

26th ISOJ Fact-Checking in Journalism During Times of Platform-Enabled Mis/Disinformation

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Lucas Graves Hi, everyone. Hi, everyone, and welcome to Fact Checking Journalism in Times of Platform-Enabled Mis- and Dis-information, which I think you'll agree is probably the most unwieldy title that we've seen so far. I want to suggest a simpler one, which is a little depressing, and that's just "Hard Times for Fact Checkers." So fact checkers have been facing, really, a perfect storm of challenges around the world and in the United States. And we're going to talk about those today after I introduce the panelists.

But at the risk of bumming everybody out, I thought it was important to mention just a couple of the major challenges that we'll be thinking about. So one, as I know most of you know, you know, late last year Mark Zuckerberg announced, as the Trump administration was taking office, that Meta was going to end its fact-checking partnerships in the United States, and probably, we expect, around the world. This has been a hugely important program for fact-checkers, not only in terms of funding, but also in terms of impact. It's one of the main ways that they're able to make a difference in the world, so that's one of the things that we're going to talk about. Meanwhile, fact checkers also have come under political attack, again, in the United States, but also around the world. Sometimes that's from online trolls, sometimes it's physical harassment, and increasingly in many cases, we're seeing interference from the state. So actually, just last month, in Serbia, authorities citing as justification rhetoric from Elon Musk and Donald Trump, raided the offices of a major fact checker there called Istinomer and their parent organization. So that's very concerning. And all of this, of course, is against the backdrop of changing news habits that make it harder for fact checkers and for other journalists to reach the audiences that they need to reach. So I'm just going to quote a couple of statistics from the most recent Reuters Institute report. So in 2024, news avoidance, meaning people who sometimes or often avoid the news, reached a new high on average across all of the countries that they cover of 40 percent. So 40 percent globally were saying that they're news avoiders in some cases. Meanwhile, trust in news also fell to one of its lowest levels, certainly much lower than a decade ago with, again, 40% of people globally, only 40% of people globally, saying that they trust most news most of the time, and the figure is actually a lot lower in the three countries that are represented on the on the panel here: the US, Spain, and in Argentina. There was some good news in that report, which is that the same research shows that people have a lot of difficulty deciding what's real and what's fake on the internet. They want help doing that, and also that they value news organizations that are transparent, that have high standards, and that are fair. And I think that's a really good description of the three organizations that are represented here today.

So I'm just going to introduce them quickly, and we'll dive right in. So immediately to my right is Clara Jiménez Cruz, who's the co-founder and head of Maldita.es in Spain. And also the founding chair of the European Fact Checking Standards Network. And then, skipping over to the end is Laura Zommer, who's the former head of Chequeado in Argentina, but is now the head and co-founder, also with Clara, of Fact Chequeando,

which is a Spanish language fact checking service in the United States. And in the middle here we have Glenn Kessler, who will be familiar to many of you as the longtime resident fact checking columnist, The Fact Checker, at the Washington Post. That's a position he's had since 2011. And before that, he was a national and international affairs reporter.

So I'm really excited to hear what this amazing panel has to say about these challenges, and about solutions, and how fact checking can meet the moment. I did want to start by covering the elephant in the room, which is Meta's retreat from fact checking in favor of the community notes model used on X, which Mark Zuckerberg justified by calling fact checkers biased. It's really hard to overstate the significance of this, but I'd love to hear each of your thoughts, including yours, Glenn, even though the Washington Post did not participate in that program. I'd like to hear your thoughts about what this means. Do you assume, should we assume that this is going to spread to the rest of the world? You know, when do we think that'll happen? And most important, what are the consequences for fact checking and for the public? And why don't we start with you, Clara.

