Appendix : Interview Transcripts

Expert	Company/Organization	Profit Status	Organization Type	Region
Expert 1	Organization 1	Non-Profit	NGO	Nigeria
Expert 2	Organization 2	For-Profit	Fact-Checking Organization	USA
Expert 3	Organization 3	Non-Profit	Collaborative Alliance	India
Expert 4	Organization 4	For-Profit	Media/ Entertainment Company	Lithuania (US audience)

EXPERT 4- Organization 4

Q. Can you please tell me the editorial strategy of your company?

A: Our editorial strategy is a mix between virality, what our competitors are doing, for example, and the likes and engagement on Facebook and other outlets, we want to be in the game after all. For instance, we check Google Trends to see if a topic is trending across the web or with a certain group of people.
We also try to balance that by experimenting with new things, topics that may be less popular, or things that haven't been covered by our competitors at all, or even subjects we don't usually cover in our odd line of work. These could go viral on our usual outlets, such as Facebook pages, or get picked up by Google Discover and shown to a more organic audience that isn't our core audience yet.

Q. How do you balance virality and factual accuracy?

A: For a lot of our stories, we focus on entertainment content that is less newsy or fact-based, more like people's personal stories. Even for these, we try to check into the account and background of the person sharing the story, especially if it's from Reddit. We look at whether the story seems plausible to us and to several other people. If many people are calling it fake, what you might call electronic word of mouth, that matters a lot, especially in the AI age, when people are quick to point out suspicious patterns, like excessive hyphens or dashes, or a structure that looks AI-generated. There can be false positives, but if a lot of people say something is completely fake or bogus, or if someone is posting the same story with slight variations elsewhere, we take note.

For more factual content, such as listicles and news pieces, there's a multi-stage process. For listicles that aren't opinion-based but rather collections of curious or historical facts, we start with a topic from the research department. We decide to cover it, gather all the information, and sometimes promote the original source. The editor usually me or a colleague— eviews the submissions, doing a basic background check to see if the facts seem plausible or questionable. If something seems manipulated or likely inaccurate, we remove it from the article. When the writer gets to the article, they fact-check everything again in more depth, since they have more time to check each submission especially for lists under 30 items. They look for sources, whether it's a paper, a reputable magazine, or another reliable outlet. This is especially important for facts related to health or history, which are more concrete than opinions or fuzzy pop culture facts.

For news articles, we try to get a variety of perspectives from different outlets—right-leaning, left-leaning, and everything in between—since we write for an American audience. We aim to provide a centered, unbiased view while maintaining an entertaining, friendly editorial tone. We check how competitors and news outlets have covered the topic, the IFCN ones are more trustworthy and if several reputable sources agree on the facts, we consider those to be accurate. We avoid running with stories based solely on what one person says, which can lead to misinformation spreading.

Q. You mentioned balancing between political perspectives. Given your understanding of your audience's political inclinations, do you tailor your articles to align with those views?

A: It's not about being as accurate and centrist as possible. I believe that, based on various online analyses, we are generally a center-left leaning magazine. A lot of our writers take pride in having a younger workforce, and naturally, many younger people are more tolerant of various things. This sometimes means that when people inject their own perspective or voice into a story, it reflects a more liberal viewpoint. We tend to contact more left-leaning or liberal experts for interviews, so there is a slight bias toward a more left perspective. However, this isn't outlined in our business strategy. If someone is more right-leaning, they could cover a topic from that perspective. But as editors, we try to write about everything in an entertaining tone that doesn't offend, avoiding assumptions or rhetoric that could be construed as hateful or shaming. We try not to discriminate against any group or say that one group is obviously wrong or stupid. We just present their perspective and what they have to say. Hopefully, that makes sense. We aim for a more left-leaning tone, but it's not set in stone.

Q. Can you give me an example—if at all—where there was a viral story, but you refused to publish it because it didn't meet your accuracy or factual checking standards?

A: Nothing specific comes to mind. However, I can tell you about a quasi-related incident. For a long time, we made meme lists, and at the very start of the AI image generation hype, one of those lists included a picture of Trump doing something I'm not sure what exactly, but I believe it was Trump getting arrested. Someone didn't like it, and it caused a significant amount of trouble for us. That article was a meme listicle, so it obviously wasn't factual, but it got turned into a case of us spreading misinformation. After that incident, we avoided covering anything very related to Trump or his politics, just to be cautious, since people could accuse us of misconstruing facts or being inaccurate.

Q. Can you tell me what kind of content categories are most prone to ambiguity?

A: Probably the biggest category is health and diet advice. Every once in a while, for Google Discover purposes, we write articles about various diets and health tips, for example, someone says a certain diet worked for them. There's a lot of ambiguity here because everyone's body is different,

and what works for one person may not work for another. We have to be careful and hedge our statements, saying that this is what worked for this person, not that it's a cure-all or panacea. We also refer to a lot of sources when covering health and diet topics, and we consider feedback from people who say a diet doesn't work for them.

There's also ambiguity in celebrity stories, for example, when people share their experiences with celebrities, saying whether they were nice or unpleasant. We phrase these as people's opinions, hedging our bets that the story may be true or seems to correspond to the celebrity's public behavior. There's always a layer of separation between us and the reader or the celebrity, by design.

Q. If the audience reacts differently to content you pull out, do they actually give attention to accuracy in entertainment news?

