

ISOJ 2020: Day 2

Disinformation and Misinformation: What can be done beyond traditional fact-checking?

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 - [Craig Silverman](#), media editor, BuzzFeed
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Rosental Alves Hello, everyone, this is Rosental Alves again to welcome you to another session of the great ISOJ online. Welcome. Thank you for joining us again. But before our last panel of the day, I would like to do a few housekeeping reminders. The panel's keynote sessions and workshops will all be interpreted to Spanish. If you would like to join and watch in Spanish, click the interpretation globe in the meeting options down below on Zoom and select the Spanish as the as the language channel. Please also note that we are live streaming on ISOJ YouTube. There are links at the ISOJ website for that, ISOJ.org. In case you have any issues with Zoom, you can go to to use YouTube. If you are having any further tech issues, please contact our tech helpline via WhatsApp or text SMS at 1-817-526-0179. Also, please remember to follow and use hashtag #ISOJ2020 to enter, to stay connected with with the conference on social media.

Now, I would I would like to welcome our our speakers for this afternoon, Talia Stroud, Don Heider, Cristina Tardáguila, and Craig Silverman. So I pass to you, Talia.

Talia Stroud Hello, everyone, I'm Talia Stroud. I direct the Center for Media Engagement, and I'm delighted to have all of you attend this panel entitled "Disinformation and Misinformation: What Can Be Done Beyond Traditional Fact-Checking?" It's a pleasure to moderate this panel with so many fantastic scholars and those involved in the actual practice of fact-checking, and media coverage of fact-checking, and the misinformation space.

Before we turn it over to our panel, I'll offer just a few introductory remarks. The first is that it's incredibly interesting, as you think about fact-checking, to learn that traditional fact-checking is a model of identifying a claim, doing the research and then publishing the findings. And this model is thought to really help the public figure out how exactly information is traveling, what is correct, what is incorrect. But the tricky part is what researchers have found about fact-checking is the following quotation. "The top 1% of false news cascades diffused to between 1,000 and 100,000 people, whereas the truth rarely diffused to more than 1,000 people." Falsehood diffused faster than the truth.

And I think that this is one of the critical challenges when we think about how we should move beyond traditional fact-checking. It's not enough to check the facts and publish the findings. In addition, organizations have to be more thoughtful about marketing and

communicating the information that they're finding in order to try to combat this effect, in which falsehoods travel really quickly, and truth doesn't travel quite as quickly.

As we look through what fact-checking organizations have been doing presently to try to cater to this, I think that there are some really important examples to bring to the forefront. First, a number of fact-checking organizations have been looking at social media as a place to disseminate what they're finding. If you look at factcheck.org, for example, its posts routinely get thousands of followers retweeting, sharing and commenting on these fact checks, which is an amazing way to try to distribute this information. Second, you can look to fact-checking organizations that are increasingly trying to provide information in audio and visual formats. And I think that this way of thinking about how do people actually consume information. Are they going to read paragraphs and paragraphs about what fact-checkers have found? Or is there a way to transmit this information in a way that caters to the way people are thinking via audio and visual?

So an example here would be Full Fact. They have a Fact Blast here, where they are sharing in three minutes the week's information, and I think that this is a really great example because it shows how a fact-checking organization is thinking about the way in which people encounter information in an attention economy where they only have really limited attention spans. And so I think that this is a really collective way of trying to get the information out there.

Another example is one that is shown here on a slide from Chequeado, where they've actually created an infographic to share the information about coronavirus. And so thinking through creative ways to share the information, I think, is another way to try to help the truth travel farther than falsehoods.

A final one to mention is serialized efforts, so Africa Check has a #keepthefactsgoing podcast where they're sharing information. For example, their episode one starts with the basics, they say. Five questions to ask yourself before forwarding a WhatsApp message. So I think all of these examples showcase how fact-checking organizations are currently thinking about marketing and communication and trying to get the information out there more broadly, going beyond traditional fact-checking.

If I were to think about some tips for fact-checking organization along these lines, I would offer four. The first is to determine where the target audience goes. Really be thoughtful about who is the target of this? Obviously, in many instances you want to try to reach those people who are misinformed, and who you believe the correct information could have an educative effect. So figuring out who that audience is and where they actually go is an incredibly important first step for fact-checking organizations.

Second is to learn how to get attention in whatever medium that might be. Is it a podcast? Is it an infographic? And really figuring that out, so that you are actually trying to reach the audience that's most of interest.

The third tip or advice that I'd give is really think about divides. There are so many divides out there when we're thinking about this information. So who is on Twitter versus who is getting this information delivered via email, and thinking through that sort of divide is really important. But there are other divides as well. If we talk about political divides, for instance, in the United States, Democrats and Republicans not only use very different sources of information, but they might process fact-checks quite differently. And so thinking through how people are processing fact-check information and trying to design fact-checks in the

wording, in the images, in every aspect of the factor, cater to those people in the divide that you want to learn the correct information, I think, is a really important endeavor.

And the final thing that I would just really, really push for is to think more about experimentation and iterating. I think oftentimes it's really a lot of work already initially to create the fact-check and go through process, but I think it's really incumbent upon fact-checking organizations to work either on their own or work in collaboration with academic researchers, or think tanks, or whatever organization they want to think about what's the best strategy for getting that information out there? And then test it? Like did it actually work? If I do a fact check that asks a question, does that perform better on social media than a fact-check that simply delivers the information about whether or not a claim is true or false? And I think as a fact-checking community, the more we can do that, the better off we'll be in terms of having fact-checked information, and having the truth out there, and having it go farther than the falsehoods.

So that's just a few initial contextualizing thoughts as we now turn to our panelists. Our first panelist is Craig Silverman. He's the media editor at BuzzFeed, and he'll be sharing with us some information about the need to investigate actors, platform, and the ecosystem that actually enables this information. Craig, delighted to turn it over to you.

