

## Knowledge Work in Platform Fact-Checking Partnerships

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This article explores how platforms, news publishers, and fact-checkers describe the trade-offs they make in partnerships to counter misinformation. Using 54 interviews with these actors active in the global fact-checking field, it shows that resources and news values constitute key aspects of these partnerships. They contribute to knowledge shaping of what it means to fight misinformation (e.g., focusing on debunking, resource-allocation inequalities), and what types of misinformation matter for the public. This study highlights two kinds of problems in the growing anti-misinformation field, namely, coordination (technical, as to how to integrate different efforts by multiple actors) and cooperation (different organizations have different goals).

*Keywords: platform, fact-check, journalism, partnerships, collaboration, cooperation, misinformation*

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In response to global alarm about online dis- and misinformation, organizations dedicated to “external” fact-checking of political rhetoric, news reports, online rumors, or other public texts have multiplied (Graves, 2018). A recent count finds 341 active fact-checking outlets in 102 countries, more than three times the total at the start of 2016 (Stencel & Luther, 2021). These organizations constitute a self-described global movement that is closely tied to, but distinct from, professional journalism even though fact-checkers embrace journalistic values like accuracy and fairness. Major news organizations lead the fact-checking field in many countries, but only about 60% of fact-checking projects worldwide are attached to media organizations; others are independent, based in universities or are part of civil society organizations focused on democracy building. Fact-checking is a rare example of a transnational movement that brings together practitioners from different media systems and cultures, academia, and the civil and political spheres (Bélair-Gagnon, Graves, Kalsnes, Steensen, & Westlund, 2022; Graves, 2016). Fact-checking is thus a productive arena for examining truth-seeking knowledge practices in partnership contexts.

This study focuses on partnerships between fact-checkers and major platforms companies, which have proliferated since Facebook (now Meta) announced its partnership program in 2016. Amplification is a primary motivation for fact-checkers to join such partnerships; fact-checkers recognize that platforms are vital for distributing their fact-checks to relevant audiences and in the spaces where they encounter misinformation (cf. publishers in Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). However, not all partnerships involve published work. For instance, TikTok recently launched “consultative” partnerships with fact-checkers that do not emphasize amplification of published fact-checks (TikTok, 2020). Other platform partners include Google, which has worked closely with members of the fact-checking community to develop data standards to surface fact-checks in search engine results. These partnerships entail different but related models, aims, and participants—these aspects influence the incentives, professional self-understandings, and practices within fact-checking operations. It is worth exploring further (a) what these fact-checking partnerships are globally, and (b) in what ways fact-checkers and platforms conceive making trade-offs to build their field as agents of knowledge. This article thus explores the trade-offs of actors involved in platform fact-checking partnerships in the fight against misinformation.

The article recognizes that organizations have specific and limited resources in their work to fight misinformation. Situated in a resource-based view of organizations, the article deploys a knowledge-based view (KBV) approach, based on the assumption that organizations must have specialized experts or expertise that work toward shared goals by coordinating and collaborating with each other (Grant, 2013). We conducted interviews with news publishers, fact-checkers, and platform company representatives. Our aim was to identify and explore fact-checkers’ trade-offs in platform partnerships, and what that might mean for power asymmetries in the field of misinformation and communication.

### **Framework**

Cross-sector partnerships—the needed and contractual participation of stakeholders across sectors and around shared interests—are an important feature of contemporary work practices in knowledge-production activities globally. *Platformization* can be understood as the integration among digital platforms’ economic, infrastructural, and governmental extensions with the information and cultural industries’ organizational and cultural practices, creativity, and democratic aims. It also refers to the interactions between platforms and

creative/knowledge industries, leading to “a complex balance [information and] cultural producers have to maintain on platforms between self-expression, audience interests, advertiser needs, and platform governance . . . deeply affecting the nature of cultural content and the space for creative expression” (Poell, Nieborg, & Duffy, 2021, p. 6). Platforms are thus an extension of the Web, involving multiple stakeholders (third parties) in the process of preparing their data to be “platform ready” (Helmond, 2015).