A: There have been moments—not frequently—when we've covered people's stories from around the web, such as from Reddit or TikTok. There's always a healthy amount of speculation about whether something is real, especially in stories about big wins or unlikely events. Some people say that these things don't really happen, while others say real life is stranger than fiction and these things do happen. There are definitely people who care about whether a story is real.We do react to feedback. There have been times when people have done online digging and found that we hadn't vetted a story or user well enough, and the story turned out to be fake or had gaps. In those cases, we remove the story immediately, since our goal is to promote real stories and share them with our audience, not to spread fiction. For lists of facts, people have more control over what they think is real or relevant. If something seems fake to enough people, it gets downvoted. Its like they verify or start a conversation in the comments speculating if its true or not, there is a community notes style active verification and policing done by some users in the comments. In that case, we either correct it with more facts or remove it from the list to avoid spreading misinformation. As for newsy articles, I'm trying to think of an example. Recently, there was a contested article about a King of the Hill actor who was tragically shot in his own yard after a feud with a neighbor. There were multiple conflicting reports, police said it wasn't a hate crime, but the man who was shot said it was. There was a lot of debate in the comments about the wording, whether it was a hate crime or not, and whether the facts were correct. So, there are cases where conflicting facts and perspectives lead to ambiguity and discussion.

Q. Whenever there's a viral news story like this, do you manage fact checking something in that given short time?

A: Yeah, so, for example, if there's, I don't know, someone passing away or something happening, as we are kind of writing about it, we try to cover it as fast as possible and come out with it on our web page as quick as we can. The fact checking again is kind of happening in two waves: the editor checks if it does seem verifiable, if there are various different sources online who are reporting this, legitimate sources who are saying this, if it has been covered by a news outlet, both national or local news outlet. Then, the writer as they're writing it collects more context about it, more perspectives, more of the various sources that we're basically basing the story or the article on. So that's kind of how the fact checking happens. There are sometimes moments where we publish something where the article is only outlining the briefest facts of what we know. This is more at the news department, which is kind of not my wheelhouse exactly, but where we cover only the barest facts or the story from a further kind of distance. Then, as time goes on throughout the day, we fill out the article with more context, more background information. If something else is discovered or something else happens related to the story, various articles can get a tag that they've been updated with more information inside. We try to cover the facts correctly on the first go, but if that is impossible or if we miss something, we try to append it or fix it, adjust it as soon as possible.

Q. Do you use any any proprietary tools for this?

A: For memes, kind of, we don't need to do fact checking, you know. Any visual picture yeah, I'm kind of thinking, because we usually try to I'm wondering, probably the news department does more of this and they have to do the fact checking in those terms because they cover a lot of stories of celebs, spicy pictures, things like that. So, we do use, of course, Google image reverse search to find the original source of the image if possible. We also use TinEye to find where the image was first posted and what the original source is, to inspect where it has come from, just if we're unsure or if we want to know if an actual celeb posted that picture. So those are the kind of main things that we use for pictures. Well, did you mention TinEye? What for the image was first posted? Of course, Google image reverse search to find the original source of the image if possible, and we also use TinEye to find where the image was first posted and what the original source is, to inspect where it has come from, just if we are unsure or if we want to know if an actual celeb posted that picture. So those are the kind of things that we use for pictures.

Q. Okay, and you also share your work on, say, Facebook and other channels. So, does the algorithm affect what you publish, or are you more cautious with certain platforms? Do you have a different strategy for each platform?

A: Yeah, so, for example, there are different kinds of strategies and the algorithms are a bit nebulous, but we have kind of ascertained several ping mechanisms of how they work more precisely. For example, Facebook is one of those outlets where we kind of try to limit our political content and things about Trump because that's where the backlash happened and it seemed that right after that incident we had our traffic where we experienced a significant drop. So we probably got flagged for maybe not reporting the facts 100% correctly or something like that, or especially as it's a kind of polarizing topic in politics, so we had to kind of stay off of political topics, especially pretty much everything around Trump and his cabinet and what was happening in terms with that, even avoiding mentioning his name on Facebook especially. Another thing, Facebook is, as far as we know, not a very big fan of clickbait or, if you put it politely, the curiosity gap. So when we're publishing stories and using Facebook as an outlet, we have to be not kind of trying to tease anything in the story that would make the title incomplete or something like that, that would make the person click just because of the title and not because they want to hear more about the story. But now, for example, Google, we try to incorporate a curiosity gap because Google is allegedly and apparently more lenient with that and it is one of a pretty widespread strategy of how various companies get clicks on Google and Google Discover. Those stories that get pushed to the Google feed of news is by incorporating some kind of click not clickbait, but, you know, tease, so for example not revealing everything in the image, not revealing everything in the title, something that would pique a person's interest and that they would want to open the article and find out more. So Facebook is more strict with it while Google is kind of less strict with it and it seems to be a standard industry practice to have some kind of keys.

Q. You mentioned about clickbait and from what I know and from what I understand, there is this unsaid exaggeration or satire that happens with entertainment news outlets and everything. So where do you draw the line between acceptable exaggeration and potentially misleading content?

A: So, for example, in terms of the work process, we have, for example, in my department, two editors and one editor is responsible for the final list of titles while another editor kind of adds their own title or titles to that list and then checks it over to see if there's something that's too bombastic, too sensational. So we kind of, when it's a big responsibility of the editors to proofread the writer's titles and the other editors to check if they're not too bombastic. The writers can get away with a lot in their titles, just saying that someone was shocked or devastated or heartbroken, but at the end of the day, the editor has to take a look and see if usage of this word is actually relevant or if we can

actually describe the story in those terms. There were a lot of times where we wanted to describe a certain story as insane or as crazy because that would get a lot of clicks because people are naturally drawn to things that are unusual, so to say, but we also have had to stay off of those words in a certain sense, or only use them in quotes or paraphrase, because it is still kind of this could be construed as disrespectful to a group of people who are maybe struggling with mental health issues or things like that. So it is a big responsibility of the editors to have the story in mind and then consider if the titles are not overblowing something or overhyping it. We do do kind of A/B testing along with the story so we have various titles that go out of the story and there are several stages of it. The list of titles gets published to a lower page at least for our department, then it goes to a higher page. If we also notice after the first test has completed that the titles that have gone to the top have a very big difference in click-through rate, that may be an indicator that if it's by several percent in our metrics, then that maybe could mean that the title is something is overblown because it's just clearing the other titles by such a lot of percentage in click-through rate, that something is different with it so it's either an exceptionally good title or there is some kind of form of clickbait or some kind of good curiosity gap that the editors once again take into account. For the article going to the next stage of publishing, they take it out or change it somehow so it's more apparent and not as click-baity if it is click-baity. The same goes throughout the process of the article. If people are saying that a title for an article is inaccurate or if something is overblown, it is kind of a warning call that maybe we found that this was appropriate to say but maybe it is somewhat overblown. But there are cases where people say that it's maybe clickbait or that the title is overhyping the story where we do kind of disagree and we also keep the title because it seems appropriate for what's happening in the story.