Clara Jiménez Cruz So, I think we have enough information to say that this will expand to the rest of the world. I think it's important to note that the Meta fact checking program was a program that added context, and not censorship anyone's content. What it did was fact checkers could label content with the evidence to back that up, so with the evidence to be able to say that something was false, so that whenever a user ran into it, they would have the context that an independent fact checker would tell them, "Hey, be careful with this." That said, I think this is going to have direct impacts to the users. We're going to see more of this information on the platform that is not being tagged. Luckily enough, I come from the European Union, and Meta is, among other platforms, obliged on what is called risk mitigation measures that they take to fight disinformation. So things that Meta program has done so far that we don't know if they'll continue to do, is it scales our work. There are 50 fact checkers across the European continent that tagged in the first half of 2024, 199,000 pieces of content, and that meant that 31 million posts were tagged or rated as false, and that prevented millions and millions of Europeans from being deceived by that content. So it's a matter of scalability for our work. It also enables us to be able to monitor disinformation campaigns, and for example, the doppelganger campaign in Germany, which is Russian propaganda cloning Western media outlets was exposed because the Meta program existed, among other foreign interference campaigns that we've seen throughout the European Union. And thirdly is the funding, and the funding is important. 20 million euros a year coming through the Meta program only for the European fact-checkers, and the ending of that means the loss of 250 jobs, the downsize of every other fact-checking organization across the continent, and the closure of 12 organizations. And that is only the European Union, which by the way has European Union money to survive, which is not the same for the Global South in this situation.

Glenn Kessler I think from my perspective, since we were not part of the Meta program, Meta was really significant for the growth of fact checking across the world. Right now there are probably almost 20 fact checking organizations in India. I don't know if that would be possible if it were not with the money that Meta was providing. I always had a bit of a sinking fear that we were, in the fact checking community, we were relying too much on one organization to sustain fact checking. It certainly was helpful. It certainly spread fact checking around the globe, but it also shows how you can be subject to the whims of a billionaire. I mean if you read the letter that Mark Zuckerberg wrote, you would think he didn't really know what the fact checking program was, because what he described had literally nothing to do with the fact-checking program.

Laura Zommer Just adding to that, I think as fact checkers, we need to be clear in terms of Mark Zuckerberg is clearly lying, and he knows that. And the reason why he's lying is because he can't say to the public or the user in the platform that he decides to prioritize his business and align with Donald Trump government to continue doing business. And then being clear on that, can make us arrive to possible impacts of this decision beyond fact checkers. What is happening now, and what they are telling us is that the platform are not any longer looking for neutrality. They are not going to do that. And they are pretty clear. Then, what can we do? Clara mentioned what happened in Europe, being and disclosing that Factchequeado never received money from Meta. We used to receive and together receive money from Meta in Latin America, and in Latin America there are different fact-checkers receiving and being part of that program that suffered in the last eight years a lot of wrath and threats because the company never be enough explicit about how the program works. And basically, as Clara said, what the third party fact checking in Meta does is contribute to fact checkers to reach the people that we need to reach. We know that in lots of cases, conversations from informed citizens and journalists are not the same that conversation from other people that we want to reach. And what this program allowed us is they are giving us funds, but they are also giving us the chance to knock the door of that people that are not coming to our website or social media accounts. And that distribution is what we are losing.

Lucas Graves If I could have a quick follow-up. Can I have a follow- up?

Laura, just to follow up, Mark Zuckerberg and others also argued that in fact, the program wasn't effective, that it wasn't scalable, right? That fact checkers could never keep up with the vast volumes of misinformation that were online. Is there any truth in that, but also, you know, what would a better designed partnership look like? How can fact checkers meet that challenge?

Laura Zommer Yeah, what we always, in the fact-checking movement, we always discuss about this statement on scalability, saying the reason why the scale was that one and not other one is because the company decided to pay fact-checkers for a number of pieces a month, no more than that. They never allowed, for example, Chequeado in Argentina to upload in the platform, paid, more than 40 contents a month. If they were open to pay for 1,000 a month, we were able to produce that with a bigger team to track that. It's not a model or workflow that can allow us to scale. It's that they didn't want in the past, and they don't want now, to invest on fighting disinformation. Because disinformation gives them money and disinformation is part of their business.

Lucas Graves Clara, you started to mention this, but as soon as Meta made that announcement, a lot of eyes turned to the EU, certainly mine did, as kind of the last best hope for an institution that could stand up to the platforms and require some form of rigorous anti-disinformation efforts, hopefully including fact-checking partnerships. What do you expect in that regard from your perch as the chair of the EFCSN? And what will it depend on? What should we be looking for to know if they'll retreat there as well or not?

