

Preliminary communication

Received: 9 January 2021

<https://doi.org/10.20901/pm.58.2.04>

---

## **Media Ecosystems and the Fact-Checking Movement: a Comparison of Trends in the EU and ASEAN**

---

MARIJA SLIJEPČEVIĆ, MIRELA HOLY, NIKOLINA BORČIĆ  
VERN' University

### *Summary*

A creative economy is an economy where value is based on imaginative qualities rather than on the resources of land, labour and capital, and one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy. The media industry is an important part of the creative economy and faces the most dynamic media ecosystems changes. One of the most interesting phenomena is the rising discipline of fact-checking. The discipline, which in four years (2014-2018) had a global growth of 239%, has developed to combat the adverse consequences of fake news and misinformation. It has brought interesting changes in media ecosystems and has enriched this part of the creative economy sector. This paper brings an overview of fact-checking trends in the European Union and South East Asia as these two regions show the fastest growth of the creative economy. Analysis answers the following research questions: What is the status of fact-checkers in those parts of the world? Which business models are dominant? How popular are they on social media? Which methodologies are used for fact-checking? What are their sources of financing? How often are the fact-checking organisation bilingual? Results show a significant discrepancy in trends in those two continents and emphasise fact-checking organisations' contribution in the complex media ecosystems and further development. As media ownership impacts media content, research regarding media owners' impact on fact-checking trends in the European Union and South East Asia is recommended.

*Keywords:* Fact-Checking, Fake News, Creative Economy, European Union, ASEAN

### **Introduction**

A creative economy is an economy that incorporates all forms of design, intellectual and cultural creativity, and innovation, in both the entertainment and media industry. It differs from other economic systems as its value is based on exploiting

ideas, imagination and innovation, rather than on traditional sources of land, work and capital (Howkins, 2013). John Howkins, British writer and media manager, popularised the term “creative economy” in 2001 and “applied it to 15 industries extending from the arts to science and technology” (UNESCO and UNDP, 2013, p. 19). The creative economy includes all types and forms of arts and crafts, books, films, paintings, festivals, music, design, media, digital animation and video games, and generates revenue through trade (export) and intellectual property or copyright (UNCTAD, 2015, p. ii). It is closely linked to concepts such as the creative industries, cultural industries and cultural creativity. The cultural industries were first mentioned in a negative context as a form of commodification of culture. Such understanding of the cultural industries dates from the earlier work of the Frankfurt School, in the 1930s and 1940s, but later, more precisely since the 1980s, thanks to the work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), this perception has changed (Ibid.).

Besides UNCTAD and UNESCO, many scholars and theorists from various disciplines, from the humanities and social sciences, applied arts and arts, and the technical sciences have also shown an interest in the creative economy and creative and cultural industries. Paul Jeffcutt (2001, acc. Cvjetičanin, 2014, p. 456) emphasised that creative industries are trans-professional, trans-sectoral and trans-governmental. According to Cvjetičanin (2012) there is no single definition of the creative economy because it is a term in a state of constant mutation, which underlies the convergence of creativity, culture and the economy. For UNCTAD, “the creative economy generates incomes, employment and other economic benefits, while at the same time providing an avenue for social progress and cultural fulfilment” (UNESCO and UNDP, 2013, p. 123) as well as “environmental sustainability”. In its reports, UNCTAD (2015; 2018) repeatedly emphasises the exceptional role that the creative economy plays in the implementation of the concept of sustainable development, precisely because the creative economy is based on the exploitation of ideas and human creativity, rather than on the exploitation of natural resources, which is what has caused the environmental crisis. In the last few years, trends show a shift in the economic paradigm from the concepts of production and consumption of goods towards the consumption of ideas and experiences. For example, the United Kingdom’s Creative Alliance research shows that “78% of millennials would rather purchase an experience than a product” and emphasises that “millennials respond better to product marketing that focuses on an idea, or lifestyle, rather than solely on a product”.<sup>1</sup> The study concludes that all this shows “the ‘experience economy’ will boom, benefiting the creative industries associated with it” (UNESCO and UNDP, 2013). In other

<sup>1</sup> <https://creativealliance.org.uk/millennial-trends-that-creative-industries-cant-ignore/> (accessed 13 October 2019).

words, economic trends, just like research regarding the behaviour and attitudes of the younger generations, show that the creative economy has a prosperous future.

Much of UNCTAD's research has shown that the creative industries are creating new jobs in occupations that mean higher specialisation levels, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises. The advancement of technology, especially in the area of digital technology, education and innovation, as the creative economy and creative industries are largely knowledge-based, have all positioned the creative economy among the most dynamic sectors of the global economy, those with a strong transformative role in future socio-economic development. The most recent UNCTAD report (2018, p. 32) concludes "the creative economy is expanding globally" and "contributing to nations' gross domestic products, exports and growth". It particularly emphasises that "many countries reported an increase in creative industries exports during the last decade" and that "many of them are developing countries" which reduces "the trade gaps and dynamics in international trade of creative industries between developed and developing countries is changing" (Ibid.). According to UNCTAD, Asian countries are at the forefront of the development of the creative economy among developing countries, while the EU leads the group of developed countries. When it comes to developed countries in the creative economy's propulsion, "Europe, United States and Canada are leading creative goods exports" (Ibid., p. 20). When it comes to developing countries, "China and the South East Asia region account for the largest share of creative goods exports from the developing economic group" (Ibid.). The above-mentioned Report shows "not only that there has been significant growth in the creative economy but also that the sector can make a valuable contribution to the achievement of sustainable development goals" and that despite the economic crisis that began in 2008 "the size of the global market for creative goods has expanded substantially more than doubling in size from \$208 billion in 2002 to \$509 billion in 2015" (Ibid., p. 9). It points out in particular that "the domination of Asian countries in the top ten" states is "a clear indication of their important emerging role in stimulating and contributing to the global creative economy" (Ibid.). States assembled in the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN)<sup>2</sup> and the European Union "dominate in the export of creative goods" (Ibid.). Europe is the largest exporter of creative goods and in 2015 had exports of creative goods at \$171 billion compared to \$85 billion in 2002, a doubling in trade. This means that annual average growth rates for creative goods exports in the EU were at 5.5% in the period from 2002-2015, and that "the cultural and creative industries employ nearly 12 million people in the European Union" (Ibid.).