Q. Do you think your fact checking strategy or any editorial strategy has changed over the years?

A: So, I've worked at Board Panda for two years and three months now, so let me think if things have changed in my time. I'm not, for example, in our department, I wouldn't say that they have changed very drastically, but it's just been kind of a process of what isn't allowed at the time. So for quite a long while it was anything related to Trump, so the process itself hadn't changed, but it became a lot more rigorous in terms of that one term. So, at least for us, I wouldn't say that for our department the process has been changing or gotten more rigorous or less strict. Maybe only in past years, we have to be more vigilant for various stories like AI. We have to rely on our own opinion and various tells and electronic word of mouth from what people are saying if it's AI or not or if it's legitimate. This is where it has gone strict. Also if it follows certain style of writing or paragraphs.

Q. Do you do any paid partnerships?

A: We have tried sponsored articles in the past, but it has not worked in the past.

Q. The kind of advertising that's shown on your web page do you have visibility on what gets advertised on your web page?

A: The average worker does not see. We get to see where it will be positioned next to text. But from my experience from the staff perspective, we do not see the ads themselves. We do not see anything besides where they would be positioned.

EXPERT 3: Organization 3

Q: What do you guys do at your organization? How did you guys come into place? If you can tell me more about that.

A: The Deepfix Analysis Unit, Madhura, within our company is an industry body of fact checkers, and media houses in India. It has been around for a few years, but the Deepfix Analysis Unit particularly, was launched or we formally came into existence on 25th of March 2024. We have been around for a little more than a year. Our focus is countering AI-generated misinformation. We primarily focus on audio and video content.

The project is powered by a WhatsApp tip line. There is a publicly available number through which any member of the public in India can escalate an audio or video that they suspect might have been generated or manipulated using AI. They can send it to us. We do our analysis, which is a combination of manual analysis and analysis using detection tools. In some cases, we escalate content further to experts who we work with. You can go to our website and check out our partners. Those are our detection and forensic partners. In some cases, we publish very detailed assessment reports, as you can see on our website. Those assessment reports include all what I mentioned previously: tool analysis, expert analyses, and everything is written in a very clinical fashion. The reports are very clinical. There is no editorializing. You have a level of transparency in terms of how we know what we know and how we are coming to a particular conclusion.

We typically publish assessment reports on cases that are harmful or misleading when it comes to the use of AI. These are pieces that we usually receive through the tip line because we receive a lot of content on the tip line and not every piece of content will be manipulated using AI. From that, we sift through content which specifically has AI elements in it, again underscoring the fact that it is harmful or misleading. Our work is focused on verification. Every piece of content that hits the tip line is labeled and there is a response sent out to the user. We have our own parameters in terms of content that is absolutely spammy. We do not respond to the user. We categorize that content and separately bucket it. In terms of responding to content which may not have elements of AI but which may still be manipulated, we use a partner fact check for that.

Ours is a collaborative project. If you go to our website, you will see we have a bunch of fact checking partners. We have 12 fact checking partners who are an integral part of the fact checking ecosystem in India. We are supporting the fact checking ecosystem in India through our analysis. We also reach out to them if we need help in terms of regional expertise, particularly because the fact checking network in India is now spread across different parts of the country. Sometimes there is regional content that might be going viral and we are a small team. Our expertise in terms of language and context is limited.

As an organization, we are dealing with seven languages: English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Bangla, Urdu, and Marathi. We have in-house expertise only in a few, but we reach out to our partner fact checkers if we need context if they are in a particular region or more conversant with a particular language. Similarly, they regularly escalate content to us that they suspect may have elements of AI. We do our analysis and we share it with our partners. That in turn helps them produce their fact checks and share it with their target audience.

The other track is catering to international partners, international fact checkers. They are not necessarily partners, but they are international fact checkers. These international fact checkers are IFCN certified. To maintain a level of standardization, you can look up IFCN. IFCN is an international body based in the US. It is the international fact checking network and it is set up under the Poynter Institute. To be an IFCN signatory, you have to be part of the larger pool of international fact checkers and you have to run through certain checks to qualify. If you are IFCN certified, you are considered legit. We opened it up to IFCN certified fact checkers, and we are receiving international escalations as well. That is the other channel because initially when we started out, we were primarily focusing on India. Now we realize we are also getting traction outside of India and how grave the need to address this content is.

In terms of export partnerships or exploratory partnerships, it is a combination of research labs at universities as well as commercial organizations. The partners that we have, we work with Get Real Labs, which is led by Dr. Hany Fareed, who is the name in this space when it comes to countering deep fakes. He has been a professor at University of California, Berkeley. Get Real Labs is an entity that he co-founded outside of the university setup. We work with them. We work with folks at RIT. They have something called the DPEG project. We work with them. We escalate content to them. We also work with Validia, which is based in San Francisco and has its own proprietary tools that help the detection of deep fakes, especially audio. That is what they started with. Audio detection tends to be harder. Then we have a company in India called Contrails. These are our usual partners.