Craig Silverman Thank you, Talia. Pleased to be here. And that's great context for what I want to talk about, because I think you lay out that there is some good things happening with traditional fact-checking. And in fact, if we look at some of the data that's out there about fact-checking organizations, we're in the midst of a boom. This slide shows some data for the Duke Reporters Lab, where since 2014, they've been tracking how many fact-checking outlets there are around the world. And back in 2014, there were 44. As of 2020, they found almost 300. So there are more journalists, more organizations, in more countries doing this than really ever before, and obviously that's good news.

This next slide gives you another sense of fact-checking organizations. Now, this one shows all of the places around the world where Facebook has partners who are fact-checking content that is being shared on Facebook. And there are far more places around the world where Facebook has partners than those individual organizations because it's working with people like Agence France-Presse who are in many, many countries helping fact-check. And so, again, this is good news. But, you know, whenever there's kind of a single funder who is somewhat dominating the space, there are always some concerns and sometimes some strings that come with that. And I think this is one of the things we have to think about as we're looking about fact-checking and tackling misinformation and disinformation. Facebook, when you look at what they want, they want their partners to be checking as many facts, specific facts, specific claims as possible. And they don't want them checking politicians, and they want them checking the stuff that is going viral on the platform. So its partners get a feed of potential claims to check. They check them. And then if something is found false, you get images like you see on this slide here, alerting readers that they've shared or have encountered something that's false. And again, that's a good thing. But we have to make sure that traditional fact-checking is not necessarily being co-opted to serve one party.

And beyond that, we also have to think about what is the source, and what is the ecosystem that is leading to all of these claims that actually need to be checked. Who are the actors? What are the systems, the technologies, and the other players that are enabling this entire ecosystem to exist? If all we are doing is checking facts and not

digging deeper than we're actually not getting at the source of the problem. And so we have to add that into the framework of fact-checking as well.

When I think about what that means, I think about this quote from the Hutchins Commission on a Free and Responsible Press. They published the report back in 1947, and they said that, "It is no longer enough to report the fact truthfully. It is now necessary to report the truth about the fact." And I think that's kind of what I'm talking about. It's not enough to just do the claim and to check the fact, you actually have to report the truth about the lie. And so if I were to edit it, to me today, it's sort of, "It's no longer enough to check the facts truthfully. It's now necessary to report the truth about these, and the people, and the interests that have created and helped spread that lie."

So to give a few examples of what I mean by that, one thing that we have to be doing is looking for inauthentic activity across these platforms. These accounts that I'm showing here were all attributed to Roger Stone, the Trump political adviser who recently had his sentence commuted. And right around the time he had his sentence commuted, Facebook announced that it had removed a range of accounts and pages linked to him that were fake. And so we see here, there were Facebook pages, there were accounts, there were Twitter accounts as well. And so we had authentic activity serving a particular person's interest, and that is helping pollute the information space. It also helps spread false, misleading content.

But it's not just about true and false. And this is one of the things I think we have to keep in mind when we think about misinformation and disinformation is that a lot of times people are walking right up to that line of something that won't get checked by a fact-checker because they know that will help it get on Facebook and not be flagged in some way. And when it came to the content from these Roger Stone fake accounts, they weren't spreading a lot of false or necessarily misleading content. They were mostly promoting him and promoting Trump. So they had an agenda. They were inauthentic. And this was, again, polluting the information space, even though it wasn't necessarily false.

In addition to that, I think we also need to be exposing the bad actors, exposing the entities that are behind false, misleading and also inauthentic content and behavior. On this slide, three examples of this. One, a story I did back in 2016 about teens and young men in North Macedonia who were spreading, in many cases false or misleading stories that were pro-Trump. They didn't care about politics. They wanted the money. In the middle, there are two Facebook pages. One is pro a Nigerian politician. Another is against him. They were both run by the same PR firm. And so we have disinformation-for-hire actors in the space who are very motivated, creative and well financed. And then the last example is something about the Chinese government, and what they do to kind of flood the zone on Chinese social media to sort of sweep away bad or inconvenient discussions that are harmful to the party. So we have to think about who is behind this stuff and expose it.

And then the last thing that I think is important is revealing the systems and particularly the tactics that people are using. I am very obsessed with the financially motivated actors that are out there. I did a story back in January about people who try to rent the Facebook accounts of average folks around the world. So they'll pay you money to rent your Facebook account, and they'll use that Facebook account to set up an advertising account connected to it. And they will be able to run ads, and of course, they will run ads that will often in many cases rip people off, as is this example right here. This is an ad that shows the film director, Peter Jackson, claiming he was arrested. He was not. And if you click through this ad on Facebook, it would take you to a page trying to sell you erectile

dysfunction medication. Now, obviously, there's a false claim involved in this, but it goes deeper than that. These guys spent around \$35,000 running this ad. They brought in \$71,000 revenue on that one ad alone. So there's a massive financial incentive here for these skeezy marketers to be doing this stuff. And it connects back to misinformation and disinformation because again, as I noted, my story ran in January of last year about people renting out their Facebook accounts and how it was being used. And just a couple of months later, in March, New York Times ran an article with the headline "In Ukraine, Russia Tests a New Facebook Tactic in Election Tampering." A new Facebook tactic in election tampering. Now, what could that be? Well, when you read the story, it's all about finding people in Ukraine on Facebook who wanted to sell their accounts or temporarily rent them out so that they could run ads. And so we have an intermingling of different motivations, different actors, different kinds of innovation in this space of media manipulation that is helping pollute the information environment. And so if we only think about checking what is true, or false, or satire, then we missed this whole entire critical layer of what is actually helping spread, and produce, and fund the kind of falsehoods that fact-checkers end up having to deal with. Thank you.

Talia Stroud Thank you so much. That was really interesting. Next we'll turn to Don Heider. He's the executive director at the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, and he'll be sharing with us some of the ethical responsibility that journalists have to avoid frames that are too simplistic.

Don Heider Thanks so much, Talia. I just want to say it's a pleasure being on this panel with all of you. In the last election cycle. I really felt like Craig's reporting on misinformation was superb, really led the way in many ways. So great meeting you, at least virtually, Craig.

A lot of what I'm going to talk about today is built on two folks at the Markkula Center's work. The two people work in our journalism media ethics area, Subbu Vincent and Anita Varma, so I wanted to give them credit right off the top.