<sup>2</sup> Members of ASEAN are: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. <https://asean.org/asean/asean-member-states/> (accessed 21 October 2019).

The growth of the importance of the creative economy in Asia is evident compared to other regions because “China, and Eastern and South East Asia combined, accounting for \$228 billion in 2015 of creative goods exports, almost double that of Europe” (Ibid.). Unfortunately, the creative economy’s impact on democratic development and civil society has not been sufficiently explored in the scientific literature. Too much attention has been paid to the economic potential of cultural and creative industries, and too little to the potential of “those other, general development goals, better intercultural communication, common good and social cohesion, reduction of poverty/gap between rich and poor” (Cvjetičanin, 2014, p. 10). Araya (2010, p. 220) warns of the detrimental effects of the growth of creative industries in the value created in the education sector, especially higher education. Due to the increasingly widespread treatment of human creativity and innovation as a resource, a corporate transformation of educational institutions is taking place. Miller (2009, p. 94) is not overly optimistic regarding the creative economy’s social transformation potentials and concludes that “rather than working with the progressive goals of social democracy that uses the state in a leftist march of the institutions, this new development favours neo-liberalism”. It seems that after an initial enthusiasm that dominated narratives in the late 20th century, favouring the idea of potential social transformation from the creative economy, that dominated narratives in the late 20th century, theorists in the 21st century began to return to the Frankfurt School’s ideas regarding the creative and cultural industries. This is especially visible in the media ecosystem as today’s media industry is more than ever under the control of the few big players – global media holdings (Turow, 2013, p. 346). Thanks to the relaxation of regulations related to the concentration of media activities, in the 21st century, we have witnessed the growing influence of conglomerates that are “increasingly active in the fields of communications, information, entertainment, leisure” (British Academy, 2004, p. 19). Such changes in the media’s ownership structure in a global perspective undoubtedly affect the content published by the media, especially information selection. This makes the action of fact-checkers very important because they not only determine the accuracy of the published information, but also indicate the selectivity in the publication of certain information.

The media industry is a significant part of the creative economy. The media industry is in a dynamic era, resulting in many changes in media ecosystems around the world. UNCTAD singles out the media as an example of “the shift from the production of creative goods to delivery of creative services, a trend which is poised to accelerate” so “newspapers, originally considered a creative good, have flipped to offering a creative service, as online media outlets expand driven by digital news subscriptions and online advertising” (UNCTAD, 2018, p. 15). UNCTAD refers to PwC Entertainment and Media (E&M) Report from 2018, which recognises “there is a new wave of convergence, connections, and trust in the media ecosystem, ar-

guing that the thick borders that once separated E&M, technology and telecommunications – and sectors within them – are dissolving” (PwC, 2018, p. 4, acc. Ibid., p. 16). Media (traditional and new), together with the “visual arts including antiques, paintings, and photography, and publishing including books” are, according to UNCTAD, “high-growth sectors of the creative industries” and together made up “16,5% of total exports from developed countries, in 2015” while “art crafts and new media both account for 20% of total exports from developing countries” (2018, p. 21).

### **Fake News and Fact-Checkers**

According to the recent literature (Nyhan, Porter, Reifler & Wood, 2019; Nieminen & Rapeli, 2018; Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy & Kleis Nielsen, 2017; Bradshaw & Howard, 2017; Chan, Jones, Hall Jemieson & Albarracin, 2017; Dentith, 2017; Haigh, Haigh & Kozak, 2017; Shin & Thorson, 2017; Graves, 2016a; Graves & Cherubini, 2016; Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016; Werner, 2016; Hochschild & Levine Einstein, 2015; Fridkin, Kenney & Wintersieck, 2015; Marietta, Barker & Bowser, 2015; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010; 2015; 2016), misinformation and fake news are threatening to overrun society. Fact-checkers have been created in order to raise awareness of the existence of fake news, serving as one of the mechanisms to combat against it.

Paskin (2018, p. 254, acc. de Beer & Matthee, 2020, p. 13) explains fake news as “particular news articles that originate either on mainstream media (online or offline) or social media and have no factual basis, but are presented as facts and not satire”. The term fake news is not a new communication concept, the term actually dates back to the late 19th century as stated in the Merriam-Webster dictionary. De Beer and Matthee (2020, p. 14) emphasise that the spread of fake news is in direct correlation with the communication possibility of digital media. In addition to this, fake news can be subdivided into three groups: misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. Misinformation includes information that is inaccurate, but not designed to cause harm. Disinformation is information that is false and is intended to harm a person, group, institution, etc. To point out, disinformation is about the intent to deceive, and misinformation may not involve deception at all (cf. Bounegru, Gray, Venturini & Mauri, 2017; Benkler, Roberts, Faris, Etling, Zuckerman & Bourassa, 2017). Malinformation is fact-based information that is knowingly used to cause harm (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The European Council recognised the threat of online disinformation campaigns in 2015. As a result of Russia’s ongoing disinformation campaigns the EastStratComm Task Force in the European External Action Service was set up. In line with this, in 2018 the Commission outlined a European approach and self-regulatory tools to master disinform-

mation online.<sup>3</sup> From September 2015 to spring 2018, the group created a publicly available international database of over 3,800 misinformation cases.

With the development of fake news, fact-checkers, portals dealing with checking and evaluating media-transmitted information have evolved. Regarding the above mentioned, Farida Vis highlights that “false information spreads just like accurate information”, adding that “networks don’t discriminate based on the veracity of content” and emphasises that “people are supposed to play that role” (Vis, 2014, acc. Silverman, 2015, p. 32). Therefore, fact-checking could be considered the most interesting new phenomena in the media industry (Amazeen, 2013; 2015; 2017; Graves, 2016b; Graves & Cherubini, 2016; Lowrey, 2017; Mena, 2018; Singer, 2018). Fact-checking services are individuals or institutions that analyse and resolve the certainty of statements and content in the media discourse and mentor the public on its believability (Brandtzaeg & Folstad, 2017).