In addition, we escalate content to Northwestern University's Cords project, which is the global online detection system. It is set up under the university and is a great service. You escalate content to them and they give you detailed reports, which come with a certain amount of expertise and heft. We use that in our assessment reports. Furthermore, we escalate content to 11 Labs. It is not a formal partnership, but it is an arrangement where they help us assess if the platform has been misused. It is also a way for them to understand if their tools are being misused. 11 Labs is very good with voice cloning. It is considered the most prolific tool when it comes to voice clones. Their standard quality is considered very good, but unfortunately it has been misused a lot. There are good use cases and bad use cases. When bad actors are using a platform which is supposed to do good, it only makes sense when you look at the ethical use of AI. We are able to signal to them, hey, we saw this, and they have a free tool, the classifier. If you run something with the classifier and it shows that the probability of it being generated from the 11 Labs classifier is very likely, then you escalate it to 11 Labs and they send us a report saying, we have analyzed this, it seems sympathetic, and we have taken action against the folks who misused our tools. That is broadly how we function.

Q: So, it's a for profit organization, is it?
A: We are a sectionate not for profit. What we are bringing, we are a service. It is supported by Meta. We received our seed funding from Meta. You can see the website, this is supported by Meta.

Q: Can you tell name the tools you use for fact checking? Are these, like you, some of them you said they're open source. Some of them are commercial. Do you also have any custom built tools?

A: No custom built tools, Madhura. What I mentioned right now, these are experts who escalate content. Some of them have their own proprietary tools. Some of them have given us access, but most of these people I mentioned are all experts. They have their own proprietary tool. The other tools that we work with, we regularly use, one is an audio tool called kr. We have access to that by virtue of partnership. We also use Hive, which we subscribe to. We also use another tool that we have been using. Each tool will have a video detection aspect, an audio detection aspect, but some tools will only be audio specific. We do use some free tools, like Make-a-Meter, which is led by a professor at University of Buffalo. They have built this tool which includes a lot of classifiers. Classifiers mean you have audio and video. You can run your piece of content through four or five or six different sub tools or tools. You can run those pieces of media through those different tools and get your results. These are probabilities. Those are accessible to everyone, that is a free tool. We use a combination of partnership tools that we have access to through our partnerships and sometimes also free tools. By free tools, we also check what and who is behind those tools. We want those tools to be legit. A tool is only as good as the data set it is trained on.

Q: Do these tools have any limitations?

A: As I said, tool is only as good as the data set it is trained on. In some cases, the tools might be representative of data from the global north and not from south. We have seen that with voice detection tools. There are different schools of thought. Some folks will say that the detection systems work differently for audio whereby language does not matter. If the tool has to check for manipulation, AI manipulation or AI elements, there are different markers the tool uses. There are different artifacts the tool looks for. Some people will tell you that, some others will tell you that no, the language that the tool is trained on also matters. We have definitely seen that when it comes to content in Indian languages, the tools sometimes are not very helpful. An audio tool will also not be helpful if there is background noise, if the audio quality is bad, if there is music. Even with video tools, if the video quality is bad, which usually is the case with AI manipulated content, what you input will impact your output.

Q: And do you see any platform specific trends within platforms?

A: It is always a very difficult chicken and egg thing. It is difficult to say what is trending on which platform. It is fair to say sometimes that if you look at platforms in terms of what they cater to, on Instagram you will see more visual content. On Facebook you might see content which is posts and videos embedded, which would likely be AI manipulated content, essentially video track with the original, but the audio will be synthetic. What we get on the tip line are audio notes and videos. If people are using the WhatsApp tip line, it means it is something they have received on their WhatsApp. It is difficult to say. On X, for instance, you will see posts with videos embedded. Different platforms are built by these bad actors, there is no one particular platform.

Q: And do you also verify things you see on X? I mean, if something has been shared or generated on X?

A: The way we function is that our first source is what we receive on the tip line. Second is what our partners are sharing with us. Third is social media monitoring that we do actively. We keep on top of what might be trending because sometimes we also find cases where we receive something on our tip line which may not necessarily be going viral. There have also been cases like that.

Q: So it's not like, okay, so if say X is producing, lot of these deep fakes. Would Meta say, okay, focus on the deep fakes generated by Meta platforms. Do they say that? Do they want you to focus on Meta specifically?

A: Meta does not interfere in our day to day functioning. We are funded by them, but we are independent. Our operations are independent. Who is working with us, what we are doing, how we are running operations, Meta does not have any metadata. The kind of content we are dealing with, the bulk of our content has been AI manipulated. Deep fakes have been fewer, but high profile cases. What we are seeing now, and what is a larger trend, is AI manipulated content. Content where the video track will be original, and then there will be a synthetic audio that is being used to manipulate it so it makes it seem that somebody actually said something when they did.

Q: And specifically, when we talk about India, what do you have to say about media literacy?

A: Given that we are the world's largest democracy, country of the most populous country in the world, a country of 1.4 billion and we have the smartphone penetration that we do have in this country, people have access to all these platforms and closed messaging apps. User behavior is difficult to gauge. One of the things that is problematic here is the low level of media literacy, and furthermore, the lower level of AI literacy. Some people do not even know what we are dealing with. Some people will actually believe what they see because they have no idea that something like AI exists. There is a concept like AI. We all sit in our echo chambers, and we are talking to people

who know about AI and people who understand, and we think that is our world, but that's a misconception. In tier three cities, tier four cities, people have no idea. Even in tier two cities, only a small section might have some idea, or they might have a sense, but not the extent to which something can be done. We do not have enough data in terms of signaling what is going on the literacy trends in the country. We need surveys like those to understand. My understanding is based on the work that I have been doing in the schools over the last several years and there are gaps.

Q: I think its very different here in Europe, do you think it has to do with the regulations?