So I'm going to talk about sort of three things we suggest that journalists think about as they're in the midst of this election cycle in terms of battling misinformation and disinformation. The first point we're going to make is that we would really like journalists to think seriously and do as best they can to stop relying on simplistic frames for covering complex issues. One of the things about giving our news primarily on online platforms is there's, I'd say, increased pressure to make stories, get stories up quickly, and for them to be increasingly brief. So brevity has become a very important principle. But the problem with that is that oftentimes it may cause us to oversimplify stories. And this is something that journalists, I think, have struggled with for many years, but I think it's been increasing because of the pressure to be brief.

So as journalists, we often depend upon familiar frames for stories. You think about, like simple dichotomies, and that is you set up a problem in the story and then you explore some solutions for the stories. And the reason we use these over and over again is they resonate with audiences, and they're very familiar to us. But they often may not do justice to a particular story. So oftentimes the way a narrative is constructed may be to simply, or in fact, it may be the wrong frame to pick for a particular story.

And I'd say the other part of this issue is often misinformation uses the same familiar frames. So we're trying to encourage journalists to not just pass on those frames and to think about how stories are often more complicated, more nuanced, and they may not fit

traditional frames. We've been talking a lot over the last six months about this idea of trying to do slow news rather than fast news, which means to be a bit more thoughtful, to really think about context for story, and to fact-check and make sure that the stories are correct before you pass them on. So don't take the simple frame presented and pass it on.

And also absolutely essential, don't simply pass on misinformation no matter who it comes from. Craig sort of mentioned this during his presentation. There's this idea that's come up recently that we really like, and that's this idea of the truth trying to build a truth sandwich. And that's the idea that when you have a statement that, you know, is inauthentic or misleading, don't just pass it on, especially in social media if you're a journalist. It's better to give a fact first to give some context to the statement, then give the questionable statement, and then give another fact that puts it in more context. That way, we're actually doing our job as journalists rather than simply passing on something that we all know is untrue.

So number one was stop relying on simplistic frames for covering complex issues. The second thing we asked journalists to think about is how we might represent people's lived experience, and how that offers a grounded way to counter misinformation. So I'd say traditionally, often we go to folks impacted by an issue, sometimes to bring the emotion of a story out, or to flesh it out a bit. But we're sort of counting on experts to give us the facts. Yet really, the people most impacted by the story might be the people that really have the most accurate information on the ground. So get folks on the ground, get people most impacted by the story to address the very issues that the experts are talking about.

This means asking stakeholders what they think, what they need, and what might help them. That's all part of an approach that Anita Varma is endorsing in this develop called the "solidarity approach to journalism." Solidarity journalism means standing with communities affected by not only representing their pain, but their views on what happened, and what their needs are and amplifying their ideas on how these needs might be best served.

A couple of examples of this might be if a reporter is covering peaceful protesters who are protesting racial justice issues, there's really not two sides to this story. There's not a simplistic frame. So it might be best to take this approach of solidarity reporting. Anita developed the approach when she did a very exhaustive study here in the Bay Area of reporters that were covering homeless folks. And again, there is no oppositional frame for homelessness. It's a much more complicated and nuanced issue.

So that's the second approach we say we would like journalists to think about, is trying to represent people's lived experience as a way to counter some of this misinformation that's being passed on. The third way, we'd say, is for journalists to recognize misinformation, we think multiple literacies are needed. There's a lot of hand-wringing after the last election about whether media literacy has failed us as a society. And certainly more media literacy, I think is helpful. But I'd say it also is a bit false in that we would endorse that multiple literacies are needed by any journalist, especially working in these very contentious issues like misinformation.

So, for instance, we would argue that the journalists especially needs social media literacy. Social media products, as we all know, are not designed for the whole person to give us everything we need to give us all the information, and depth and breadth we need of a particular issue. What they do is they often privilege our emotional selves, and they speak very much to the emotion of a moment. And so, again, I think it's easy to get caught up in

that emotion. And again, it's sort of counter to this thoughtfulness and the slow engagement that we would endorse journalists to try to practice as much as possible.

So social media literacy is one kind of literacy journalists could think about. Another approach would be science literacy. So oftentimes, and this has happened really in my entire career as a journalist, oftentimes we'll take part of a scientific study, and we don't really give it the justice it deserves. And we may not understand the science behind the study that's being released, and therefore we do short shrift on the story. So there are a lot of important questions to ask, especially in the context of COVID right now, about any academic paper or any study that's released from scientists or researchers. So we want to know, is the article citing an academic paper? Does it have sites for multiple research on the findings? Preprints in research are often early stage science. And they make claims, but it has not been verified. So there are a necessary part of the process, but they are not the final truth on a particular issue. And often they have not been peer reviewed. So it's important to know at what stage is this research, and has it been peer reviewed? Has it been tested? If a finding has been peer reviewed, is there any information on the widespread replicability of the experiments? So even peer reviewed scientific work is often not easy to replicate, but it's important to know if this is just one particular study or other scientists in another part of the world have replicated the finding.

The third thing we did endorse is this idea of brain literacy. And brain literacy is having self awareness about your own state of mind and your own vulnerability to fraud and manipulation, when we read stories, when we read posts, when we view images. And if you think about the number of very emotionally charged images we've seen in the last few weeks, it's really quite remarkable. And so, again, as journalists, we don't want to get caught up in the sort of emotional moment and be persuaded by a photograph or a video and not necessarily have all the facts at hand, especially those with political implications. And I think this is going to just do nothing but increase over the next few months as we get closer to the election. So those are the three tips we suggest. And I'll wrap things up and be happy to take questions later.

Talia Stroud Thank you so much for that, Don. Super interesting tips there. Well, now turn it over to Cristina Tardáguila. She's associate director at Poynter's International Fact-Checking Network, and she'll be sharing with us information about cooperation among fact checkers and the Coronavirus Facts Alliance.