Lowrey (2017) states that by 2010 the area of fact-checking was very homogeneous, but over time, there is a process of fragmentation parallel to the increasing legitimacy of the role of fact-checkers. According to Nyhan and Reifler the fact-checking movement was recognised as a possible mechanism in maintaining media image as a credible source of information (2015, p. 9). As a result of the analysis of 48 scientific articles from the Scopus and Web of Science databases published by April 2018 addressing the topic of fact-checking Nieminen and Rapeli (2018, pp. 3-4) emphasise three perspectives within research about fact-checking, those dealing with the effects of fact-checking, fact-checking as a profession, and public opinion about fact-checking. It is also significant that most fact-checkers focus on traditional forms of political communication and less on social networks, which have become a very influential source of fake news, especially content on Twitter (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018; McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016).

The closest to a conceptual explanation provided by Uscinski and Butler concerning this “premise” of fact-checking is that “one can compare statements about politics, policy, society, economics, history and so on – the subject matter of political debate – to ‘the facts’ so as to determine whether a statement about these topics is a lie” (Uscinski & Butler, 2013, p. 163, acc. Amazeen, 2016). Fact-checking is commonly considered more encouraging by those with high political expertise (Graves, Nyhan & Reifler, 2015). Accordingly, the intention of fact-checking should be to afford to clarify and directly checked out information to users so that they may apply the facts to make fully conscious choices in voting and other decisions (Amazeen, 2015, p. 4; cf. Elizabeth, 2014).

The important years in improving the US fact-checker system are 2003 and 2007, as FactCheck.org was founded in 2003 and PolitFact and the Washington Post

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_19\\_2914](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_2914) (accessed 21 October 2019).

FactChecker were founded in 2007. The first occurrence of fact-checkers in Europe was recorded in the UK in 2005 when Channel 4 News launched a blog dealing with the verification of statements during the parliamentary elections. Similar projects were implemented in 2008 in France and the Netherlands, and by the end of 2010 certain forms of fact-checking portals existed in ten European countries. In this decade, more than 50 specialised fact-checkers have been launched in Europe, and a third of them have ceased to operate or only operate intermittently (Graves & Cherubini, 2016).

The topic of fact-checkers is not straightforward and is not a unitary solution to the digital age challenges concerning the creation of media discourses. The first challenge is the lack of unity and a sufficiently precise cognitive-linguistic methodology to clearly identify in various contexts the key mechanisms of constructing discourse that is tailored to the intentions of the creator. Lim (2018), in his research, states that various fact-checkers who overlap in their checks agree when it comes to complete truths or falsehoods, while there are significant differences with controversial statements that they consider to be true or mostly false. Having multiple fact-checkers check the same contentious statements would increase the level of trust in fact-checkers with the audience (Ibid.). Another challenge is related to its ownership and financing. Despite similarities in strategy and methodology, fact-checkers across the globe differ in approach and structure. While many were created as part of existing media organisations, some were founded by independent journalists, and a small number were created at the initiative of academics or political experts (Singer, 2018).

In September 2015, the International Fact-Checking Network was created at the Poynter Institute in Tampa Bay, Florida in order to gather the world's fact-checkers under one institution. The most crucial part of their effort at the International Fact-Checking Network was to formulate a code of ethics for the world's fact-checkers in September 2016. That code outlines five values that fact-checkers should adhere to. The first is a commitment to impartiality and honesty, then a commitment to transparency of sources, the third is a transparent presentation of organisation and funding, the fourth is a commitment to a transparent presentation of methodology and ultimately a commitment to open and true/fair updates and the updating of published texts so that the audience always has access to accurate information.

Furthermore, there is a database at Duke University within the Duke Reporters' Lab that includes fact-checkers worldwide. Researchers from Duke University also pointed out that the number of these sites tripled from 2014 to 2018 (44 to 149), representing a growth of 239 percent. The database displays that in September 2019 there were 195 active sites in 62 countries, including every project of the International Fact-Checking Network documented as signatories of its code of prin-

principles.<sup>4</sup> When deciding which pages to include in the database, the following criteria are considered: whether the site checks all pages, examines isolated claims and whether it draws conclusions, follows political promises, is transparent about sources and methods, publishes funding and affiliation information with other organisations, and whether their primary mission is news and information.

Although fact-checking in Europe has evolved through existing and recognised media organisations, at present more than 60% of existing fact-checkers are not operating independently or as projects of non-profit organisations (Graves & Cherubini, 2016, p. 6). Fact-checkers operating in existing media organisations are prevalent in Western Europe and major democracies such as the United States, South Korea and Australia. Due to existing resources and infrastructure, they have a great advantage in attracting audiences but are dependent on the financial support of the home media editorial staff (Graves & Cherubini, 2016). In contrast, due to the lower level of press freedom, freedom of speech and political instability, fact-checkers in larger numbers emerge as independent projects in areas such as Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Latin America and South America (Singer, 2018).

### **Fact-Checking Trends in EU and ASEAN Countries**

Given the fact that EU and ASEAN countries are leaders in the development of the creative economy, that the media industries are an actually crucial division of this development, and that the discipline of fact-checking within the media industries has grown significantly in the last few years, this article sets out the following research questions: What is the status of fact-checkers in these two parts of the world? Which business models are dominant? How popular are they on social media? Which methodologies are used for fact-checking? What are their sources of financing? How often are the fact-checking organisations bilingual?

Our research was conducted in November 2019 with a combination of several quantitative methods. First, the list of fact-checkers in EU and ASEAN states was defined, using data from The Reporters' Lab database in November 2019.<sup>5</sup> The database highlights the name and logo of each fact-checker, its webpage, in which country it is present, structure & funding and, if applicable, affiliation and rating system. We continued our research by looking at the webpages of every active fact-checker in countries which are part of the EU and ASEAN (38 countries).<sup>6</sup> We counted 60 fact-checkers in total. Content analysis of the stories the fact-checkers

<sup>4</sup> Reporters' Lab. (2019). [www.reporterslab.org](http://www.reporterslab.org) (accessed 20 November 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Reporters' Lab. (2019). <https://reporterslab.org/fact-checkin/> (accessed 20 November 2019).

<sup>6</sup> The research included Great Britain as an EU member because it was conducted before the finalisation of "Brexit" process.