A: The regulatory framework is one part of it, but the other part is also the schooling system. In schools they are taught about misinformation. We have a long way to go. It is about the framing, which is problematic. Political thinking as a concept exists, but it is about framing and the application which is missing. Those are the gaps that we need to fill. I also hear the word critical thinking alot. But what do you mean by critical thinking? What are the areas that you can apply critical thinking to, when you look at these different buckets, when you are trying to understand the impact of AI on society. When you are reading something, what level of critical thinking, how much skepticism should you bake into your everyday being? Those are the aspects people think about.

Q: And in your work, did you face any resistance from any person, any group of people, anything like that?

A: No. Because we mostly verify and our work is very clinical. I am not editorializing anything that you see on my website, it is very clinical. We are not giving any sort of judgment. We are saying something is fake, something is synthetic, or something is authentic. We are limited to that, and there is a methodology. I am doing storytelling through a different lens. I am collecting evidence. I am giving you evidence based on what my tools are telling me what I am able to see. These are all facts. Anybody can use this. The idea is also for people to be able to learn something from it. I make sure that we bake in a certain methodology when we write our reports.

Q: When you are verifying, how do you balance speed and accuracy?

A: That is a very good question. One of the ways in which we have been able to do something around it is that when something is breaking, if something is going viral and we need to address it, it will be going viral everywhere. We give the initial analysis to our fact checking partners, and then they put out their fact checks. The fact checks includes our analysis and what you are getting from the tools, and in some cases, maybe also an expert analysis. We come in to build on that. We do our detailed report with additional inputs, because some of our partners are in different parts of the world. Time zones are different. We build on that report so that we are able to offer a diverse perspective. It is the difference between getting something out there and then building something on top of it to be able to give people a more long form piece. The idea is to do it well, to do it thoroughly, to not make mistakes, and to include all possible expertise that is available because you will not be able to revisit.

Q: Can you share an example where you or your company had verified something and it led to a change in perception, any famous incident or something like that?

A: I would not say change in perception, but one case which was very widely used and quoted is an Indian example. If you go to our website, you will see there were these audios of Supriya purported to be Supriya Sule and another Congress leader. It was used by everybody. That spoke to the fact of a collaboration and that this is something that is happening. We did not see anything like that during the federal election, during the 24th general election, but we saw something like that during the state election, which was an aha moment. It was not happening during the general election cycle,

but during the state election. Have they learned something from the general election cycle and are they applying something here? Right before the voting day, from midnight until morning, it was going viral. That was a good piece in terms of reach, traction, and what they were able to achieve. The other piece, there was something escalated to us by an international fact checker known as Vera files. They had escalated a piece of video to us, a short video clip, which supposedly featured their president, and it showed him snorting coke. That was the perception. By virtue of the analysis that we were able to give them and to our partners, they published their reports. Those reports are very widely used It also made it to the highest offices in the Philippines, and it is being quoted as evidence. So yeah these things do have an impact.

Q: You talked about echo chambers, filter bubbles, and confirmation bias are leading to escalation in misinformation in just political content or everywhere else?

A: As I said, we do not have any preference, is about what the time demands from us. Additionally, It is very important for people to understand, be it this or disinformation, it has existed since time immemorial. It is only the technology that has changed. With the advent of tools, from one tool to the other, when the tools and technology get more sophisticated, bad actors will exploit that. It is not about this government or the other government. Irrespective of whichever government comes, you will have bad actors who will exploit technology to create mis and disinformation.

Regarding the politics, whichever government comes in, there will be people who will use these tools to their advantage. Other parties are also in a disadvantageous position. The need for verification will always be there, and it will only be more simply because the technology is advancing. Governments will come and governments will go, but as rapidly as the technology is advancing, we will need to keep up with it, because bad actors will exploit it. Disinformation starts. Disinformation leads to misinformation. You have to be mindful of what is happening, what is the narrative building that is happening, and how are the tools being misused.

The other question you were asking in terms of the content that we saw or are seeing: during the election cycle, we saw a lot of content in the run up to the election cycle, and thereafter, we saw content related to the elections, but thereafter, we have been seeing content also related to scams. Scam content is something that is consistent. It is an all season content. One finds the other thing to remember is also that with misinformation, it will be tied to your major news events. For instance, the recent skirmishes that we saw, the military escalations that we saw between India, we saw content around that. Any news event incentivizes bad actors.

Q: And is there any misconception about deep fakes? Like, I know it's like a very vague question, but it, I think it's still a very new thing.

A: People do not understand what deep fakes are. People do not understand that. They will not be able to tell and that is true for a lot because the defects are getting so there are two aspects. One is trying to bucket this content into, trying to use labels with this content, what qualifies as a deep fake? There is a big debate around it, because some people will also say that manipulated content, they will also plug it in the same bucket and say, that is a good thing. Understanding what really is a deep fake is important. If you are calling everything a deep fake, you are also raising a certain level of alarm, which is uncalled for. Understanding what qualifies as a deep fake and what does not qualify is important. Having the right labels of content is very important. If something is a deep fake, the lines between synthetic and authentic are blurring. People are not able to decide, people are not able to understand what is really a deep fake and what is authentic content.

Q: Do you think platforms are doing enough? How can they improve collaboration with fact checkers in particular?

A: This is a very open ended question, and I am always hesitant of answering this for various reasons. I am not a part of any platform. It is like asking a third person who we are and if we are doing our reports correct. Similarly, how platforms function, what they are doing and what they are not doing is informed by a lot in terms of what goes on internally. What are the platform policies? What is the leadership like? What is the focus like? We have seen, for instance, X has changed so much from the previous leadership to now. There used to be a time when people used to go to X, Twitter, to get a lot of breaking news. I have been one of those journalists. It was very popular among journalists, by the way. If news is breaking, let us go to Twitter, Twitter first. But not anymore. Are platforms doing enough? I don't know Should they be doing more? Yes, they should. My pet peeve is around labeling. If you cannot have your labels right on the platform, for instance, if something is AI generated, it is about time that there has to be a way in which that disclaimer has to be there because people consume content and people think it is real. Having a consistent policy around labeling of content and having those disclaimers is very important. It is not being done as consistently. You will have some cases, but not always.