Cristina Tardáguila Well, so hello, everyone. I hope you can hear me and see me fine. Thanks a lot for the invitation. This is a great panel. I mean, I can't just believe it. I'm here. It's a great achievement for a fact-checker that comes from Brazil. And I want to say thank you again to my friend Rosental, another great Brazilian, and Don and Talia and Craig. I really admire you. It's been a long time and great to be in this panel.

Well, I want to say it was great to hear you Talia at the beginning, highlighting some of the vast work that has been done ICFN's members. You talked about, Chequeado. You talked about Full Fact. You talked about factcheck.org. And I would also like to say that there are some other interesting, very interesting, ways of spreading fact-checks around the world.

I just wrote a piece and published a piece about Congo Check. And I just wanted to highlight that they are just walking on the street and getting phone numbers to spread fact-checks through SMS because internet in the Congo is quite expensive, and people don't have that kind of chance to connect through Twitter, or WhatsApp, or Facebook. So they're getting SMS messages. So I just wanted to highlight the efforts that the community has

been doing around the world really is a really diverse kind of effort. So I really want to praise Congo Check for that.

And so I prepared myself to talk about the Coronavirus Fact Alliance. And because the question of this panel was what can we do beyond fact-checking? And I would say more fact-checking in a coordinated and cooperative way. And the best example that I can show you is, is some lessons that we have learned so far from this marathon that we have started to run on January 24. The Coronavirus Fact Alliance started to exist on January 24, when my friend Summer Chen, who is the editor at the Taiwan Fact Check Center, called me and said, "Hey, Cris, I think this weird virus that is popping up in China is going to cause some misinformation in the region, and I think it could be happening somewhere else. And would you mind calling others in the community and seeing if they also are seeing hoaxes about this so-called, at the time, Wuhan virus?" And I did. So I sent out an email. You are going to see on the slide. It was a simple email. By the time, 17 people had died and only 600 infected, and we thought those were big numbers. And we well, at least in 30 different organizations from the IFCN, answered my email saying, "Hey, we're seeing misinformation around this weird virus. And yes, we think we should collaborate."

So we thought at the beginning to tell you the truth, to be super honest, we thought that this alliance was going to be another one, just like the ones that we had done in political situations, just like the G20 alliances that we have done. Some alliances that we have done regionally when Guaido, for example, tried to take over the Venezuelan government. Or even last September when we had the United Nations General Assembly. What we do is we mainly fact-check our representatives, and then we share the claims. But we know with those events, they have a time frame. They start this day. The representative speaks in a certain moment. And it's kind of easy to know what they're going to say because they obviously prepare their speech, and we kind of know what they're about to say.

But then this pandemic just got us off guard. So now we have like 99 organizations, and you're going to see the growth of the alliance after five, six months. And we started like in four days, we had shared 20 fact-checks, and now we have more than 8,000. And we started, as I said, with 30 organizations, and now we are 99. And this means we're covering more than 70 countries, and we're checking content in more than 40 different languages. And, well, this number is gigantic, but they are not cool. They are the final proof that misinformation is a terrible fight. And they prove that fact checkers are needed, and they also prove that while we still need to work a lot more.

But we need to be faster, and we need to keep the precision. We would not be able to fact-check that content, that amount of content, by ourselves. If we didn't work together. If we weren't a collaboration, we would never, ever be able to build the database that we have now. It's available, as you can see on the screen now, it's available at Poynter.org, and the database is now serving not only as a place where people, anyone, can go and search and see if the content that they received is false, but also it has given birth to a database in Portuguese, a database in Spanish, a databases in Hindi. And also to chat bots, WhatsApp chat bots. I know WhatsApp is not very heavily used by English speakers in United States, but it's a big, big, big thing in the rest of the planet. So we managed to develop a chatbot that is fed by the database of fact-checks. So what that means is that people who speak Spanish, English, Hindi and Portuguese, they just need to talk to the bot and say, "Hi, hola, oi," or something else in Hindi that I can't say, and to ask the question about content regarding COVID, and they will get easy access to the database.

So nothing would be possible if the committee hadn't worked together and without losing precision. So I totally understand that Don said, just take your time, go slower, but at least from the fact-checking community when it comes to news events, we needed to work fast because misinformation was killing people actually. Right.

And I wanted to share with you also the infographics that were created. We created a bunch of infographics, and this is a way to connect with what Craig was saying, that we have to kind of understand how misinformation moves around the planet. So if you take a look at the infographics, you're going to see like the 5G conspiracy theory, where it popped up. So you could easily tell a story out of these images. You could see how many people around the planet believed or maybe shared about, I don't know, maybe "drink tea to get cured from COVID." So these are stories that are hidden inside the database.

And what I think is the most important and we're right now working on it is that fact-checking communities now adding researchers. So we're trying to collaborate not only among ourselves. But we have opened a call for papers, and then we now have a bunch of wonderful researchers that are going to take a deep dive into the database and tell good stories. And that fits perfectly with what Craig just said. We can't just stay in the unit of the fact-check because it seems like we will be doing this forever and ever and ever. So we have to work together. We have to be very, very fast when it comes to breaking news, without losing precision. We need to know that one organization here in the United States might not have the tools or the knowledge enough to debunk something that is in Chinese, so we can easily reach out to a Taiwanese fact-checking organization. Or if you are in Taiwan, maybe you need to fact-check something that is Italian, and you can reach out to an Italian organization and get that done very fast.

So we created like an international newsroom, and we work together. And then we're bringing now this new, let's say, new level of understanding, which is, I think, the most exciting part to see. And I really appreciate, and I really want to thank all the 99 organizations, and more than I think 165 checkers that have been connected to me and to Jules Darmanin in Paris, who is my partner in the coordination effort. And we've been doing the best we could, so I just want to say thanks to all these partners. I know you haven't slept much, but the work is seen worldwide. So thank you for the opportunity of thanking them.

Talia Stroud Thank you so much, Cristina. Fantastic to learn about the various efforts, including the cell phone effort there and the Coronavirus Facts Alliance. Thank you for that. And truly a pleasure to moderate this panel with all three of these people whose work and organizations have inspired my own teaching and research. So thank you so much for this opportunity. That concludes the recorded presentation portion of this, and we will now turn to a live Q&A.