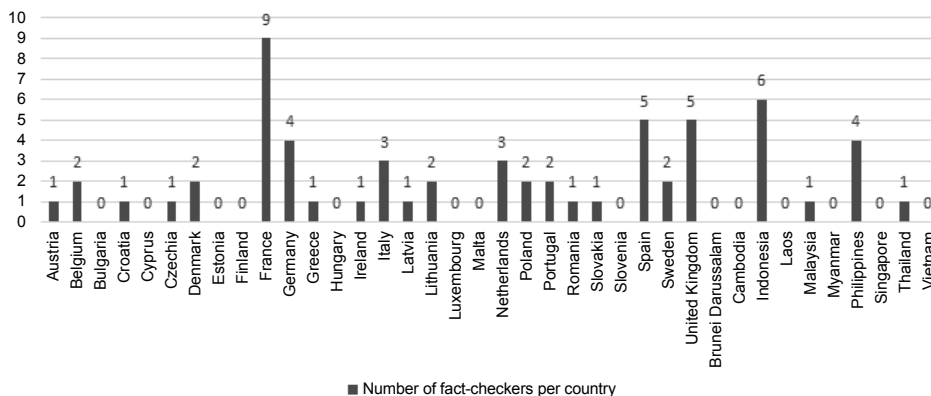
published was not conducted, and the analytical matrix of analysis measured the next criteria on their webpages: what languages are on the page, have they highlighted their social media profiles (and if so, which ones) and have they featured the IFCN sign. In the third part of the analysis, we collected data by following connections to fact-checkers social media profiles, only to register the number of followers for each site. Furthermore, for the last part we explored which fact-checkers are signatories of International Fact-Checking Network Code of Principles, and used this to determine what kind of methodology was used for their work (Verified signatories of the IFCN code of principles, 2019). To conclude, in order to answer our research questions (to find out how many fact-checkers there are in those regions, which business models are dominant, how popular they are on social media, which methodologies are used for fact-checking, what their sources of financing are, and how often the fact-checking organisation is bilingual) we conducted a short content analysis of Duke Reporters' Lab and the IFCN, the webpage of each fact-checker from the list and their social media profile. Those analyses were made only to determine the business and organisational models of fact-checkers. The fact that the research gives only an overview of the business models' quantity and basic data is an important research limitation. Suggestions for future research are to broaden these insights with content analysis of the fact-checkers' work, in-depth interviews with editors-in-chief of each organisation, and use these insights to measure their impact on the audience.

### **Analysis: Fact-Checkers in Numbers**

Out of 28 EU countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom), twenty of them have fact-checkers recognised by Duke Reporters' Lab, which make up 71% of the examined EU countries.

Out of ten ASEAN countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) there are fact-checkers present in four countries, or 40%. Figure 1 shows the number of fact-checkers for all EU and ASEAN countries.

For all countries, most often the number of fact-checkers is one (10 countries) and two (6 countries). The biggest number is nine for France and the second-biggest is six in the case of Indonesia.

**Figure 1.** Number of Fact-Checkers Per Country

Source: data from <https://reporterslab.org/fact-checking/#> (accessed 20 November 2019)

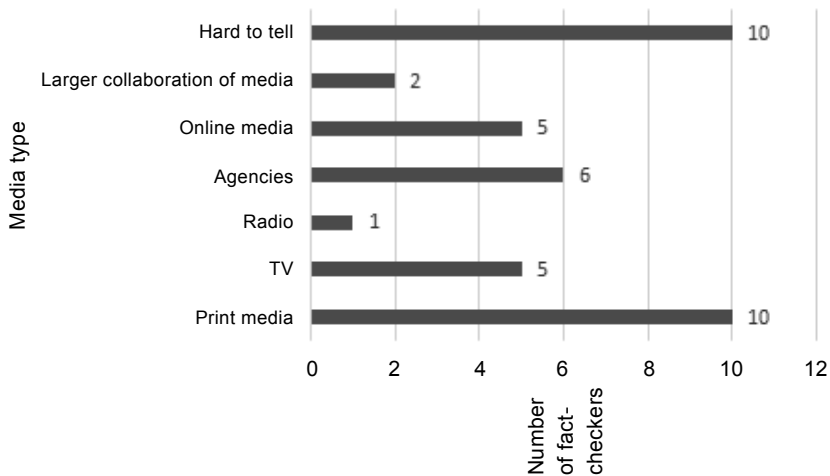
## Models of Organisation

There are three dominant models of the examined fact-checkers; they are either independent (18), affiliated with larger media organisations (39) or universities (3). University projects are usually affiliated with journalism studies (French LuiPresident.fr with Ecole Supérieure de Journalisme de Lille, Dutch Factory from journalism school at Fontys University of Applied Sciences, and Nieuwscheckers from Leiden University’s journalism and new media program).

Independent fact-checkers, which are not affiliated with any media fit the so-called “NGO Model” in Graves and Cherubini (2016). There is Fakt in Austria, Faktograf in Croatia, Demagog in the Czech Republic, Greek Ellinika Hoaxes in Greece, Demagog in Poland, Poligrafo in Portugal, Factual in Romania, Demagog in Slovakia, MAFINDO’s TurnBackHoax.ID in Indonesia.

In the “Newsroom Model” (Graves & Cherubini, 2016) print media are the most common type of media which developed their own fact-checkers (for example: Knack Factchecker with *Knack Magazine* in Belgium, TjekDet with *Mandag Morgen* in Denmark, CheckNews with *Libération* and Les Decodeurs with *Le Monde* in France, German Fakt oder Fake affiliated with *Die Zeit*, Spanish La Chistera with *El Confidencial*, DN’s Fakta I frågan with the daily *Dagens Nyheter* etc.), as shown in Figure 2 on the next page.

News agencies are also important for fact-checking, and due to the size of the organisation they can dedicate more journalists to the job of checking accuracy (AFP has made the greatest efforts in this sample because they have four fact-

**Figure 2.** Number of Fact-Checkers Affiliated with Media Organisations

Source: own research

checkers registered on Duke Reporters' Lab: AFP's Factual in France and three AFP Fact Check Asia in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, but there are also fact-checkers with Thai News Agency, Agenzia Giornalistica Italia and Deutsche Presse-Agentur).

