significant pressure from the public to always be “correct,” with even minor errors like typos attracting scrutiny. To address this, the organization has implemented a Correction Policy that provides different mitigation measures depending on the nature of the mistake, ranging from releasing a message to correct the information to removing the content altogether. This approach ensures that errors are addressed in a manner that is appropriate to their severity, helping maintain credibility and trust. However, despite these efforts, the organization struggles with a lack of manpower, which affects the speed of responses in real-time communications, such as chats via Line and Facebook messenger. Since the Center does not use chatbots to handle these interactions, it places additional strain on their human resources and impacts the efficiency of their response times.

The Center has noticed the proliferation of AI-generated videos, though these issues are not yet widespread in Thailand. However, it anticipates that as the use of AI-generated content grows, platforms will play a crucial role in helping to detect and screen deepfake videos. It is hopeful that these platforms will implement effective screening mechanisms to identify and mitigate the spread of misleading or false information, especially as deepfakes become more prevalent in the digital landscape. All in all, there is no concrete strategy to deal with GenAI yet.

One significant issue is the limited funding opportunities. With its connection with MCOT, once a state-owned media entity, the Sure and Share Center is having a difficulty to explain and convince some of its potential funders/donors that it is no longer a state-owned enterprise (i.e., some donors are not allowed to fund state-sponsored organizations). This connection, thus, can create constraints in securing financial support from a broader range of funders, potentially limiting their ability to diversify resources.

Another major challenge is maintaining public trust while ensuring the financial sustainability of the organization. As the organization works to uphold its commitment to providing accurate, fact-checked information, it must also balance the business model necessary to support its operations. This includes ensuring that fact-checkers are adequately compensated and retained, which is critical to keeping the organization running effectively in the long term.

2. CoFact

Name: CoFact Thailand

URL: <https://blog.cofact.org/>

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/CofactThailand/?locale=th_TH

X: <https://x.com/cofactthailand>

The organizational structure and working methods of CoFact

In 2019, CSOs in Thailand held the “International Conference on Fake News” jointly organized by the Thai Media Fund, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF), the Thai Public Broadcasting Service, the National Press Council of Thailand, SONP, the Faculty of Communication Arts of Chulalongkorn University, and the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Thammasat University. In the event, Audrey Tang, the Digital Minister of Taiwan, gave a keynote sharing her experience in prototyping Cofact of Taiwan. This subsequently led to Thailand’s CoFact project as the eight organizations signed the declaration to join forces in fighting against fake news.



Figure 2. Screenshot of how the website provides a dedicated tab on fake news in the 2023 election and health issues for quick search

CoFact has its presence in all social media platforms, including Facebook, X, YouTube, TikTok, and Line as well as its main website. Upon a quick search through all these outlets, CoFact appears to cover a variety of topics and the contents presented in each of the platforms seem to be slightly different in terms of the content diet. For instance, YouTube seems to be the place where health-related contents are more prevalent whereas X tends to cover more about politics. The website appears to be the most well-balanced, comprehensive database that curates assorted types of content within the CoFact online ecosystem. That said, the website also provides a dedicated tab on fake news in the 2023 election and health issues for quick search as

shown in the image above, reflecting its priority on politics and health. Further analysis on content presentation is forthcoming in this report.

According to its website, Cofact “intends to establish an open, safe, and creative space for co-finding facts in the ‘info-demic’ era.” Akin to its original iteration in Taiwan, Cofact represents a fusion of “civic tech” and “journalism,” where the editorial team collaborates with volunteers to verify news and information from reliable sources though it is unknown how the said volunteers are recruited and what the scope of their assignments is. Simultaneously, its website also serves as a platform for the public to share and discuss factual information and personal viewpoints, as it crowdsourced interested individuals to fact-check various topics in a forum-like setup. However, it is unclear how the editorial team cross-checks and validates the accuracy of the crowdsourced information. Beyond the website ecosystem, Cofact offers a chatbot service, allowing the public to submit news or content for verification by the editorial team through Line application. Once verified, this content is shared on social media and mainstream media outlets. Some pieces are further developed into in-depth reports as part of the “Cofact Journalism” project, focusing on topics that either go viral—whether as fact or misinformation—or those that have significant public policy implications and value to the community.

On its website, *CoFact* provides varieties of information related to factchecking as aforementioned. For instance, it also includes “special reports” in which controversial hot topics are investigated further to offer the public with a more well-rounded information surrounding the issue. Generally, the special reports are long-form stories and do not aim to resolutely flag the topic as real news or fake news. Relatedly, fact-checked stories are clearly marked on the website as shown in the image below. News that is verifiably true earns a green checkmark whereas the false ones get a red X tag.