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the Q&A portion of this panel. Delighted to see all of you. So we will be collecting questions from Zoom and from YouTube. And we won't have time to get through all of them, but we'll do our best. And to just get things started. I'll kick off with a question to all of our panelists. And my question to you would be, if you had unlimited time and money to investigate something related to fact-checking, what would you do?

Cristina Tardáguila I can do that if I can start. So first I would pay fact-checkers better, and I think the fact-checking community just loves me now. But anyway, I would probably try to get more transparency on the impact of our fact-checking because we don't know

where it goes and who reads it. We don't know much of that. So we don't know the size of the monster we are fighting against. We don't know how big it is. And if it's losing power, we don't know much about that. So I would spend money investigating that.

Don Heider I have a fantasy, and that is to be able to offer excellent context to every story. And I was talking a little bit in my taped presentation about trying to encourage slow thinking. Now when I say slow thinking, it comes from this idea of fast thinking and slow thinking. Where fast thinking sometimes is an emotional response to a story. Slow thinking, we're trying to rely more upon our rational tools that we have. So sometimes applying slow thinking to a story might mean taking five minutes to go to a fact-checking site, that might take another 10 minutes to make a phone call to verify something. So slow thinking doesn't have to mean a day, or a week, or a month. But I do think oftentimes when we see stories, we don't see enough context that help readers understand the history and background.

Craig Silverman I mean, I guess for me, I do think the impact piece that Cristina mentioned is really important. Because there is more research being done than ever before, which is great. But I mean, there's still a bit of fumbling around in the dark that we're all kind of doing of what is the best way to present a fact-check? How do we actually convince and persuade people? I mean, the act of sort of checking this stuff, for example, for Facebook so they can reduce the reach of something, that's a concrete impact that's specifically tied to Facebook. But we still don't know yet about the flags, and the labels, and the way that the fact-checkers produce our content, and how people consume that. So I think that's really important.

The other one that I would just note, I think messaging apps are really important, and it's very hard to know exactly how content is moving across them. They are a black box, a very black box, in the sea of other black boxes. In terms of in other cases, it's algorithms, but with them it's because they're designed to be private. We know so little about the origins of content and how many people have seen a piece of content in that kind of thing. So I think continued research on messaging apps and understanding more about how content flows within them and how people perceive content within their messaging app groups are probably two really important related areas for fact-checking.

Talia Stroud And a great transition to some of the questions that we're receiving. The first one is when does a fact-check override an opinion?

Cristina Tardáguila So let me see if I understood that correctly, because that might look like a question to the fact-checkers that are working for Facebook, right?

Talia Stroud I think it's meant to be quite general about when. The full comment I will share is, "When fact-check override an opinion? Just last week and this week, reports have surfaced about Facebook having removed the false rating on a climate change article. Scientists are upset with Facebook. The platform seems to argue the false claims made in the checked article are allowed under opinion." So you're absolutely going down the right path there.

Cristina Tardáguila I could see that controversy coming up. OK, so this is a great discussion. And fact-checkers will always push platforms to allow us to fact-check more and more and more. We want to flag everything that's there as false, or true, or exaggerated. But we do understand, we do have to acknowledge, that an opinion is something that people are allowed to have. But it's quite weird when people say, well, my

opinion is that the earth is flat. So it's really tough. What is the limit between an opinion that is, you can clearly accept and let it be, from an opinion that is just like, I think, the sky's pink. So I would love to hear that the two panelists too? What do you guys? What should we do? Should we keep pressuring a platform to allow us to debunk those stupid, crazy opinions?

Craig Silverman I mean, specific to this one, you know, the original article that ended up being fact-checked, it was an article that presented itself as really listing facts about climate change. And so for me, it was like the framing of this opinion piece was like, "Hey, here are some surprising facts about climate change or that kind of thing." The framing of it was very much in I'm going to give you factual information. And yes, I'm coming from a point of view, but here I'm going to lay out a specific bunch of claims. And obviously that's catnip to a fact-checker. It's like, "Oh, you would like to make a list of claims? I would like to check those claims." Right. And so I do think in that case, it was completely justified to have it checked. This is someone who had sort of placed this op-ed to forward their argument that they're making in a book. And so I think that was a completely legitimate one to check. Now, if somebody is writing like a long essay making an argument or something like that, that is really coming from a place of opinion, and it has a couple of mistaken factual errors in it, I guess a bit less in that case, because it's a preponderance of claims of which maybe there are a couple that are false. And so, I mean, I think this goes to one of the tricky parts of doing the work, which is that there are clear cut things that are easy to deal with, and then there are things that are going to go on the line.

And as I said in my presentation, a lot of people are realizing that they need to create these sort of mix scenarios or walk right up to the line so that they can make an argument that they shouldn't be checked. And I think there was a concerted effort in this case to say this is the kind of thing that should not be checked, and the argument is being made because they know it'll be quite effective for their point of view if they can make sure that this kind of thing isn't checked. And we have to be aware of people trying to game the system and work the refs when it comes to this stuff.

Don Heider I think op-eds are fair game to be fact-checked. I can't imagine trying to write an opinion piece that doesn't make some fact claims. And once you do that, I think it's fair game for fact-checking.

Cristina Tardáguila Don, I'm taking that back to Facebook. I like the way you said it, and yeah, cool.

Don Heider I'll stand behind it.

Talia Stroud And Don, continuing with a question for you, a commenter asks, "How can we encourage more journalists and fact-checkers to use truth sandwiches?" So I'll turn it to Don and any other panelists.

Don Heider Well, we can praise them whenever they do. That would be a good way. I just think we're living in an era where, again, there's tremendous pressure to use social media to get information out quickly. And so, unfortunately, what that does at times is it takes out the fact-checking, the verifying part of the story. I don't think it has to. So I think if you're covering a story, if you're covering a news conference, for instance, and a politician or official makes a statement, which you know to be factually inaccurate, or even in the couple of minutes you're sitting there listening, you can check the facts on it. I think to just pass on that information, which you know is false, is in my view, it's irresponsible. So I love

this idea of giving some context to the statement, giving this statement, and then again, giving the facts that might contradict the statement. So I don't know how we can incentivize it except for to praise good behavior and to call out journalists when they're not behaving quite so well.