There are two examples of larger media collaboration: FactCheckEU, a collaboration by 19 media outlets from 13 European countries. This is "a project of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), bringing together the European signatories of IFCN's Code of Principles to counter misinformation in the European Union at a continental scale ahead of the European Parliament elections of May 2019 and Tsek.ph, a collaborative fact-checking project for the Philippines,<sup>7</sup> and Tsek.ph, a collaborative fact-checking project for the Philippines' 2019 elections, coordinated by the Journalism Department at the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication, with participation of two other universities and nearly a dozen media partners and support from Meedan, The Facebook Journalism Project, Macaranas Journalism Grant and the U.P.'s College of Mass Communication Foundation".<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> About us. (2019). FactCheckEU. <https://factcheckeu.info/en/legal> (accessed 25 November 2019).

<sup>8</sup> About Tsek.ph. (2019). Tsek.ph. <https://tsek.ph/about> (accessed 25 November 2019).

## Subjects of Analysis

In total, twenty fact-checkers did not state the subjects of their analysis on their profiles on Duke Reporters' Lab nor did they have this information in their English profiles. The rest could be categorised in different categories: politics in general, elections, online hoaxes, social media, public figures claims, business topics etc. Our research shows that the most common category is "elections" with 36% of pages dedicated to this topic. If the category "politics in general" (18%) is added, it is obvious that more than half of all fact-checkers are focused on political claims, and 28% of all fact-checkers have stated online hoaxes and social media as their focus.

It is interesting that two Asian fact-checkers also focus on messaging apps like WhatsApp (Indonesian Tempo's Fakta atau Hoax and Thai Sure and Share Center), which is not mentioned on any other pages.

There are examples of pages focused on science or health inaccuracies (Climate Feedback, Health Feedback, Ellinika Hoaxes, Liputan6 Cek Fakta...). Portuguese Poligrafo also mentions "sports and pop culture" as part of its focus. Nieuwscheckers and Maldito Buló state that they search for inaccuracies in the "press".

## Rating Systems

One of the commonly used characteristics of fact-checkers is that they use rating systems to show the quantity of truthfulness/falsehood. In previous research, "close to 60% of European outlets indicated that they rate claims along an ordinal scale representing degrees of truth" (Graves & Cherubini, 2016, p. 18).

It usually contains a 3-scale measure (7 fact-checkers), or 4 or 5 (each scale was found among 5 fact-checkers), there were four examples of 6-scale and one example for 7- and 8-scale rating systems. Examples of scales are "true, rather true, rather untrue, and false" (Belgian Knack Factchecker) or "true, partly true, partly false, false, hoax and not possible to check" (Dutch Nieuwscheckers).

There is an interesting feature seen in the rating systems: humour in the names of the scales. Graves and Cherubini (Ibid.) call them "colourful, sometimes comical meters". In the examined fact-checkers we found categories like "confused", "danger", "like farming", "clickbait", "crazy", "big lie", "panic-mongering", "True, but...", "Pepper in language", "FFS!" (For Facts' Sake!), "slander or smear", "Partly True shouldn't Share Yet". Poletika in Spain uses various emoticons for rating system and Italian AGI Fact-checking uses a traffic-light system with three ratings: green, yellow, red.

## Languages

Most of the fact-checking pages are in the official language of the country, 50 of them or 83%, four of them are exclusively in English, although English is not an

official language (for example, Health Feedback and Climate Feedback in France or AFP Fact Check Asia in Indonesia and the Philippines) and 10% are in several different languages.

Examples of fact-checkers with more than one language are FactCheckEU with 11 languages, French AFP's Factual with 9 languages, Les Observateurs with 4 languages, Lithuanian DELFI Melo Detektorius in the official language, English and Russian, CORRECT!V's Echtjetzt in German and English and Melu Detektors in Latvian and English.

## **Methodology of Work – International Fact-Checking Network's Code of Principles**

During our research it was noticed that most fact-checkers try to stay as transparent as possible in their work and their principles are very simple. The above mentioned Code of Principles from the IFCN has only five principles and it is a good definition of the methodology used for research. So, we checked which of the examined fact-checkers are signatories of the International Fact-Checking Network Code of Principles regarding the methodology used.

Of the 60 examined fact-checkers 25 are signatories of the IFCN code of principles, but only two from ASEAN countries.<sup>9</sup> "The code of principles of the International Fact-Checking Network at Poynter is a series of commitments organisations abide by to promote excellence in fact-checking."<sup>10</sup> Organisers believe nonpartisan and transparent fact-checking can be a powerful instrument of accountability journalism. "Being an IFCN verified signatory requires committing to 12 different criteria on transparency, ethics, methodology and impartiality. Signatories must apply to be evaluated by a journalism expert as compliant every year."<sup>11</sup>

## **Sources of Financing**

One of the characteristics of this new media format is financial transparency. It is one of five principles in the IFCN code of principles ("A commitment to Transpa-

<sup>9</sup> FactCheckEU, Knack Factchecker, Demagog, TjekDet, 20 Minutes Fake Off, AFP's Factual, CheckNews, Le Vrai du Faux, Les Decodeurs, Les Observateurs, CORRECT!V's Echtjetzt, dpa-Faktencheck, Ellinika Hoaxes, Pagine Politica, DELFI Melo Detektorius, Patikrinta, NUcheck, Demagog, Poligrafo, Maldito Bulo, Newtral, FactCheckNI, Full Fact, Tirto.id Periksa Dana, VERA Files Fact Check.

<sup>10</sup> Commit to transparency – sign up for the International Fact-Checking Network's code of principles. (2019). <https://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/> (accessed 24 November 2019).

<sup>11</sup> About us. (2019). FactCheckEU. <https://factcheckeu.info/en/about> (accessed 24 November 2019).

rency of Funding & Organisation”).<sup>12</sup> Most fact-checkers have that information stated and if they are not part of a media organisation or university, they name the exact organisation or fund from which they receive funding. There are also examples of detailed cost structure (Croatian Faktograf publishes yearly costs for coordination and administration, content research and production, office and communication costs, and online costs and promotion).<sup>13</sup> Fact-checkers sometimes ask their readers for individual donations and have a ‘donate’ button visible on their pages (for example OKO.press, TjekDet, CORRECT!V’s Echtjetzt, Lavoce.info, Factuall...). Four fact-checkers stated they receive support from Facebook and Google.