Clara Jiménez Cruz So I think we all know that the world has changed dramatically since January. And one of the things that have happened is that those policy discussions that had to do on how to tackle disinformation within Europe have been totally unbalanced by the threats that the US government has thrown towards the EU if they decide to fine companies for their disinformation distribution. Explicitly X, because there is already an investigation open against it, but also any other platforms, because the threat that the US government is throwing is we will leave NATO if you fine our technological platforms for disinformation distribution. And the EU cannot afford right now to lose the US from NATO

given the Ukrainian situation. So crazy world, the one we live in right now. I think my personal feeling is that I doubt that the EU is going to act upon that threat, so I doubt they're actually going to pursue those fines. I do think that nevertheless there is a law in place, which is the Digital Services Act, and laws in Europe are enforced no matter what because there are judges that will enforce them anyways, not only the European Commission. So what I see happening is that companies and Meta in 2026 will do a risk mitigation assessment in which they will say that they're going to mitigate this information with something else other than fact checkers. And we need to see how the commission acts upon that, and we need to provide enough research to actually prove that community notes, as we've seen anywhere else out of the U.S., are simply not enough. Because when you look at all the data of community notes across every language across the globe, there are countries in which there are 250 community notes proposed a year. And that is really not scalable for fighting this information.

Lucas Graves And isn't it the case, also, that a study that Maldita just did showed that community notes could be a lot better if it incorporated fact checking, and that in fact, community notes that do incorporate fact checking tend to be liked more by the community of community notes makers?

Clara Jiménez Cruz Yeah, what we found is that they reach consensus quicker, they are proposed and approved quicker than any other note, and that fact checkers are the third source using community nodes behind X posts themselves and Wikipedia, which talks a lot about the kind of the work fact checkers do towards the public, and the trust that the public actually still has in fact check.

Lucas Graves So before we leave the subject of the platform companies, Glenn, I'll direct this question to you, but I'd love to hear anybody weigh in who wants to, do you worry that we're entering a world now where major globe-spanning platform companies systematically favor particular candidates or parties, you know, their allies in different countries? And if so, what can fact checkers do in such a world?

Glenn Kessler Well, yes, we've already entered that world. I mean, the X platform is a 24-7 propaganda channel for the Trump administration and whatever Elon Musk deems is important to him. And it's very difficult to be on X without seeing that kind of content, and I'm not entirely sure what you can do to combat that. I mean, what I've always said to people is that you are the master of the content that you see. And you, whenever I talk to college students and high school students, I say, diversify your social media feed and make sure you see people from the left as well as the right, and you get a nuanced perspective. But the way these algorithms are developed, increasingly, it's very hard to filter out stuff that's inaccurate and false, and at this point, fact-checking organizations don't have the foothold to kind of combat that in a way that would make people more informed.

Laura Zommer I'm going to bring some hope, or try to. I think, obviously, everyone, not just Factchequeado, have a challenge that is distribution now. And there's, at least for me and the operation that we are doing in Factchequeado, two ways to avoid paying the social or the big text to show our content. And the reason why, at least in the US, I don't feel like I can continue paying ads to Meta is because they are biased, and they are explicit on that. And the two ways are, in a way, back to the origins, and it's what we've been discussing during other panels, which is audience and community-centered and listen and have a direct relation, and at least in the model of the Spanish speakers media, WhatsApp is still a way to do it, where you can have conversation one to one. And I'm saying till now

because we know Meta is going to make us pay for that conversations. And then go to the regions and connect with people everywhere that you can connect. Partner with others, and that others are not other media necessarily, but everyone that is helping that communities. Again, I go to the Factchequeado model because it's the one that I'm leading now, but is partnering with civic organization, or health centers, or organization serving and helping these communities to have a better life because they are all trusting messengers that can contribute to spread our content, and they can benefit spreading our content. And the other way is I decide not to pay any longer the big techs, but to pay influencers. They are following the logic of the algorithm, and I prefer at least to split the power with some of them and not contribute into the concentration of the big tech. And I know probably there are people in the room that don't agree with this, and five years ago in Chequado I was pretty sure that I'm never going to pay an influencer to do this, now, I think that is the better scenario to have the impact and reach the people that I want to reach. I don't want just to reach the people that are already convinced about the benefits of democracy. I want the reach the other.