EXPERT 2: Organization 2

Q: So before we start our conversation, how did you react to Meta shutting down its third-party fact-checking in the US, as your organization is an IFCN registered body?

A: My reaction to Meta shutting down the fact-checking program was upsetting and sad to see the devaluation of fact-checking. From a business perspective, it benefits us because more people reach out to us for fact checks on misinformation. On the flip side, more misinformation is being spread, so we have more content to write about. However, there is already too much content. I would say it is not helpful for us, because it means we are drowning in more misinformation. From a business perspective, it is unfortunate, because I do not want us to be the only fact-checking organization. We are one the oldest and have that reputation. Having organizations like PolitiFact and FactCheck.org helps keep us accountable. Competition in the fact-checking environment is good because people can double-check our work and we can try to do the best for our readers. It is always upsetting to see another fact-check organization get closed down, especially Meta, with Facebook being one of the largest spreaders of misinformation.

Q: How is your process of fact-checking at your organisation? How do you approach your work? How do you decide what to write about?

A: Our process starts with assignment editors, who put together the assignment list for the day based on what we get in mail and what people are searching on our website. People may be searching things like Pope Francis or something he said, or we often cover death hoaxes, celebrity name died things like that. What people are searching and what is in our mail factors into the assignment list. People email our tip line to ask questions about different stories, and if we get multiple emails about one thing, we might look into it. We also have a Slack channel called topic ideas, where assignment editors, the web producer, and writers put in any misinformation or news articles that might need context. People come to us to contextualize the news because they trust us over other outlets. Even if the New York Times and The Washington Post are covering it, sometimes readers email us or ask us about news that has been widely covered because they do not trust other news organizations. We often end up saying here's what we know, here's who reported it, here's what we know about the reporting process. We reach out to reporters on the stories and ask if there is any chance they might be able to share who the source was or the documents the source shared. We will not publish it, but we can say we independently verified this. There is a second person checking the reporter's work, and legacy media is often happy to work with us.
We get the list of stories in the morning. We have an East Coast team and a West Coast team. West

Coast wakes up to a list of stories ready to go. I usually choose a story based on two things: how popular it is and if it fits within my skill set and is interesting to me. Stories that are most interesting to me are the ones I dive deepest into. My focus is US politics and government, so stories are related to legislation, health insurance, Medicaid, and policy. Misinformation often arises from media literacy, or in my case, people not understanding how legislation works. For example, I had a story about people claiming the Wisconsin governor was trying to change the word mother to inseminated person in state legislation. This created a hubbub among right-wing influencers and media, but in reality, he was only changing that language in legislation about artificial insemination. There was a misunderstanding, people thought he was trying to legally change the definition of mother. The story was about explaining that the language was changed to be gender neutral, to include same-sex couples. If two women get married and one is pregnant, you cannot just say mother, because it is unclear which mother you are talking about. Gender-neutral language is beneficial in legislation. People either benefit from scamming or are genuinely upset because they do not understand legislation. A lot of my job is reading through thick policy and making sense of it. If I do not fully understand, I reach out to the legislative author, law experts, and policy people. I have experts I go to for certain topics, like education finance. I am trying to expand to a more diverse set of sources. If we are basing a fact-check rating off what an expert says, we reach out to multiple experts, because even top people in the field might differ in opinion.
The other big thing is showing my work. That is a huge part of our' ethos. Every time I mention a source, I link to it. Every time I talk about bill language, I say where in the bill it is from. Editors will ask me to link the source again if I mention it in a sentence. We want to make it as easy as possible for the reader to figure out where the information comes from, so they can decide if it is credible. Once I finish a story, it goes through a main editor. After that editor goes through it, they might have notes for me. If not, it goes to another editor for a back read, which is technically a copy edit. Some editors will do all the work the other editor did again. After two edits, it goes to the web producer. The web producer skims the copy and does copy editing, makes it SEO friendly, and chooses a headline and feature image. Then it gets published. Stories are either scheduled as breaking, daily, or evergreen. Evergreen stories are historical and never lose relevance.

Q: Talking about news you want to publish immediately as soon as it breaks out, how do you balance speed and accuracy when something like that comes up?

A: That is a difficult conversation, ongoing at our organization. There has been some frustration with breaking stories, because we are not a breaking news organization. Part of being a fact-check organization is doing the second-day story and waiting a couple of days to make sure we have the right information. But because of the news cycle, we often write stories that are "here's what we know" and update them in a couple of days. We used to have a research in progress rating, where we said "here's breaking news, here's what we know, we are looking into this further." We had a fact-check on whether the UnitedHealthcare CEO was shot, and news outlets reported the bullet casing said "deny, just depose," or "denied, defend, depose." The story was research in progress because we could not get a cop to speak to us. Syndicates like Yahoo and NewsBreak do not like ratings like that—they want true or false or something concrete. We now use "newsers," which are stories without a rating. Sometimes stories do not have a rating because we do not have enough verified evidence. We give the facts we know, what we are still trying to figure out, and a tip line in case someone has a tip. The story might get updated in the future. We have complicated explainers where we have all the facts but cannot put a rating on it because it is too nuanced. We also use no rating for breaking stories. For example, a story about someone being deported by ICE—if we do not have confirmation from ICE, we say here are the facts as reported and whether the news organization is reputable. For example, I did a story about whether the Trump administration made a deal with cartel members, El Chapo's son, to bring in family members as part of his plea deal. News outlets called it confirmation from the Mexican security chief, but here, that is not enough. We said the Mexican security chief said this, but we do not have confirmation from the Department

of Justice and do not know the terms of the deal, so we cannot put a fact-check rating on the claims. We give all the details, including the interview, translated by Google Translate with help from Spanish-speaking supporters, so people can see how news outlets are reporting things. We give all the details and receipts.