Throughout the 2000s and especially over the last decade, news actors have seen the rise of platformization and related liminal actors, via partnerships, redefining the epistemic and practical boundaries of journalism. These range from start-ups to foundations seeking to contribute to the defining, shaping, and articulation of what constitutes journalism and knowledge (Eldridge, 2017; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). In seeking to understand knowledge-producing practices, scholars and practitioners must stay attuned to “infrastructure, circulation practices, and epistemic contests . . . [and] the materiality of digital media, various usage patterns that arise, and public struggles over what news as a form of knowledge ought to look like and who should produce it” (Carlson, 2020, p. 230; see also Ekström, Lewis, & Westlund, 2020). Partnerships in journalism—and the way participating actors describe them—constitute a rich terrain for understanding how socio-technical arrangements yield knowledge-based practices around shared and competing goals. This section develops the conceptual framework first by analyzing the literature on platforms, partnerships, and fact-checking. Second, it explores the ways in which coordination concepts can help us understand knowledge work in platform fact-checking partnerships.

### ***Platforms, Partnerships, and Fact-Checking***

News publishers across the world typically focus on a well-defined geographical market (i.e., local or regional) and encounter limited competition from other news publishers. Facing similar challenges and opportunities, news publishers have a tradition of learning from each other in formalized ways (e.g., through industry associations such as the World Association of News Publishers) and informally through vicarious learning such as through peer exchanges among managers. Partnerships, coordination, and collaboration among actors have evolved at the intersection of journalism and different occupational worlds (Bélair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; Eldridge, 2017; Lewis & Usher, 2013; McMullen Cheng & Bélair-Gagnon, 2022). Publishers have turned to platforms for their news work and distribution, configuring their platform presence and developing different sets of relationships and relative dependence on platform companies. News publishers have also developed numerous different types of partnerships with platform companies (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022).

The platformed press, with its publisher-platform relationships, represents an emerging and important research area, illuminating the power dynamics at play when it comes to how publishers develop amid platforms and their socio-technical infrastructures (see Bell & Owen, 2017; DeVito, 2017; Meese & Hurcombe, 2021; Myllylahti, 2021). However, to date there is limited research on the similarly important relationships between fact-checkers and platforms. Fact-checking institutions have their roots in journalism and are marked by close collaborations with each other via industry associations (e.g., the International Fact-Checking Network) and informal networks (Brookes & Waller, 2022). They have entanglements with platform companies; some even exist and operate thanks to platform partnerships.

The growth of the global fact-checking field since 2016 has significantly relied on partnerships. Many fact-checking projects have been formed in partnerships between different kinds of newsrooms or between news organizations and other institutions such as journalism schools (Kalsnes, Falasca, & Kammer, 2021). Outlets that specialize in fact-checking—based in their own newsrooms or other kinds of organizations—count on media organizations to amplify their work and carry it to audiences (Graves, 2018). The global fact-checking movement is thus marked by a high degree of collaboration among fact-checking organizations and with external stakeholders, for two reasons. First, fact-checkers have coordinated their efforts regionally and globally to address transnational misinformation flows—dramatically exemplified in the #CoronaVirusFacts alliance (with more than 16,000 fact-checks spanning 40 languages). Second, fact-checkers have been relying on media and technology partnerships to amplify their work and increase its impact. This is illustrated via Meta’s Third-Party Fact-Checking Program (3PFC), the platform’s program with independent third-party fact-checkers certified through the nonpartisan Poynter’s International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). The 3PFC includes more than 80 fact-checking organizations globally, working in more than 60 languages. This partnership has become a crucial source of funding for fact-checkers worldwide, helping to fuel a surge in new fact-checking outlets, particularly across the Global South.

This raises questions about “voluntary participation” in these partnerships, as fact-checkers to various extents depend on platforms for operations in terms of funding and tools—with under-resourced or less-established outlets having greater dependency on platform resources. The 3PFC has also set precedents for other partnerships. In 2018, WhatsApp began partnering with a growing number of fact-checkers to provide a chat service. Through this computer-mediated service, users can submit identified misinformation (Meedan, 2020). TikTok also established a partnership program with fact-checkers in advance of the 2020 U.S. elections, through which fact-checkers verify if flagged content is misinformation. These partnerships help to shape subsequent practices and understanding of misinformation.