Lucas Graves Clara, I'm going to pull you into this question because it just occurs to me that one of the things that Maldita does, that it's always specialized in, is not only sort of fact checking every individual claim, but then aggregating those claims and analyzing them to uncover sort of what are the narratives that are spreading from country to country, how are those narratives changing over time, and sometimes even what is the origin of those narratives, right, which accounts are driving them, and so on. So is that also part of the formula for helping to keep platforms accountable as democratic spaces, where ideally something resembling democratic discourse can still take place?

Clara Jiménez Cruz I think that we tend to imagine fact checking in a very narrow way of rating true or false across specific contents. And I do think that what fact checkers do is much more, we recollect all that data so that it can afterwards be analyzed by researchers, by policymakers, by the people having to make the decisions, and by ourselves. And what we do in Maldita is we extract out of all the data that we collect of information not only in Spain but also in other countries through our partners, and we extract the narratives that are driving that conversation to be able to know when this information campaign is being targeted at specific audiences across different languages in Europe, for example. That collection of data, again, gives us, on the one side, the ability to tell the general public how disinformation is being targeted at them and how it can be affecting their own biases or their decision-making. But also, it enables us to make platforms accountable on how they are not handling those disinformation campaigns. And I think we've been talking a lot about Meta here and about X, but I think we need to understand that we see huge disinformation campaigns being run on YouTube, and YouTube doing nothing about it. And we've started seeing, and I think the US is a very good example for this, a lot of this information being run and making money on Spotify through podcasts, and nothing has been done about that either.

Laura Zommer The same happened with TikTok. TikTok has enormous campaign of disinformation as well.

Lucas Graves So just to keep things light, let's talk about some of the political challenges that fact checkers are facing in the US and elsewhere. It's not only fact checkers, and of course journalists who are under attack, but it's also many of the institutions that they work with and depend on, right, from sort of public agencies, public health agencies, to universities, to other news organizations, watchdog groups, civil society, et cetera. So I'd love to hear each of you talk about sort of how that affects your work, and one of the things

that's always really fascinated me about fact checking, is how fact checkers work with outside experts, how they work with, you know, outside decision-making bodies. So, flesh that out for us a little bit, and then talk about sort of what you do in an environment where the credibility of some of those outside institutions is also being challenged.

Glenn Kessler Yeah, I guess I'll start. So I used to go around the world and train fact checkers in countries that did not have a robust tradition of democracy. And I would always have a line where I'd say, "In the US, we're very lucky we have access to solid, detailed information from the US government that we can trust. And this is something that you don't have in your country. Hopefully you will develop that, but it puts me at a relative advantage compared to you, a beginning fact-checker." What we're now seeing under this administration is a systematic assault on the basic data that helps inform reporting, helps inform fact checking. And just as a small example, earlier this year when the US government decided to terminate all funding for the US Agency for International Development, USAID, just at the very moment they terminated all that funding, they wiped away all the websites having to do with USAID. And then they went out and said, for instance, the USAID was giving \$50 million to Hamas for condoms, which on the face of it seems a little absurd, but it was said by the press secretary at the White House. Traditionally, I would have, you know, checked, like, okay, how much money did USAID spend on condoms on an annual basis. And all that data was wiped away. Now, thank goodness for the Wayback Machine, where some of those old pages could still be found. And I was able to find a USAID report, which showed that in the year before, USAID spent a total of \$60 million on contraceptives around the world, which made it kind of strange to think that they would be spending 50 million just on Hamas, which is located in an enclave only two times the size of the District of Columbia. So I was able to write a fact check debunking this and ultimately the administration backed off from it, but that's an example of how they're eliminating sources of information that would make it possible for you to check the lies that they are saying. The other thing is the US government spends a lot of money collecting data, doing interviews, there's Census data, there is jobs data, and increasingly I'm going to have less and less confidence in the accuracy of that data because they are systematically laying off people that collect that data, that analyze that data. And I don't have much trust that this administration will not politically manipulate that data because in the past, no matter who was in charge, all those worker bees were left untouched, and it was done in a non-political manner. So it's a serious problem. I mean, they're already talking about, because since they've laid off so many people from the federal government, you're going to see soon in government statistics the impact of those layoffs, and the impact of the decline in government spending on an important figure, the gross domestic product. The gross domestic product, of course, includes federal spending. So they're now talking about changing the formula for the GDP to not include federal spending. This is not the kind of action that a democratic, transparent government takes, but this is the situation we find ourselves in the United States. You may have experience with this in Argentina.