### Social Media Reach

It is quite hard to define the reach and the impact of fact-checkers because the literature states that they are (still) not very influential (e.g. Graves & Cherubini, 2016).<sup>14</sup> Therefore our research was focused on finding out fact-checkers’ reach on social media as a way of gaining some perspective on their influence.

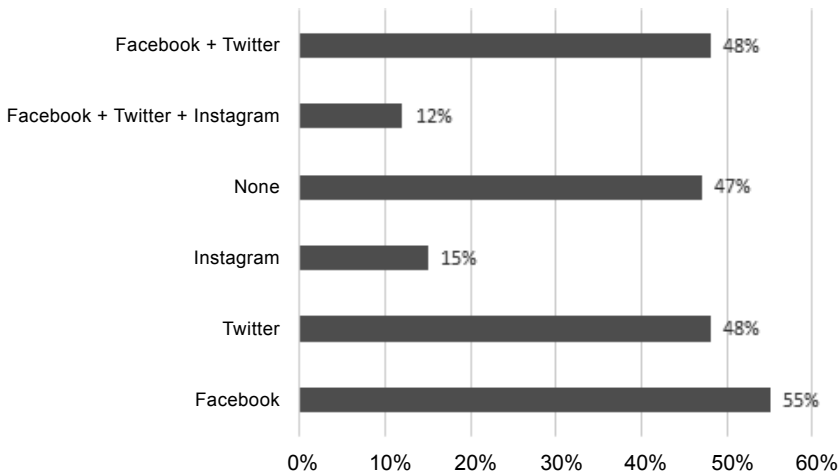
At each webpage, we looked for a connection with social media pages. Of all the examined pages, 47% were not present on social media. In ASEAN countries the percentage is higher: 58%, and in the EU countries 42% of all the examined fact-checkers do not have an account on any social media network. Often, links posted on a fact-checker page led to the social media accounts of the affiliated media organisations and did not contain fact-checking stories. The most often used network was Facebook, then Twitter and in the end, Instagram. In very few cases, there were accounts on YouTube and LinkedIn. Specific data can be seen in Figure 3 on the next page.

The biggest reach was on Facebook, and the least utilised social media for fact-checkers is Instagram.

<sup>12</sup> “Signatory organisations are transparent about their funding sources. If they accept funding from other organisations, they ensure that funders do not influence the conclusions the fact-checkers reach in their reports. Signatory organisations detail all key figures’ professional background and explain the organisational structure and legal status. Signatories clearly indicate a way for readers to communicate with them”; <https://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/know-more/the-commitments-of-the-code-of-principles> (accessed 25 November 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Što je i čemu služi Faktograf.hr. (2019). Faktograf.hr. <https://faktograf.hr/metodologija/> (accessed 18 November 2019).

<sup>14</sup> “To exert some control over their media footprint, most European fact-checking organisations rely on formal or informal media partnerships. In our survey, 54% indicated they currently partner with a newspaper or have in the past; 55% said the same about television, 50% about radio, and 80% about online news outlets” (Graves & Cherubini, 2016, p. 26).

**Figure 3.** Social Networks with Fact-Checkers Profiles

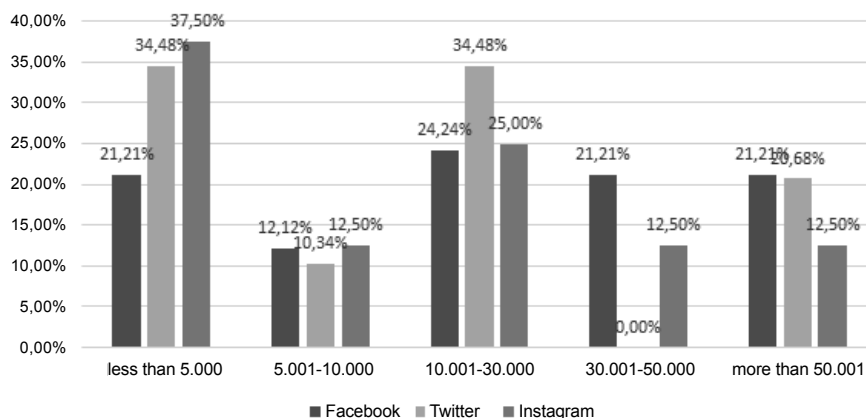
Source: own research compiled from fact-checker webpages

As presented in Figure 4, for Facebook, the largest average number of followers for all fact-checkers falls between 10001-30000, and for Instagram it is less than 5000. Results also show that fact-checkers in ASEAN have a higher average of followers on Facebook than those in Europe, while the situation on Twitter is the opposite.

## Conclusion

Even though traditional media have not shown as great an expansion as other parts of the creative economy, a new element has emerged in the media ecosystem: rising new media and informational tools worldwide. In an all-present expansion of misinformation in public discourse, journalists, NGOs, activists, and other professions are trying to bring back the confidence in information and minimise the damage fake news can have on political processes, especially during elections. Based on investigative journalism postulates, and yet with a clear distinction from often corrupt media, fact-checking services have become a new, indispensable part of the modern information system and creative industries.

As seen in Duke Reporters' Lab and the International Fact Checking Network, there are more than 200 fact-checkers on six continents. This paper focused on two regions; Europe and Asia, to contribute to this new field of research. In the conclusions of this research, it can be seen that the EU countries, for now, have a wider

**Figure 4.** Social Media Reach

Source: own analysis from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram sources

interest in the fact-checking movement than ASEAN members (71% as opposed to 40%), but there are great examples in quantity: Indonesia has the second biggest number of fact-checkers per country in this sample (6), and the Philippines have four. News agencies play an important role, as they are drivers for numerous fact-checkers, e.g. AFP Fact Check Asia in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines or Thai News Agency.

Both the EU and ASEAN have examples of great collaborative projects: FactCheckEU with 19 media outlets from 13 European countries and Tsek.ph with three universities, 12 media partners and four funding supporters.