Figure 3. Screenshot of how a factchecked story is marked on the website

Apart from its website, the organization is also active on social media, having its presence on both Facebook and X with 7.3k followers and 1.7k on each of the platforms, respectively. The presentation on its Facebook Page duplicates the majority of what is on the website, there seems to be some clear distinction as well. For instance, Facebook appears to be an outlet that also includes information about other activities of *CoFact* such as workshops, seminars, and even advocacy works. It also shares posts from other Pages if it falls into factchecking theme. Notably, it appears to focus on informing the public how to not be fooled by the financial scam operations; and what to do if they do. The way that it reports on factchecked information on Facebook is also different from that on the website. Rather than posting each news/topic as a standalone post, it compiles series of links—to what seems to be factchecked information for each week—then post it as a “summary of factchecked news.” The sample image of such a post is shown below.



Figure 4. Screenshot of reports on factchecked information on Facebook

Lastly, updates posted on X seem to be the most clearly marked, allowing followers to quickly gather the information about the veracity of an issue through checkmark emojis.

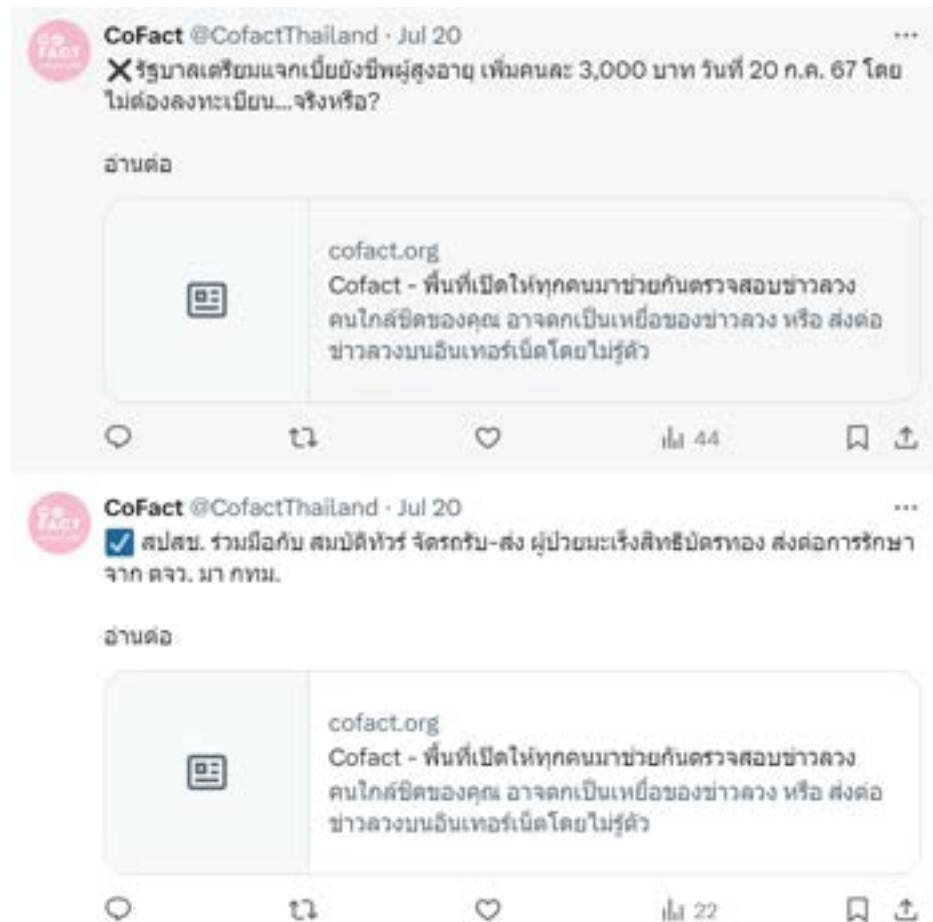


Figure 5. Screenshot of reports on factchecked information on X

As for the posting schedule for all its outlets, the schedule seems unclear though it might be due to the fact that the organization puts an emphasis on collaboration; thus, relying on crowdsourced information (i.e. asking the public to report on the news first). However, it appears to try to maintain engagement on social media by posting at least several times a week. For instance, on Facebook, it uses the “summary of news” posts as regular content then supplement that with some other updates.

It is interesting to note that an apparent posting strategy wherein the editorial team chooses to post on all social media outlets with the intention to draw the audience back to its website ecosystem through a series of hyperlinks. There are hardly any posts, be it on X or Facebook, that do not have a link that leads back to *CoFact*’s website. This strategy can be alluded to as a simple attempt to bring traffic to the website, or reflecting the need to draw people to a

relatively autonomous space where the information can be better curated and elaborated beyond the limitations on social media.