Laura Zommer Yeah, what I'm going to tell you is that when I presented in ISOJ in 2017, I started my presentation at that time in the first Trump government, saying I came from the future, because at that time I was coming from Argentina with the statistic institution, with a political intervention and with that institute without publishing the poverty rate and the inflation rate, because it wasn't necessarily good for the political party in power. What I wanted to add, and I'm not saying this is going to make things easier in the U.S., is that lots of countries, not just in Latin America, I can say probably in all the Global South, has been doing great reporting without as much as public reliable and disaggregated data as the one that you or European countries, or some of European countries has. And we can manage to do that in a way that is transparent enough with the public, not necessarily

presenting an alternative source that is a private source, and it were the same at a public one, because sometimes the scale of the people interview or the survey is not as good, but that help us or contribute to the public debate in lots of the discussions where the statements that are circulating are clearly not accurate. Sorry, just adding on data, for all the academics and the people in the room, our practice, and this is an ordinary practice in lots of countries in the Global South, is each time when an election change the party in government, we scrape all the government data before the new government arrive, because in our countries, they always delete what they don't like. For sure, in the US, they are going too much because they decide not to use any longer the word "Hispanic community" or "minority." Like, okay, perhaps this is not necessary what we used to see, but having the practice of protecting the data, all the data, not necessarily the one that you expect to be deleted is like a usual.

Glenn Kessler Right, no, I wish I had made much more use of the Wayback Machine before. I mean, I used the Wayback Machine quite a bit, but I kind of wish there had been a great effort before the Trump administration came in to put everything into the Wayback Machine because there are huge gaps that can't be filled at the moment.

Clara Jiménez Cruz We're not getting back there. I think, I mean, I think we've started to talk about this more and more, but I think it's good to say that we've been quite naive with this information in the past. We've been seeing for years how different groups were being attacked by disinformation in different ways. We saw the medical sector throughout the pandemic. When a climate crisis came, we saw the meteorologist, we saw civil society, we saw media, we saw fact checkers. And I think it is only now, seeing not only what's happening in the U.S., but what's happening in Bosnia, that it's going to Montenegro and Serbia as well, what's happening Indonesia, what's happening in different parts of the world. Basically it's disinformation being put to the work of the autocratic playbook. And I think we need to realize this is not us as fact checkers combating these or that little hoax. We're fighting a narrative that is here to undermine democracies and change the world as we know it right now. And we might be too late, but either we start calling things by their name, or then we will be very late.

Glenn Kessler Yeah, I was, I don't want to be too pessimistic, but I kind of feel like, no, you make a really excellent point, and to me it's a bit like climate change, where they said, "once we get past one and a half degrees centigrade, it's too late, and the world is going to be cooked." And what you actually see in the Post's excellent series that won a Pulitzer Prize on this, we went to all sorts of parts of the world where it had already exceeded 1.5 degrees centigrade in that region, and you could see the damage that had happened and how people had lost their livelihoods and things like that. And so I kind of feel like in the democracy fact-checking space, we are now at that point where it may be too late, and certainly in some parts of the region, I'm sorry, in some parts of the world, it is too late, and it's going to be very difficult to reverse.

Laura Zommer I'm going to bring some hope again.

Glenn Kessler Okay, thank you.

Laura Zommer In lots of cases, these types of crises are the ones that make us have the brightness to find different solutions, and I think this is the moment in the U.S. Lots of people are surprised, just like frozen, like, "I don't know what to do." Okay.

Clara Jiménez Cruz I'm not the pessimistic one here, I just want action. I want people to wake up.

Laura Zommer Yeah, I know. I know. I know. What I'm saying is that, OK, you already have February to realize, March. Two months are enough. Things need to start happening. And when I'm talking about "things," for sure what we need to be doing is more collaboration, more discussions, more deep discussions, but also actionable things to start resistance.