There is one uncommon characteristic with two ASEAN fact-checkers: their focus on hoaxes and rumours spread via messaging apps like WhatsApp (Indonesian Tempo's Fakta atau Hoax and Thai Sure and Share Centre), something which is not mentioned on any other webpages.

Although UNCTAD data shows that the European Union and the ASEAN countries are leaders in the growth of the creative economy in which the media industries play a significant role, and despite the growth of fact-checkers worldwide during the last five years, it is not possible from the results of our analysis to see evidence of a significant impact from fact-checkers on mass audiences (relatively modest number of followers on fact-checkers' social networks). However, the growth in the number of fact-checkers may point to the growing importance of these portals for specific audiences, such as the media itself, that is, journalists, analysts, communicators and politicians. The relatively modest interest among



mass audiences for the content published by fact-checkers currently does not give an optimistic picture of fact-checkers' future. It is also significant that most of the examined fact-checkers focus on traditional forms of political communication and less on the content on social networks, which have become a very influential source of fake news. We assume that the fact-checkers will shift their focus to social media disinformation, considering they are a greater threat than media and journalism, of however poor quality they often seem. It is also evident that there are relatively few independent fact-checkers and that they have problems with financing. This indicates that potential financiers still do not recognise this specific activity as a prosperous return on investment, which is not in line with the trend of creative economy growth.

This overview aimed to contribute to the body of work on fact-checkers and their impact. The phenomenon is still evolving for now, but has large potential in the creative industries regarding media and professional communication. To our knowledge, this is the only work whose focus is on the phenomenon of fact-checkers in these two regions, since most of the known literature is focused on origins of the movement in the United States.

In conclusion, fact-checkers are still struggling to find their audiences and extend their reach, but they should be seen as a growing element of creative industries, yet one that is in its beginnings, but with a needed role in modern informational environment. We especially point out the importance of researching the role of oligarchy in the media in the current and future development of the fact-checking movement. The concentration of the media in the hands of a small number of elites indicates increasing control over the information that should be questioned not only from the position of accuracy, but also from the position of a selective approach in publishing information in the public interest.

## REFERENCES

- Amazeen, M. (2013). *A Critical Assessment of Fact-checking in 2012*. New America Foundation.
- Amazeen, M. (2015). Revisiting the Epistemology of Fact-Checking. *Critical Review*, 27 (1): 1-22.
- Amazeen, M. (2016). Checking the Fact-Checkers in 2008: Predicting Political Ad Scrutiny and Assessing Consistency. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 15 (4): 433-464.
- Amazeen, M. (2017). Journalistic interventions: The structural factors affecting the global emergence of fact-checking. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, 21 (1): 95-111. DOI: 10.1177/1464884917730217

- Araya, D. (2010). Cultural Democracy: universities in the creative economy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 8 (2): 217-231. DOI: 10.2304/pfie.2010.8.2.217
- ASEAN. (2019). ASEAN Member States. Retrieved from <https://asean.org/asean/member-states/>
- Benkler, Y., Roberts, H., Faris, R., Etling, B., Zuckerman, E. & Bourassa, N. (2017). *Partisanship, Propaganda, and Disinformation: Online Media and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election*. Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society Research Paper. Cambridge.
- Bounegru, L., Gray, J., Venturini, T. & Mauri, M. (2017). *A Field Guide to "Fake News" and other Information Disorders*. Public Data Lab. Amsterdam.
- Bradshaw, S. & Howard, P. N. (2017). *Troops, Trolls and Troublemakers: A Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation*. University of Oxford. Oxford.
- Brandtzaeg, P. & Folstad, A. (2017). Trust and Distrust in Online Fact-Checking Services. *Communications of the ACM*, 60 (9): 65-71.
- British Academy. (2004). *That Full Complement of Riches: The Contributions of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences to the Nation's Wealth*. British Academy. London.
- Chan, M. S., Jones, C. R., Hall Jemieson, K. & Albarracin, D. (2017). Debunking: A Meta-Analysis of the Psychological Efficacy of Messages Countering Misinformation. *Psychological Science*, 28 (11): 1531-1546. DOI: 10.1177/0956797617714579
- Cvjetičanin, B. (2012). *Kreativna ekonomija i kultura*. Retrieved from <https://www.culturenet.hr/default.aspx?id=44984>
- Cvjetičanin, B. (2014). *Kultura u doba mreža*. Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada. Zagreb.
- de Beer, D. & Matthee, M. (2020). Approaches to Identify Fake News: A Systematic Literature Review. In T. Antipova (Ed.), *Integrated Science in Digital Age 2020. ICIS 2020. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems* (pp. 1-9). Springer. Cham. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-49264-9\_2
- Dentith, M. R. X. (2017). The problem of fake news. *Public Reason*, 8 (1-2): 65-79.
- Elizabeth, J. (2014). Who Are You Calling a Fact-Checker? American Press Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/fact-checking-project/fact-checker-definition/>
- European Commission. (2019). A Europe that protects: EU reports on progress in fighting disinformation ahead of European Council. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_19\\_2914](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_2914)
- Fridkin, K., Kenney, P. J. & Wintersieck, A. (2015). Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire: How Fact-Checking Influences Citizens' Reactions to Negative Advertising. *Political Communication*, 32 (1): 127-151. DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2014.914613
- Graves, L. (2016a). Boundaries Not Drawn: Mapping the institutional roots of the global factchecking movement. *Journalism Studies*, 19 (5): 1-19.