Talia Stroud And Craig and Cristina, I don't know if you have anything to add?

Craig Silverman I mean, one quick thing I would add is that, yes, I do think you have to reinforce. One thing we should realize is the vast majority of journalists have no idea what a truth sandwich is at this point in time. Right. For those of us in this niche world who are passionate about this stuff, we are evangelizing the truth sandwich and trying to practice it. But there is an education component here. So how do we get more journalists to do it? They have to know about it in the first place. And they have to understand the risks of perpetuating false claims, and not framing them with the proper context, and not taking care to indiscriminately amplify false or misleading claims. And so I think the first step is the education piece. So that means journalism schools. That means newsrooms. That means thinking about ways of getting this knowledge out there, because it just isn't right now is the truth of the matter. And that's one of the fundamental challenges we have of this but also with some of the techniques around fact-checking, around verification, there's still not as widespread in newsrooms as they should be.

Cristina Tardáguila And Talia, just a quick thought is, well, I'm Brazilian, as you all know. And in Brazil, fact-checkers get attacked because they don't put in the headline that somebody lied. We don't use the word "lie." And we try to explain that, well, we don't use that because you don't know the intention, and lying means the intention to fool somebody, at least in Portuguese. And we use "it's a false sentence." "It's exaggerated information." And we get attacked because it's like we are protecting somebody. So we are so far behind in the discussion. There's so much to be taught and learned. I wish we could hear some from Don back in Brazil. I really appreciate that.

Talia Stroud And kind of continue along these lines of thinking about how different formats work, we have a question who says, "If you want to rate different formats that fact-checking can be given in, how would you do that?"

Cristina Tardáguila Well, I think right now, it depends on the platform that you are working on. Don't try to post a one hour video on WhatsApp. That's not going to work. You have to be very fast. Like I would say, a quick image would work just fine. Because depending on the country where you are, you only need a little bit of data to make the image pop up in front of you with whatever needs to be fact-checked. But if you are on YouTube, maybe you're working with a a long video that has to be balanced like the pandemic video, then you might need to do a really long video, detailed piece to get on YouTube. If you are dealing with some misinformation on TikTok, maybe you need to be fun. So it depends on what is the misinformation, and where you're posting it. Right.

Talia Stroud Don and Craig, anything to add?

Craig Silverman I mean, I just think that's the right thing. You got to match it to the platform, to the medium, that you're dealing with. I think there has been some research that suggests that representing things visually using data may be effective with people, but I don't know that that's 100% conclusive. So think about what people are consuming on the platform where it originated and where you're trying to put that back out, and matching those things together is probably the right way to do it.

Talia Stroud And we've been talking here a little bit about using some of these strategies like video or audio to share the truth, but a question here is how can fact-checkers best address video and audio content that is emerging in real time with the intent to deceive? So kind of the opposite side of this coin.

Cristina Tardáguila I think audio is going to be the next thing, at least from from countries where WhatsApp is big, and this really terrifies me personally. And the fact-checking community, at least in LatAm, we have had the experience from Chequeado working with a forensic tool to get how the voice of the person who is being accused of saying this and that in a recording that travels fast on WhatsApp. This is going to be so hard and maybe really expensive for fact-checkers. So I'm really, really worried about how misinformers will use audio. So let's say somebody impersonating Trump says something like, "Well, I live in the White House. I am a Republican. I was elected in 2016, and I will not run for reelection." And sounds just like him on a WhatsApp audio. Would we have fact-checkers to fast enough debunk that information? This is so tough. I don't really know if the fact-checking community is ready. Do you think so, Craig?

Craig Silverman I mean, so one of the good pieces of news about it. So I agree with you that there's a first mover, there's a liars dividend, an opportunity for them. If they produce something that's convincing enough, they own the space for a little bit, while the fact-checkers have to figure out how to respond. And always, I think the first thinking about this is, "OK, well, we need to get better at forensics around audio and video, hopefully more tools. We need to have education in newsrooms." I think those things are true, and they're hard. And as you said, they can be expensive. The other piece about it, particularly when it comes to video, is that, you know, the video is going to have a location, or it's going to have an image of someone in it. It's going to have artifacts and things that aren't technical that you can look at. And the absence of things like the date and the location, of this is spreading, but there's no clear date. There's no clear location. The person that this video is supposedly of has been here all day. When could this video have been shot? So I think we do need to think one about the preparation and the training piece of it. But also, we should remember that some of our fundamental verification and checking skills about figuring out provenance, date, location, all those things still apply. And we shouldn't always worry about the technical gap because the simple question of, "OK, if this is a video Trump or an audio of Trump, when was it recorded? Where? What is Trump's office say about it?" And so I think what we're looking at is them trying to seize upon that early advantage and seed some doubt, and they may have some wins with that. But then the challenge for us becomes like, how do we push back effectively? And this is where I think some of the work with some of the projects around messaging apps has been interesting, where trying to actually reach back to people who submitted to you saying, "Hey, I received this, can you check it?" And sending it back to them saying, "No, this is either unconfirmed, or it's false," and getting them to actually help the network effect move. I almost wonder if that's one of the biggest gaps we have is how do we actually push that network back? Because Talia at the top talked about the engagement for the lie and the challenge we have in kind of reaching the similar amount. So I think that's a challenge with audio and video. They're shareable. They're digestible. Once we figured out what's going on with it, how do we also reach the people? That's, I think, a big challenge as well.

Don Heider We're a part of the Partnership on AI, on artificial intelligence, which is an industry and a bunch of NGOs working together to deal with a lot of the concerns about AI. And one group in particular is working on synthetic audio and video. And I'll tell you with my limited experience, I think false video and audio from public officials is going to be the

easiest thing to verify. What scares me more are fabricated video from, let's say, a demonstration or something on the street, which is much more difficult to verify. For instance, if you take video from the BBC or from a bona fide news organization, it may have markings, as Craig mentioned, so there's a way forensically you can identify it. But video shot on somebody's camera and then altered is a much more sticky issue, I think.