Lucas Graves OK, in a moment, we're going to start talking about new ideas and hopeful steps forward. But before we let the subject go about the political challenges, it just occurred to me as I was listening to all of those really thoughtful answers that if I were to channel, I don't know, Christopher Rufo, or a critic of that very establishment that all of your organizations rely on, they might say something about institutional biases baked into academia or even into the bureaucracies of the Environmental Protection Agency, or the NIH, or whatever it is, whatever institution it is that you're relying on, how do you respond to that? What do you think is an effective response to that critique that maybe can help us to defend those institutions, those anchoring institutions, in a moment when, as Clara suggested, they're very deliberately, very systematically being undermined.

Glenn Kessler Well, I think my response to that is, of course, every institution, certainly journalistic institutions in particular, needs to be reevaluated and reassessed, and there is implicit, I mean, we are human beings, we have biases, and you always have to figure out you know, are you living true to your values? Now, in the journalistic community, and in fact, in the fact-checking community, for instance, the International Fact Checkers Network has a code of principles, and there's that code that you have to work by, and you get evaluated almost on an annual basis, as to whether or not you're living up to that code, and one part of that code is when you make mistakes, you admit them. Every organization needs to be assessed and evaluated. And I'm not going to, I've had my disputes with Christopher Rufo, but I'm not going to dispute that there are times when he's pointed out things that need to be addressed. But the way that this current administration is going about it is actually not dealing with those underlying issues if they exist. For instance, one of the first things that Trump did was fire almost all the inspector generals of the major agencies. Those are the people that actually went out and audited and found problems and wrote critical reports saying this organization had screwed up and this needs to be fixed. If you were really trying to work to improve these organizations, you would actually double the staff of the inspector generals and give them complete freedom from any political influence. Secondly, you can make an argument about the effectiveness of international aid and whether or not it was spread appropriately. One big problem with US foreign aid was that all the food that was distributed around the world had to come from American farmers and had to be shipped on American ships. Wasteful. You could save a lot of money if you didn't have those kind of requirements. But of course, we all understand why those requirements were there. It was a political process, and politicians from the Midwest wanted to make sure farmers from the Midwest got their share of the food aid. But you don't eliminate all of the problems or you completely eliminate those agencies just because you think there's a problem, you actually restructure them. I mean, you do it in a particular sound process. I was around when Al Gore did his reinventing government initiative, and that was a two-year process where they ended up eliminating 350,000 jobs. But it was a process that was deliberative, looked clearly at what issues, where things could be streamlined, how to make the government better, and that was, of course, 30, 35 years ago, so you could certainly have done another program like that. I'm not here to defend the federal government. But if you were really concerned about those issues as

you're talking about, and you wanted to address those things, there's a way to do it as opposed to simply destroying things.

Lucas Graves I'm convinced.

Laura Zommer I think the question or you try to point out how can we do to answer to that, and I think in some cases, the answer is not to answer. Like, in some cases they are trying to force us to answer to things that are not necessary, the things that we need to answer. I don't know if this is clear, but if what we are discussing is democracy or not, or science or not...How can I be explaining that vaccination is a reasonable intervention? They're not always all the discussions, the one that we need to reply, at least not all at the same time.

Lucas Graves No, that's a fair point. It's a big job to put on fact checkers alone. I agree completely. We have a long list of audience questions, but we promised a bit more hope as well. This really is obviously a moment for sort of big, bold, new ideas in fact checking, whether that's new formats or strategies, so I'd love to hear each of your thoughts about how fact checking both in terms of your organizations, but also as a movement, how does it need to change to meet this moment? What are the opportunities that it can seize to reinvent itself? And Laura, maybe we'll start with you. We were talking just yesterday about some of the amazing work you're doing at Factchequeado, and the way that you work with other, with sort of grassroots initiatives around the country. And that's kind of like a rethinking of the mission of fact checking.

Laura Zommer The short answer, and I already speak too much, but then I'm going to be short for sure. Some people present the idea, and we discussed with Glenn the other day, of people avoid, or people are not interested in facts. And I don't agree with that at all. It is people need information. And when I'm talking about Spanish speakers communities in the U.S., or migrant communities in the US, they need basic information to decide about their lives every day. And they need information, and they need facts. What we have is a problem on the formats and the channels for distribution, and how can we reach the people that need us? What I'm sure about is that fact checkers around the world, as Clara mentioned, have a lot of data that is useful for a lot of actors. In the past, we were concentrated in using that data for journalists. What we need to figure it out, and for yesterday, not for a long way, is how can we monetize that in a way that is ethical, useful, impactful?