Q: Is Research in Progress rating still there, or have you discontinued it?

A: The research in progress rating we do not really use anymore. We just do newsers instead. For example, I did a Robert F. Kennedy Jr. story where it was "RFK wants to start an autism registry." That story would have been research in progress if we still used that rating. Instead, it was a newser I updated at least three times as new information came out. As a fact-check organization, we update stories that news organizations would just write a new story about. People search our archives and find stuff that goes viral again. The top story on our website yesterday was a story from years ago about whether Bob Ross and Fred Rogers met each other and whether a picture was legitimate. Someone posted the picture on Reddit again, and the top comment was a link to our story, so we got thousands of views. We have to make sure our records are updated, because our work recirculates from years ago.

Q: What do you have to say about media literacy? Do you think it is something that can reduce misinformation?

A: Media literacy should be in our curriculum. It is difficult, but it is absolutely something that should be taught and should not wait until college. You should not have to wait until college to have seminars on this. I remember this conversation with an uber driver and how I told him how a headline is made. Ofte times, the reporter does not even know what the headline would be as the web producers usually make SEO optimised contents. At the very least we should teach critical thinking skills.

Q: How do you remain unbiased when you have to fact-check something?

A: I am very critical of both parties in the United States. If we had more than a two-party system, it might be different. For me, it is not about being anti any party. Both parties are terrible at messaging and politics. I hear that criticism from conservatives all the time. I wonder if part of it is that conservatives produce more misinformation. Liberals also produce plenty of misinformation that we fact-check all the time. I am currently working on a story about Democrats making a false claim. We get told we are funded by Soros or that Trump paid us. Our CEO says that is how we know we are doing something right- when we get criticism from both sides.

Q: Do you use any technology or tools with your fact-checking, besides reaching out to people?

A: A big part of our job now is fact-checking AI content, videos, photos, if its a real video, real photo, real quote. We get stuff like people saying Trump said something, but it is AI-generated audio that goes viral on TikTok. We use AI detectors built by researchers. We try to stay away from random detectors. The University of Buffalo has an AI detector called Deepfake-o-meter. There are also detectors from security and technology companies. We use satellite imagery from companies that release it by request. We have a spreadsheet of tools, including reverse image search. We use datawrapper and flourish to create interactive tables and charts. Google Pinpoint is a great resource for analyzing large collections of documents and has a free transcription service. Archiving insights we recently got a subscription with Perma, a paid archive service. We also use Ghost Archive, Wayback Machine, and archive.today to archive things so we can show claims that have been deleted. We use these for timestamp, when government websites say something and then take it

down, we have a timestamp to show what was said before. We also use archived links to bypass paywalls so readers can see the story.

Q: Do you think any of these tools have limitations?

A: We got Perma because archive.today, Ghost Archive, etc., cannot archive videos. That is a huge limitation, especially now that we are fact-checking Instagram reels and TikTok videos. We cannot provide an archive link for those claims. We just got Perma and cannot yet speak to how effective it is. AI detection tools are fallible and not 100%. When we use these tools, we say the tool gave a certain percentage chance of being AI, but we cannot say it is 100% AI. Sometimes we can say 100% because there is a fake rock or missing finger, but with voice detection, it is difficult. We always say what the AI detection tool said but remind people these tools are not always correct. Reverse image search sometimes does not work, some images do not come up. Different tools have different abilities, so we use multiple tools. Google search is getting worse, especially with AI overviews making mistakes. Legislation searches: congress.gov and congressional reports are often what I search through.

Q: Do you think platforms are doing enough to combat misinformation?

A: No, I do not think platforms are doing enough. One is owned by someone we frequently fact-check. We are fact checking X is fact-checking all the time. My personal account gets more misinformation, so I use a burner account to look at misinformation. On Blue Sky, the MSNBC cohort produces a lot of misinformation, and there is no community notes or fact-checking. YouTube creators like Cash Jordan have millions of views on AI-generated videos fear-mongering. They all need fact-checking services. Reddit is better in that subreddit moderators often take down factually inaccurate posts, and Redditors post our links. But Reddit still has a lot of misinformation. Our story about Bob Ross and Fred Rogers got noticed because a Reddit commenter linked to our story, but the post is still up and has 100,000 upvotes. No one is taking it down. Misinformation can spread. I do not think social media sites are not doing enough and need more efforts.

Q: How do you think collaboration between fact-checkers and websites could improve?

A: A big thing is security, these organizations do things on a whim and get rid of them on a whim. A lot is based on what political winds are saying. We need more regulation. It is thorny—do you want politicians regulating fact-checking? I do not know the answer, but organizations are not going to have robust fact-checking services unless legally obligated.

EXPERT 1: Organization 1

Q: Can you tell me your journey with fact checking?

A: I started my fact checking journey in 2020 with an organization in Nigeria called the Center for Democracy and Development. It is an NGO focused in West Africa, but my work was mainly in Nigeria, with a focus on fact checking, disinformation, and misinformation across Nigeria, specifically during that period in northern Nigeria. At some point, we covered all of Nigeria. Regarding Meta, I work as a trusted partner under the Center for Economic Technology, which is the organization currently working with Meta. What we do is detect, or rather, whenever we come across big news on Facebook, we try to call the attention of Meta by referring to them. If something fake is trending, we alert Meta to look into it and try to take it down. Meta provides us with a harmful content guide that helps us determine if content is harmful or not. Sometimes it is not just misinformation but also hate speech being trended on the platform. It is not limited to just Facebook; it includes Instagram as well, since Instagram is part of Meta. These are the two

platforms we usually report on. Whenever we come across problematic content, we write to Meta, summarize what we found, sample the content, and Meta reviews it. They do not usually take it down immediately; it takes time because they need to reverify it on their end as well.