When it comes to the activity of fact-checking, Ananny (2018) noted an inter-reliance on U.S. platform partnerships. Meta launched this partnership in 2016, in the wake of the U.S. election. The aim was to rely on independent fact-checkers as “third parties” to review and rate the accuracy of stories on Meta platforms, using original reporting via interviewing sources or analyzing photos. When fact-checkers rate platform content as “false,” Meta reduces the distribution to users, labels the content, and notifies users who might share said content. Content in this process is not removed from the platform, though removal is possible if it violates the company’s community standards. While fact-checking organizations generally appreciate the value of the 3PFC initiative tensions have repeatedly surfaced around differences in how they and Meta define misinformation, prioritize their efforts, and understand the larger goals of the program (e.g., Ananny, 2018; Silverman & Mac, 2020). And while fact-checking organizations and publishers partner with foundations, nonprofits, government-sponsored research centers, and local and transnational institutions, their relationships with platform companies have been central in their work against misinformation.

### ***Coordination in Knowledge Work***

Much literature in management and strategy has stressed the importance for companies to develop and sustain a competitive advantage in their markets and niche of operations. To understand if and how this

can be achieved, managers must consider what resources their companies have or can develop. Recognizing this, the Resource-Based View (RBV) has become influential in management and strategy literature. The RBV tradition links to several related theoretical approaches, such as dynamic capabilities, core competencies, and the KBV (see review in Kraaijenbrink, Spender, & Groen, 2010). Ultimately, adopting such a lens for researching contemporary work in complex and large organizations entails paying attention to their internal resources for achieving goals and strategies, which in turn is linked to their specialized knowledge.

Specialization is essential when it comes to organizational goals such as developing a competitive advantage. Contemporary organizations do not enroll all specialists as employees in their organizations but may offer project-based contracts, hire consultants, or enter into partnerships with other companies possessing the needed resources (Chadha & Steiner, 2022; Nerone, 2022). KBV develops an understanding of the ways in which collaboration works to coordinate and transfer knowledge. It highlights organizational contexts and whether they are superior to the market, or whether hierarchical governance is more efficient for integrating specialized knowledge and achieving different goals (Grant & Baden-Fuller, 1995). KBV gives emphasis to the human side and matches with opportunities and markets. It also prioritizes more specialization in relation to other theories of specialization. It builds on the idea that an organization needs to enroll specialized expertise—involving tacit (learning by doing) and explicit (gained by knowledge) knowledge as well as socio-technical resources—to form successful partnerships.

Research has found that establishing routines and roles for coordination, among a diverse set of specialists carrying diverging explicit and tacit knowledge, may be a prerequisite to the performance of specific forms of work. A news publisher case study showed how the shared ambition for producing online live broadcasts enrolled participatory actors inside the newsroom (journalists and managers) and beyond with a specialized TV-studio team. Through role responsibilities and knowledge integration, these partners solved problems arising in critical moments of coordination (Westlund & Ekström, 2021). Coordination can occur through socio-technical means in addition to structured roles. Social actors in journalistic institutions use coordination technologies, such as Microsoft Teams or Slack, to integrate work and different sorts of knowledge (Bunce, Wright, & Scott, 2018; Koivula, Villi, & Sivunen, 2020). In fact-checking, the problem of misinformation requires actors in diverse sectors of society to coordinate their actions. Indeed, research has indicated that fact-checkers coordinate globally, as a community of practice (Brookes & Waller, 2022).

Therefore, we take the approach of focusing on trade-offs, meaning the ways in which platform partnership actors talk about negotiating resources, capabilities, expertise, and professional self-understandings. Existing research has highlighted the variety of sociopolitical contexts in which fact-checkers operate, leading to fundamentally different understandings of the problem of misinformation (Lauer, 2021; see also Graves, 2016; Moreno-Gil, Ramon-Vegas, & Mauri-Ríos, 2022). The approach of focusing on trade-offs helps to account for the diversity of organizational forms and institutional fields represented in the global fact-checking movement but also underscores the challenges that movement has faced as fact-checkers have professionalized and sought to develop field-wide standards and credentialing mechanisms through the IFCN (Graves & Mantzarlis, 2020). It is in this context of fact-checking as an emerging, weakly institutionalized transnational field that we explore the influence of platform partnerships. Specifically, this study asks the following research questions:

*RQ1: What normative or practical trade-offs involved in partnerships with platforms are revealed in fact-checkers' self-understandings?*

*RQ2: What are the ways that coordination and cooperation work to transfer knowledge in partnerships within socio-technical systems?*

Answering these questions will give us an understanding of (1) the ways that platform partnership actors organize resources and professional self-understandings in relation to fact-checking as knowledge production; and (2) how, in their view, this may come normatively at the detriment of combating misinformation in the form of fact-checking.