Clara Jiménez Cruz And sustainable.

Laura Zommer Yeah. As stable as we can.

Glenn Kessler Well, I think part of the issue that fact checkers face is trying to get information to where people are. And, I mean, there's a lot of information spread across messaging apps, you know, WhatsApp, or Instagram, or even the Facebook thing. What is it called? I don't even remember. Messenger, yes. I try to avoid all Facebook stuff, though I do like WhatsApp, but I guess that's Meta. So there you are. I think there needs to be a greater effort to try to engage people in the space where they're seeking information. I don't quite know the answer to that. One thing that has been very successful at the Washington Post is the Washington Post Fact Checker newsletter, which has more than 500,000 subscribers, and it's gone up exponentially. And I think one reason is, is because not only do I do a summary of my fact checks there, but I include two very amusing cat GIFs. And many people write to me and say, I get this for the cat GIFs. Even though the

news is always depressing, I open it up because I love your cats. And if that's a way to get my information in front of them, that's a solution.

Clara Jiménez Cruz I think there are a couple of things that we're thinking about within Maldita towards the future. One is, I think we take the criticism of fact-checking potentially being biased, let's put it that way. So one of the things we decided is we're going to go back to our origins in which we crowdsourced fact-checking. Not only the disinformation content from our audience, which we've been doing forever, but at the beginning we also did crowdsourcing for the fact checking itself. We're going to go back there so that whenever we get criticized for choosing to fact check one thing and not the other, we can actually tell our audience well, listen, help us fact check it. It's there. Secondly, we're gonna put much more information available on our website on the kind of data we have, so that people are actually aware of the kind of narratives that are attacking their mindset at each moment. And that's going to be a life board that we're going to be showing everyone. And third, and this is sort of a personal feeling, but I heard about it in the previous panel as well, I think that we need to go back to talking with people that we are not currently talking to. And I'm not saying this as a journalist, I think in general. As human beings trying to live in a better, less polarized society, we need to start talking more to those that don't think about us. And we need to do a huge effort of empathy towards those who think differently. And I don't that's where our mindsets are, and I just made a fighting rant five minutes ago. I realize that. But I really think that that is the only thing that might stop the craziness that we're in right now.

Lucas Graves One more quick follow-up question for the fact-checking nerds in the audience. Should you get rid of ratings? Those of you that use them, I mean I know that you do Glenn. Maldita doesn't, except sometimes they do. But ratings, obviously, are a big target for critics. And they seem to be, forgive me, but what pisses people off the most about fact-checking. And yet they also make it much more quotable, much more visible. So yeah, I'd love to hear your thoughts about that.

Glenn Kessler You have no idea the power of those Pinocchios in Washington. I once had a very senior member of Congress call me up and say, what do I have to do to stop getting Pinocchios?

Lucas Graves I bet that happens less now, right?

Glenn Kessler Well, you know, here's one little known fact about the Washington Post Pinocchios is that we make very clear that if you as a politician admit you made an error, we'll still run the fact check, but we won't award Pinocchios. And there was actually...Well, there was two examples. One was someone, he was one of, I'd say, one of the three or four most powerful people in America, who told me I'd rather take the Pinocchios than admit I made an error. But at the same time, when Joe Biden was running for president in 2020, and he was running against Trump, who had a reputation as not telling the truth, he on several occasions decided to admit he made an error rather than get the Pinocchios. Even after he had first said, I didn't make an error, I didn't make an error, and then when he found out the Washington Post was about to award Pinocchios, he went out and said, "No, I made a mistake, I'm sorry I shouldn't have said that."

Laura Zommer I think we have two levels of audience or impact with that label. For sure, having a false for a politician, or a power business men or women, etc., can make more chances for us, as fact checkers, to have impact on their correction or even thinking twice the next time that they're going to repeat the same. But on the audience, lots of the fact

checkers around the world are working much more on narratives, not necessarily just follow the statement, and also a lot in what we are focused on at Factchequeado in identifying the gaps to fill them before it's too late, because disinformers jump in and take advantage. And then I think probably there's not just one way to do it and depending on the government style, you need to continue using the false, or biases, or exaggerated, or whatever as a way to impact not necessarily on the audience, but on them directly. But knowing or realizing that probably that's going to make for some conversations being more polarized than what we would love.