- Graves, L. (2016b). *Deciding What's True: The Rise of Political Fact-Checking in American Journalism*. Columbia University Press. New York.
- Graves, L. & Cherubini, F. (2016). *The rise of fact-checking sites in Europe*. Retrieved from <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/rise-fact-checking-sites-europe>
- Graves, L., Nyhan, B. & Reifler, J. (2015). The Diffusion of Fact-checking: Understanding the growth of a journalistic innovation. Retrieved from <https://reporterslab.org/fact-checking/>
- Haigh, M., Haigh, T. & Kozak, N. (2017). Stopping Fake News: The Work Practices of Peer-to-Peer Counter Propaganda. *Journalist Studies*, 19 (14): 2062-2087. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2017.1316681
- Hochschild, J. L. & Levine Einstein, K. (2015). Do Facts Matter? Information and Misinformation in American Politics. *Political Science Quarterly*, 130 (4): 585-624.
- Howkins, J. (2013). *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*. Penguin UK. London.
- Jeffcutt, P. (2001). *Creativity and Convergence in the Knowledge Economy*. Culturelink. Zagreb.
- Khaldarova, I. & Pantti, M. (2016). Fake News, The narrative battle over the Ukrainian conflict. *Journalism Practice*, 10 (7): 891-901. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2016.1163237
- Lim, C. (2018). Checking how fact-checkers check. *Research and Politics*, 5 (3): 1-7.
- Lowrey, W. (2017). The Emergence and Development of News Fact-Checking Sites. *Journalism Studies*, 18 (3): 376-394.
- Marietta, M., Barker, D. C. & Bowser, T. (2015). Fact-Checking Polarized Politics: Does The Fact-Check Industry Provide Consistent Guidance on Disputed Realities? *The Forum*, 13 (4): 577-596.
- McCay-Peet, L. & Quan-Haase, A. (2016). What is Social Media and What Questions Can Social Media Research Help Us Answer? In L. Sloan & A. Quan-Haase (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (pp. 13-26). SAGE Publications Ltd. Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Mena, P. (2018). Principles and Boundaries of Fact-checking: Journalists' Perceptions. *Journalism Practice*, 13 (6): 657-672.
- Miller, T. (2009). From Creative to Cultural Industries. *Cultural Studies*, 23 (1): 88-99. DOI: 10.1080/09502380802326660
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Levy, D. & Kleis Nielsen, R. (2017). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Oxford.
- Nieminen, S. & Rapeli, L. (2018). Fighting Misperceptions and Doubting Journalists' Objectivity: A Review of Fact-checking Literature. *Political Studies Review*, 17 (3): 1-14. DOI: 10.1177/1478929918786852

- Nyhan, B. & Reifler, J. (2010). When Corrections Fail: The persistence of political misperceptions. *Political Behavior*, 32 (2): 303-330.
- Nyhan, B. & Reifler, J. (2015). The Effect of Fact-Checking on Elites: A Field Experiment on U.S. State Legislators. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59 (3): 628-640.
- Nyhan, B. & Reifler, J. (2016). Estimating Fact-checking's Effects. Evidence from a long-term experiment during campaign 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Estimating-Fact-Checkings-Effect.pdf>
- Nyhan, B., Porter, E., Reifler, J. & Wood, T. J. (2019). Taking Fact-Checks Literally But Not Seriously? The Effects of Journalistic Fact-Checking on Factual Beliefs and Candidate Favorability. *Political Behaviour*, 42: 936-960. DOI: 10.1007/s11109-019-09528-x
- Paskin, D. (2018). Real or fake news: who knows? *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, 7 (2): 252-273.
- Shin, J. & Thorson, K. (2017). Partisan Selective Sharing: The Biased Diffusion of Factchecking Messages on Social Media. *Journal of Communication*, 67 (2): 233-255. DOI: 10.1111/jcom.12284
- Silverman, C. (2015). Lies, Damn Lies and Viral Content. How News Websites Spread (and Debunk) Online Rumors, Unverified Claims and Misinformation. Retrieved from [http://towcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/LiesDamnLies\\_Silverman\\_TowCenter.pdf](http://towcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/LiesDamnLies_Silverman_TowCenter.pdf)
- Singer, J. (2018). Fact Checkers as Entrepreneurs. *Journalism Practice*, 12 (8): 1070-1080.
- Turow, J. (2013). *Mediji danas: Uvod u masovne komunikacije II*. Clio. Beograd.
- UNESCO and UNDP. (2013). Creative Economy Report, Widening Local Development Pathways, Special Edition. United Nations. New York.
- United Kingdom's Creative Alliance. (2019). Millennial Trends That Creative Industries Can't Ignore. Retrieved from <https://creativealliance.org.uk/millennial-trends-that-creative-industries-cant-ignore/>
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development – UNCTAD. (2015). Creative Economy Outlook And Country Profiles: Trends in international trade in creative industries. United Nations. New York.
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2018). Creative Economy Outlook – Trends in international trade in creative industries, 2002–2015. United Nations. New York.
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2019). Retrieved from <https://unctad.org/en/Pages/Home.aspx>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO. (2019). Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco>

- Uscinski, J. (2015). The Epistemology of Fact Checking (Is Still Naïve): Rejoinder to Amazeen. *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society*, 27 (2): 1-10.
- Uscinski, J. & Butler, R. (2013). The Epistemology of Fact Checking. *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society*, 25 (2): 162-180.
- Verified signatories of the IFCN code of principles. (2019). Retrieved from <https://ifcn-codeofprinciples.poynter.org/signatories>
- Vis, F. (2014). Hard Evidence: How Does False Information Spread Online? The Conversation. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/hard-evidence-how-does-false-information-spread-online-25567>
- Vosoughi, S., Roy, D. & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359: 1146-1151.
- Wardle, C. & Derakhshan, H. (2017). Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making. Retrieved from <https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/7495-information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research-and-policy-making.html>
- Werner, H. (2016). Facts are for losers? The effect of fact-checking on trust in politicians and trust in media sources during the US presidential campaign 2016. Retrieved from [https://eventum.upf.edu/\\_files/\\_event/\\_5261/\\_editorFiles/file/Hannah%20Werner.pdf](https://eventum.upf.edu/_files/_event/_5261/_editorFiles/file/Hannah%20Werner.pdf)

*Mailing Addresses:*

**Marija Slijepčević**, VERN<sup>7</sup> University, Palmotićeve ul. 82/1, 10000 Zagreb. *E-mail*: [marija.slijepcevic@vern.hr](mailto:marija.slijepcevic@vern.hr)

**Mirela Holy**, VERN<sup>7</sup> University, Palmotićeve ul. 82/1, 10000 Zagreb. *E-mail*: [mirela.holy@vern.hr](mailto:mirela.holy@vern.hr)

**Nikolina Borčić**, VERN<sup>7</sup> University, Palmotićeve ul. 82/1, 10000 Zagreb. *E-mail*: [nikolina.borcic@vern.hr](mailto:nikolina.borcic@vern.hr)