Cristina Tardáguila I just wanted to bring something that Craig said. Back in time, I was not comfortable saying. I'm a fact checker. I have to say that something is either true or false. And since COVID started and the alliance was around, I've become more comfortable saying this is just not confirmed. And this is something that we have to be prepared. I think the amount of information that is disinformation or misinformation that's coming up is so big, and we don't have as many fact-checkers as the planet needs. And we need to be ready to say, "Hey, do not share, because it's still unconfirmed. This isn't our line. We will get to that. But for now, it's unconfirmed." So it gives fact-checkers some time to breathe, at least, and time also to say, "Please do not share while we are trying to confirm." So this is something that I needed to bring here.

Talia Stroud Super interesting. We're getting a number of questions with proposed solutions to this issue. I'm going to try to lump a bunch of them together in the interest of time. And so we have questions here. "At this point there are very few fact-checking media outlets. Will we get to a point where every news outlet must have a fact-checking team. And how far are we?" We have another question saying, "We would like to know what your opinion is about Sleeping Giants and how society can think about this?" And we have another who says, "Do you think that blocking or canceling social network accounts is a solution currently acceptable in a democratic society?" And so I'll kind of lump those together. And one more here who says, "It's a little bit beyond fact-checking, but how do you guys see the efforts of public police makers in reducing this information today?" So maybe each of you can take a stab at one or several of those, but they all strike me as ones that have a potential solution or a potential way to address this that maybe we could think about. Don, do you want to start us off with some subset of that? Again, we won't be able to address all of them in all likelihood. But if there's one of those that really speaks to you.

Don Heider I'll grab on to Sleeping Giants. I think it's an interesting movement to see advertisers and companies put pressure on social media companies to try to do the right thing, especially in terms of campaign advertisements. So to me, it's an encouraging movement that companies are basically taking a stand on this and saying, "We don't want our advertising going to a platform that's not willing to try to verify and also get rid of this information that's being spread."

Cristina Tardáguila Talia, there was one question about policymakers. OK, that one I can take, because tomorrow being the Brazilian Congress, talking about a law against misinformation in Brazil. We from the IFCN, we think that misinformation is not something that you can solve with a pen, and not with a bill. And so it's quite clear, and I go back to Don's presentation, you do not try to solve complex issues by simplifying it. And since we don't have a definition of what fake news is or what misinformation is, you cannot regulate something like that. So which brings us to this huge, huge problem that is we will not find one solution that is simple, and it will pop up from one day to the other for this huge, complex thing that is been taking us so much time, and is around for at least, what? I've been doing, fact-checking since 2013. So it's taking up my life for the last seven years. We will not change that with one policy from one platform in one country. This is not going to happen. So let's drop this idea of let's fix things with a bill or a law or whatever. It's not

going to happen like that. We need to be a lot smarter, and we need to use our time in a more efficient way. And as I proposed in my presentation, let's work together. Let's bring researchers, teachers. Let's bring platforms. Let's bring fact-checkers together. We will not win this fight by ourselves.

Craig Silverman So I think there were two remaining ones there. One was about how do we sort of get more fact-checkers? And then the other one was about, is there a tension between blocking and removing accounts and democratic values? And I'll take the last one first. You know, the reality is that these platforms we're talking about, Facebook and WhatsApp, owned by the same company, YouTube, these are all platforms owned by private companies. And they set terms of service, and you agree to those terms of service to create an account and use it. And if you violate it, then you do lose your right to be on that service. And that's a very simplistic explanation of it in that I don't think it's anti-democratic that they can create something and set some rules of the road for it. And that's a good thing if you want to foster a good community. The challenge, of course, is what are the rules that they have made? Do they align with democratic principles? Are they being forced to have rules and anti-democratic countries that are not aligned with that, even though these are companies based largely in the United States? And are they consistent in applying their rules? Are they doing what they say they will to people on an equal basis? And these are huge challenges. And even Facebook itself, I think, has gotten to the point of being like, how can we offload this? Because this is a nightmare. We just want to sell ads and make money. And all of a sudden it's like we're a proxy for democracy in countries around the world. And so they created this external oversight board. They're trying to offload, I think, as much of the pain and responsibility as they can. But I don't think in its essence is anti-democratic, but it certainly can turn out that way. And we've seen some of the extreme things that can happen.

Second one quickly on how do we get more fact checkers? Well, the challenge that I think Cristina talked about earlier is there's a financial challenge here of who is going to pay for them, and how do we make sure that fact-checking is actually a sustainable thing, that the people doing the work are compensated and want to stay, so we don't lose expertise all the time. And right now, the only answer to that is, primarily right now, is Facebook, opening its pocketbook to pay for fact-checkers around the world, which, as I said in my presentation, has a lot of great things about it, but can also have some downsides and things we need to be careful about. And so thinking about the sustainability of fact-checking and how we spread these skills into newsrooms. I don't think every reporter who does this kind of work needs to be labeled a fact-checker. I do think these skills need to be widespread in newsrooms so that people on different beats don't accidentally spread misinformation and disinformation, can apply these kinds of approaches, so that in a sense, every journalist has the foundational skills of being a fact-checker without necessarily having to be hired in that role. So I think that's one way to scale it is to not only have fact-checkers thinking about this stuff and having these skills, but to actually get it integrated into newsrooms on a much bigger scale.

Cristina Tardáguila And just to add one thing. We are underdeveloped. I don't even know if that expression is correct in English, but we really need to have fact-checking as something that is taught in schools. In Brazil, we have 50 fact-checkers for a population that is 200-million people. Not even if I stayed up the entire night, that doesn't match. So why not having teachers teaching in high schools and universities simple techniques, and you don't even need to be in communication. You can be an engineer and also a fact-checker. And you can be a doctor and also a fact-checker. There is so much misinformation in any single area. It would be so helpful.