Clara Jiménez Cruz So I don't get ratings that are mostly true, or mostly false, or like I don't understand what that means, and I don't think our audience understands that either. I do think there are things that are false or true, and hence I think those ratings should continue to exist. Everything else is something that needs context.

Glenn Kessler No, I'm just thinking. So in other words, I keep the four Pinocchios and the Geppetto checkmark, but don't have the other Pinocchio's, okay.

Lucas Graves OK, we've got time for a number of audience questions. And we have one that I know you'll all appreciate from Santiago Leon. And I've heard you all talk about this on other panels. Do you think AI can play a role in fact checking at scale?

Clara Jiménez Cruz I mean, I think it does, but basically, because it already plays it. I think AI is enabling fact checkers around the world to be able to find similar claims in different types of content and actually aggregate those different contents. I think that AI also plays a role in being able to extract those broader narratives from different contents that try to hit that same narrative. I think that what Meta does when it rates similar or exactly the same claims across their platform with just one of our ratings is using AI as well. So I mean, I think it's already here it's not something from the future. What I haven't seen yet, and I think we'll get there at some point with some very specific content, is an AI that is able to predict that this or this is false on its own. I think we're not there yet. I think we will be, but for very specific things.

Laura Zommer No, that is for sure for the statements that are exactly the same, they can do a prediction, and if we have the human in the loop, that can allow us to be faster. I think also AI is not the future but the present with us, helping to produce more audiovisual content than we have the chance to do in the past. Because we are using tools to do that. And now we are, for example, testing an AI avatar presenting health information, being transparent with the audience about that, but trying to test how people react, if people like or not that type of intervention. Then, yeah, I think we are using AI in lots of different ways and experimenting with AI to help us in different tasks, not necessarily in the whole process.

Glenn Kessler Right, I mean, the dream was always that, as someone was giving a speech, that the things they were saying would instantly be fact-checked. And Trump actually gives an opportunity for a good AI program, because so many of the things he says are repetitive, things that he's already said, and he says them almost in exactly the same way. And in fact, when he gave a speech to Congress, I had a huge document, where I'd pre-written all the things I predicted that he was going to say, so that I could instantly and very quickly get up the fact checks. So, and then secondly, I do feel, one problem we face in the United States are what are called "news deserts," where there aren't really rigorous reporting of local news, as one of the earlier panel was talking about. And you could use AI. I mean, a lot of times these politicians are just echoing talking points

that came down on high from the Democratic National Committee or the Republican National Committee. And if you were able to say, “Oh, well, this was fact-checked by PolitiFact or the Washington Post fact-checker, and 25 people around the country are repeating it.” If you could somehow use AI to expand the reach of those fact checks, it would be helpful.

Lucas Graves We have so many great questions. Maybe we can get two more in. I love this question from Kate Winkle. What are some techniques you use in fact checking claims to combat the lack of trust in journalism? Do you do something specific to help find common ground so people will accept when you say something is true or false?

Clara Jiménez Cruz We've been trying something lately that we are yet to research well enough. No, no, but I think it's important to say that we don't know, we haven't measured the impact in that way. But there was this huge flood in Spain, in Valencia, over 200 people died. The political handling of that was awful, but also there was a huge disinformation campaign, probably one of the biggest that we've seen within the country, with foreign interference, but also with a lot of national actors trying to influence it. And some of the disinformation contents were crazy shit, basically. So we decided to start doing what we've called “argument checking,” which is try to ask, like give examples of common sense to our audience. So for example, there was this narrative saying that HAARP technology had been used by Morocco on the coast of Valencia so that they would destroy their crops, and then Morocco could sell their oranges instead of Valencia, right? And that had quite a big penetration in a moment in which everything was chaotic, and everyone was very hurt. So we pulled argument checking, and we started saying, “If Morocco had this kind of technology, we give it for granted that Israel has this kind of technology, and hence it would have used it on Gaza, and we're not seeing that.” So pull common sense to understand that this is impossible. What we got from the audiences was they sort of understood that making those kinds of comparisons were something that they could relate to, into not buying into the HAARP conspiracy theory.

Lucas Graves I think we're just about out of time, so let's have a vigorous round of applause for our wonderful panelists.