Beyond the original founding organizations who are the signatories of the declaration to join forces in fighting against fake news, *CoFact* also has several other prominent organizations as its partners, such as TikTok, Google News Initiative, and Whoscall. However, as mentioned in the previous section that *CoFact* seems to also focus on training and workshops to grow the network of factcheckers, the relationship between the organization and these partners remains ambiguous. Specifically, it is unclear whether *CoFact* relies on these partners to enhance its factchecking capacity, to co-sponsor events, or for both. A case in point of that is the fact that while *CoFact* has partnered with the International Factchecking Network (IFCN) to organize a summit on International Fact-Checking Day in 2021, it has yet to seek accreditation from IFCN.

The challenges faced by CoFact

Based on its website, *CoFact* has a network of partners that include some government agencies, international organizations, civic tech NGOs, and academic institutions.



Figure 6. Partnering organizations of CoFact

However, it is imperative to note that some of them have been the partners of *CoFact* since its formation. For example, Thai Health Foundation and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) are the founding partner; and perhaps also jointly fund some of the organization's initiatives and programs. Therefore, it is difficult to gauge whether it has made an additional effort to get their presence and products (fact-checked information) accepted by the authorities and the wider public beyond methods previously discussed.

According to its Facebook posts, the organization also emphasizes capacity building and awareness raising to the public as means to cope with the emerging information environment. As such, *CoFact* has organized a series of workshops, seminars, and public events on the topic of fact-checking though the impact of these events, as with those occurring everywhere around the world, is hard to assess and measure. Nonetheless, it is imperative to point at the role of the

academe in bridging the gap between the current and next generation factcheckers as one of the additional obstacles to Thailand's goal of having a robust fact-checking culture. For *CoFact*, its original partners include the Faculty of Communication Arts of Chulalongkorn University, and the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Thammasat University—two of the most prestigious universities in the country—but it is unclear how these universities have contributed to the effort to educate and train more factcheckers to feed into the market beyond just co-organizing several workshops.

CONCLUSION

The landscape of fact-checking in Thailand remains fragmented and underdeveloped, especially when compared to neighboring Southeast Asian countries. While there have been notable (semi) state-sponsored initiatives, such as Sure and Share Center and the Anti-Fake News Center, their limited focus and association with government institutions contribute to public skepticism and low engagement. Furthermore, the fact-checking culture in Thailand is heavily influenced by the domestic political climate, with public interest in independent fact-checking waxing and waning in response to political events. This cyclical nature of demand creates challenges for sustaining long-term, independent fact-checking efforts, particularly as civic-led initiatives struggle with funding and lack of coordination.

The absence of a unified body for fact-checking in Thailand, combined with the reliance on NGOs and civil society organizations to take on fact-checking as part of broader advocacy efforts, means that fact-checking remains sporadic and topic-specific. This lack of continuity and organization prevents these initiatives from establishing the trust and credibility needed to become a consistent and effective force in the media ecosystem. As a result, the quality of fact-checking remains uneven, with varying standards across different media outlets, which further undermines the public's ability to rely on fact-checkers as a trustworthy resource.

For fact-checking in Thailand to mature and become a more integral part of the media landscape, there is a need for greater coordination among domestic entities, more consistent funding sources, and a concerted effort to mainstream fact-checking as a vital aspect of public discourse. Moreover, there is the need for universities to develop a rigorous program and coursework to train their students to become “instinctive factcheckers” for the society at large to cope with the emerging information environment; but we have yet to see much of that effort at this stage.

Another imminent challenge to the CSO-led factchecking initiatives, particularly ones that touch upon political issues, is the Thai laws pertaining to freedom of speech. Historically, defamation law has been instrumental to political weaponization against government's opponents. Sections 326–328 of the Thai Criminal Code have established several defamation offences with sentences of up to two years' imprisonment and fines of up to 200,000 Thai Baht (approximately USD 6,400) (*Article 19*, 2021). In the digital era, the enactment of the Computer-Related Crimes Act of 2007 and its Amendment in 2017 expands the application of law to the online sphere. Experts have noted that this legal clampdown can be detrimental to people's freedom of speech and expression (Neelapaichit and Puridej, 2022). In the context of factchecking, it means that factcheckers focusing on political issues, such as elections, can run the risk of being prosecuted by these laws as well. Consequently, most CSO-

led initiatives generally refrain from tackling political dis/misinformation in fear of legal repercussions. Without these changes, the country will likely continue to experience a fragmented, short-lived fact-checking culture that struggles to meet the demands of a population increasingly exposed to misinformation and disinformation.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Eun Ryung Chong

Chong Eun-ryung is a Professor at the Graduate School of Journalism, Semyung University, South Korea. She holds a B.A. in Anthropology from Seoul National University, an M.A. in Journalism from Yonsei University, and a Ph.D. in Journalism from the University of Maryland. She previously worked as a journalist at The Dong-A Ilbo, where she served as Deputy Editor for both the City and Culture desks. She has been awarded the Kwanhun Journalism Award and the Emerging Scholar Award for Outstanding Paper in Media Economics and Culture. She has also served as a member of the Press Arbitration Commission and has participated in various committees, including the Reflection and Innovation Committee for Channel A, the Journalism Evaluation Committee for TV Chosun, and the Journalism Accountability Committee for The Hankyoreh. She is the former Director of the SNU FactCheck Center at Seoul National University's Institute of Communication Research and currently serves as a board member of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). Additionally, she is a member of the International Advisory Committee for the Singapore government's Center for Advanced Technology in Online Safety (CATOS).