Talia Stroud As an educator who was passionate about fact-checking, I just endorse that wholeheartedly. We have a couple of folks that have some questions that are a bit critical of the fact-checking enterprise, and I want to offer these to you. "Who checks the fact-checkers and how?" And then we have one who says, "Today there are many bad actors around disinformation campaigns, and they're so massive. Aren't fact-checkers and verification techniques kind of giving more heads to the Hydra? How can we change that?"

Cristina Tardáguila Okay, I'll take the first one because I've been answering that for my entire life. It's quite easy, and the answer is you. Every fact-check comes with a bunch of hyperlinks, and if it's not online, if it's television or radio, it will come with all the sources. And you should be able to track down the source of information. Fact check the fact check. And if it doesn't, it means either this organization is not a member of the IFCN, or it hasn't been certified by our assessment process. So the second level is, if you're not happy with the fact-check, you can always come to the IFCN and complain officially. And the IFCN has a very tough process of analyzing each unit, each fact-checking unit that has applied for a membership at the IFCN, and we will analyze that complaint. It's quite easy to fact check a fact check.

Talia Stroud Don, any thoughts on fact-checkers and verification techniques giving more heads to the hydra?

Don Heider I don't think it is. I mean, I think we're in a war of sorts. And if you think of the people who are out to spread misinformation, they have tremendous resources, tremendous technology and a lot of cunning on their side. And so I think it's all hands on deck. I think from citizens, to fact-checkers, to journalists, to people who have area expertise, it's going to take everyone battling this information for us to try to get at what is true and what is completely fabricated for nefarious means.

Talia Stroud Thanks for that great. Craig, did you want to add?

Craig Silverman I mean, I think the one risk that we think a lot about in this field is unintentional amplification. And so I don't think it's about necessarily the techniques or things like that. It's a question of, "OK, I see this thing. It's false. It's only been shared by 50 people. I can't find variations of it. It seems like its distribution has been small. Do I do a fact-check debunking it or not?" And that is where there's the potential danger, where just to have something to do, to have something to check or to meet a quota for a funder, fact-checkers may feel an incentive to actually check stuff. And that's a scenario where we unintentionally, in the act of knocking something down, we're actually going to give more people exposure to it. They're like, "Well, I haven't seen that. And now this claim is in my head." And there is some psychological research that over time we can lose the context of information that we have. And if we're going to put something in someone's head, they may not always remember that we were debunking it for them. So I think that's the one thing that everyone in the community talks a lot about and worries about. And we should. And again, it's hard because there's no one threshold. We just have to make judgment calls. And that's where sometimes you can be right, and maybe sometimes you regret that. "Oh, maybe I engaged with this one earlier than I should have."

Cristina Tardáguila This is such a this is such a good point, Craig, because this this reminds me of two things. One, the day I decided not to fact-check a piece of content that was like very small, saying that by drinking pure alcohol, you could get the cure from COVID. And then like five days later, some 200 Iranians were killed or poisoned. And like I

went so crazy, like, "Oh, my God, I did not fact-check that." I felt so, so guilty. And and I kept saying, "Oh, my, if I had done that would I had somehow prevent their death?" It's a bit crazy. I know. But it happened. And then on the other hand, what is going on right now. And I'm very happy to share this with you, and I would love to hear your thoughts. I was just in another chat discussing should we start now advising people about the misinformation that is already starting to pop up against the COVID vaccine? Or is this conversation something that we should avoid until the vaccine is already here? Because the misinformation is already popping up, so what do we do? Do we talk about the misinformation that is already popping up here and there? Or do we wait until this is amazing and big to actually talk about it? When do we start talking about it?

Don Heider I think you start now. I think because you don't want a wave to grow of, again, of discontent over it, and then by the time a vaccine is developed and released, you know, a lot of people are very suspicious. I think you start when the disinformation starts.

Talia Stroud We have only a short amount of time left here, and this past conversation here in particular has been really fascinating as you're wrestling live in this conversation with what to do next, which is fantastic. So I want to offer each of you in our one minute left a chance to offer one sentence of what you want people to take away. What message do you want them to leave with from your presentation? Craig, if it's all right, can I start with you?

Craig Silverman I have one sentence. What I would say is let's think beyond just checking claims and how we attack the source of misinformation and disinformation, and really start to bring down the supply so that it is not as pervasive.

Talia Stroud I love it. Don?

Don Heider I'd say a good short thought to leave people with is this idea of research and understand what the truth sandwich is. That we don't just pass on claims from politicians or officials or anyone. That we, first of all, check the facts behind the claim, and then we provide that information before and after we pass on what they said.

Talia Stroud And what a what a catchy title. Cristina?

Cristina Tardáguila So my message would be to not attack the messenger. Attack the message. We have been working so hard and in a collaborative way, we haven't slept. We haven't seen our family and friends. We are doing our best to give you health information. So it's not about politics. So please praise the 99 organizations from the Coronavirus Facts Alliance. Thank you.

Talia Stroud Fantastic. We'll do this in a Zoom way. Please join me in thanking all of our panelists so much for this really fascinating discussion. For those of you who contributed questions and for those of you who are listening in, I hope you have a great rest of your day, and thank you.

Rosental Alves Thank you. Thank you so much. This has been really fascinating. You know, it's almost like seeing something that is building up, and people are thinking about solutions. So it was really a great way of ending a great day of ISOJ 2020.

I want to take a moment to give an incredibly huge thank you to our sponsors. Thanks to the Knight Foundation, Google, Microsoft, Univision, JSK fellowships at Stanford, the Trust Project and the Moody College of Communication for your contributions and support.

I am really happy you all have joined us today. I encourage you to come back tomorrow talking about misinformation and disinformation. We're going to have another fascinating session tomorrow about how journalists can find stories and misinformation in TikTok. TikTok has been growing so fast, and I think that's going to be interesting. But we're going to start with Emily Ramshaw and Amanda Zamora talking about the 19th, which is going to be fantastic also. And we're going to have solutions journalism. And I'm missing one, but anyway, look at the ISOJ.org for tomorrow's program.

So thank you very much to the panelists. Thank you, Talia, Cris, and Craig, and Don. It was a pleasure. Bye bye.