Q: So basically when you come across something harmful you then report it to Meta?

A: Yes, we are their trusted partners and we analyze content based on what is trending. We usually look at the context, where the content is coming from. For instance, if it is political or religious, it tends to escalate more than expected. Whenever we come across things like that, or hate speech, we detect it, write about it, and share it with Meta. Meta then removes the post entirely.

Q: Do you know how Meta reviews it? Are you aware of their methodology on how they approach your fact checking?

A: What we can do from our end is fact check and give them evidence that this is going to cause a problem if not removed. This is fake news, and according to our fact checking, we are able to verify this information. In line with Meta's harmful content guidelines, we give them evidence for everything we see. Meta then looks into it from their own end and sees if it aligns with their policies. If it does, they remove it, we do not know their process on how they do that.

Q: How do you balance speed and accuracy?

A: They allow us to do it at any time we come across something. The main focus is to be correct and get it right.

Q: Can you give me an example of a case where you or your colleagues fact checked something, gave it to Meta, and they corrected it, which helped debunk something trending in Nigeria?

A: I actually have something on the pandemic that I fact checked, but back then I was working with a different organization, not under the current chart and not Meta-related fact checking. It was a different organization. We fact checked around the misinformation with regards to the pandemic, specifically COVID during that era. Monkeypox also came up at some point.

Q: Have you observed misinformation being different across platforms? Also does it differ from topic to topic?

A: During the pandemic, there was a lot of different misinformation. Sometimes it was a little bit of misinformation, and sometimes it was not really misinformation but just information straightforward. People were scared and trying to create awareness, but in a wrong way. Others were trying to provide medicine, and then the vaccine came in. A lot of trends kept happening, switching from one thing to another. The issue of vaccination also came up at some point; people were afraid and a lot of misinformation spread at that period as well.

Q: Within the different platforms, is there any platform that is more problematic? How does misinformation spread differently within these platforms?

A: In Nigeria, misinformation spreads more on WhatsApp. You see all these WhatsApp broadcasts and WhatsApp groups, that is where most of our misinformation emanates from. But we also have the issue of Facebook. Facebook is another headache, because most of the things being shared on WhatsApp are generated from Facebook. For Instagram, we do not really encounter a lot of misinformation. It is more about pictures, videos, and the likes. There is not much misinformation

there. WhatsApp is the main thing in Nigeria, followed by Facebook. On Facebook, it is just one or two people posting it, and then people carry the link or screenshot the text and share it among their contacts on WhatsApp, so that is where it is being spread.

Q: In your methodology, do you make use of any technology, or is it just reviewing based on news? Are there any tools, or AI tools you use?

A: We use technology, especially when it comes to pictures. We mostly use three tools: Google reverse image search, TinEye (though TinEye is not always upgraded), and Yandex.

Q: Which one is the most effective?

A: Google reverse image search is more effective. Whenever you try to verify a picture, you mostly come up with results. For videos, we also use Google reverse image search for video search sometimes, because most video AI tools are paid. Rather than pay, we just screenshot the pictures and use Google reverse image search.

Q: Are there any limitations of these tools? While you use these tools, do you face any problems, like maybe it does not work well or gives you a false picture?

A: No limitation per se. The only thing is that sometimes there are some images you might try to verify but do not get them online, so you have to search out to others, maybe try to verify from other sources or contact the people affected directly if possible. Some images or videos are difficult to verify. There is the issue of deepfake videos that AI usually uses to manipulate people; verifying that is a little bit difficult. There is actually a platform that can be used to verify that as well, but I am not really keen to that and have not used it so far. Another challenge is deepfake videos being circulated. People are misinformed with regards to that, and it is really affecting us.

Q: Do you think there are biases in fact checking? Do you think there is a bias that certain political leanings are targeted in fact checking?

A: Usually, a good fact checker should not have that bias. But it happens. To have a very good fact check, you need to not be biased. You try to fix yourself, to try to verify this information you come across, especially when it comes to the political context. A lot of people tend to be a little bit biased, so I think it is very important for you as a fact checker to leave that aside and not forget honest reporting.

Q: What do you think is the role of media literacy in fact checking?

A: I think if people are actually aware of fact checking tools and how to verify information, it will drastically reduce the spread of misinformation circulating in our spaces. But people are not really aware of the tools. They do not know how to verify. Some are not even doing so. That is when fact checkers come in. There is a lot of awareness being created now, and with the help of AI tools coming up on a daily basis, I think if people are more aware of fact checking and how to verify information, misinformation will drastically reduced.

Q: How do you think the collaboration between fact checkers and platforms can be increased?

A: I think what could be done better is for platforms to engage more organizations in fact checking, especially constant organizations that solely do fact checking. Social media platforms should be more proactive and responsive to problematic content.

Q: Do you think companies are doing enough? What is your opinion on Meta cutting ties with third-party fact checking, in US as they recently said they will have community notes? How did you perceive that new change?

A: I believe these platforms are trying their best, but the content is a lot, so attending to all these requests of verifying information might be a handful for them. I believe they are trying their best, but they need to do better. They need to be more up to date with the content as well. Regarding the Meta issue whereby there will be no factory verification or something, the latest news that was found did not really affect Africa. We were told it is not going to affect our work. We can still continue with our work. This is more of an American thing, but when it comes to Africa, it is not really; we can just continue programming.

Q: How do you see the future? Do you see any trend that would happen in fact checking? Which direction is fact checking headed in Africa? Any key changes you see coming?

A: I think with media literacy, Africa will be able to, when it comes to fact checking, have individual fact checkers, maybe where we train more people, and then individual fact checking of information. I believe there will be less trend of misinformation and disinformation in the social space. I see that a lot of our people, there is a lot of underground training and knowledge transfer that has been carried out by various organizations with trusted partners. I feel like there is going to be a lot of improvement moving forward.

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