Sherly Haristya

Sherly Haristya is an independent digital governance researcher and consultant in Indonesia. She also serves as an adjunct lecturer in the doctoral programme of the LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Jakarta, Indonesia. In collaboration with various national and international organisations, her research has been bridging the global and national debates on digital governance issues. She earned her PhD in Communication Studies from the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore in 2019. She is the recipient of the 2020 Internet Histories' Early Career Researcher Award for her journal article "The Efficacy of Civil Society in Global Internet Governance."

Masato Kajimoto

Masato Kajimoto, PhD, is a professor of journalism at the University of Hong Kong. He specialises in misinformation ecosystem research, fact-checking practice, and news literacy education. Masato founded a not-for-profit educational organisation called ANNIE (Asian Network of News and Information Educators) to develop teaching and learning materials specific to the socio-cultural environments, media systems, and political landscapes in different Asian countries. He is an Advisory Board member of the International Fact-Checking Network at Poynter Institute in the U.S. and also a member of the Global Futures Council on Information Integrity at the World Economic Forum headquartered in Switzerland.

Yuko Kasuya ORCID: 0000-0002-5324-3204

Yuko Kasuya is a Professor of Political Science in the Faculty of Law at Keio University, Tokyo, Japan. Her research specializes in regime transitions, political institutions, and the politics of East and Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on the Philippines. She holds a Ph.D. in International Affairs from the University of California, San Diego, an M.A. in Development Studies from the Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands, and a B.A. in Law from Keio University.

Maria Diosa Labiste

Maria Diosa Labiste is Associate Professor in the Department of Journalism in the College of Media and Communication at the University of the Philippines Diliman. She is one of the coordinators of Tsek.Ph, the pioneering collaborative fact-checking project. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Birmingham in the U.K. Her research interests include disinformation, hate speech, journalism and media studies.

Wei-Ping Li

Wei-Ping Li is Research director at FactLink. Dr. Li holds a Ph.D. degree from the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland and an LL.M. degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Her research focuses on disinformation, fact-checking, social media content moderation, and privacy issues in the digital era. Dr. Li is admitted to the practice of law in New York State.

Kayo Mimizuka

Kayo Mimizuka is a doctoral candidate at the University of Texas at Austin's School of Journalism and Media. Kayo's research focuses on community-based solutions to confront the spread of misinformation and the role of participatory culture in grassroots information work. She serves as an assessor for the International Fact-Checking Network's signatory applications, and holds an M.A. in Media, Culture, and Communication from New York University.

Surachanee "Hammerli" Sriyai

Surachanee "Hammerli" Sriyai is a Visiting Fellow with the Media, Technology and Society Programme at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, where she covers ranges of topics about how emerging technologies affect societies in Southeast Asia (e.g., dis/misinformation, cybersecurity, community resilience, etc.). She is also the interim director of the Center for Sustainable Humanitarian Action with Displaced Ethnic Communities (SHADE) under the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Chiang Mai University. The Center focuses on displaced communities from the Post-Coup Myanmar.

Ross Tapsell

Ross Tapsell is a researcher at the Australian National University's College of Asia and the Pacific, specialising in Southeast Asian media, culture and society. He is the author of *Media Power in Indonesia: Oligarchs, Citizens and the Digital Revolution* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017) and co-editor of *From Grassroots Activism to Disinformation: Social Media in Southeast Asia* (ISEAS Publishing, 2020). He has written for *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *VICE* and other publications in the Southeast Asian region.

Harris Zainal

Harris Zainal is the Deputy Director of Research at ISIS Malaysia, where he strategically directs the institute's research to advance Malaysia's strategic interests. He works on the interplay between technology, human rights and democracy, with a focus on policy responses to mis- and disinformation and social media platform governance. He has earned various government appointments, including as a minister-appointed member of the National Youth Consultative Council, member of the Youth Task Force on Foreign Policy, and as a special officer and Perdana Fellow to the Deputy Prime Minister. He holds an MA in International Studies and Diplomacy from the School of Oriental and African Studies, a Bachelor of Laws (hons) from the University of Liverpool, and certifications in infodemic management from the World Health Organisation, international law of cyber operations from the University of Reading and digital journalism from Reuters.