### Data Collection and Analysis

One possible research design would have been an ethnographic case study, focusing on specialized partnership expertise and coordination from the perspective of a specific organization. For this article we chose to study the research questions by way of 54 in-depth interviews. This included five interviews with representatives from different platforms, including people working in policy and management of partnerships (see Table 1). It also included 49 interviews with representatives from fact-checking organizations (fact-checkers and fact-checking managers). This varied data set provided insights into a more heterogeneous set of dynamics. The sample for the overarching project also included four government representatives and four start-ups, but for the purpose of this analysis, we did not include these data as they were not considered pertinent to fact-checking platform partnership knowledge work.

**Table 1. List of Interviews.**

Code	Job Title	Gender	Region
R102	Manager	Female	Europe
R103	Fact-checker	Female	Europe
R104	Journalist	Male	The United Kingdom
R105	Journalist	Female	North America
R106	Journalist	Female	North America
R107	Fact-checker	Male	North America
R108	Fact-checker	Female	North America
R109	Manager	Male	North America
R110	Platform manager	Female	North America
R111	Journalist	Female	North America
R112	Journalist	Female	North America
R113	Fact-checker (publisher)	Female	Asia
R114	Fact-checker	Male	Asia
R115	Journalist	Male	North America
R116	Fact-checker	Female	North America
R117	Manager	Male	Europe
R118	Manager	Female	The United Kingdom

R119	Fact-checker (publisher)	Female	Europe
R120	Platform manager	Male	North America
R121	Fact-checker	Female	Europe
R123	Journalist	Male	Europe
R124	Journalist	Female	Europe
R125	Fact-checker	Male	Europe
R126	Platform manager	Male	The United Kingdom
R127	Fact-checker	Male	Europe
R129	Journalist	Male	Europe
R132	Fact-checking manager	Male	North America
R141	Fact-checker	Male	Europe
R143	Fact-checker	Female	North America
R144	Fact-checker	Male	North America
R145	Manager (publisher)	Male	Europe
R156	Fact-checker	Female	Africa
R157	Platform manager	Female	North America
R159	Fact-checker	Male	Africa
R161	Platform manager	Female	North America
R164	Journalist	Male	North America
R172	Fact-checker	Female	Europe
R173	Fact-checker	Male	Europe
R180	Journalist	Male	Europe
R181	Journalist	Male	Europe
R195	Manager (publisher)	Male	Oceania
R202	Fact-checker	Male	Europe
R205	Journalist	Male	Europe
R211	Fact-checking manager	Male	North America
R218	Manager (publisher)	Male	Europe
R223	Fact-checking manager	Male	Europe
R227	Journalist	Male	Europe
R232	Journalist	Female	Europe
R233	Fact-checker	Male	Europe
R234	Fact-checker	Male	Europe
R237	Manager	Female	Europe
R238	Fact-checking manager	Male	Europe
R239	Journalist	Female	Europe
R301	Fact-checker	Male	Europe

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*Note.* We used regions for anonymity, especially for smaller countries where fact-checkers could be identifiable.

Participants were curated using the Poynter's IFCN membership list, followed by a snowball sampling (Morgan, 2008). Both platform representatives and fact-checkers provided elaborate information about their experiences; however, because these partnerships are bound by nondisclosure agreements (NDAs), participants often claimed inability to provide partnership details beyond what is currently publicly available via news, press releases, or trade press articles. While this presented a challenge, interview reflections and descriptions still allowed for significant insight (beyond the opacity of platform operations visible to the outsider).

The interviews were conducted by video conference, between October 2020 and July 2021. On average, the interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, with the shortest being 27 minutes and the longest, 129 minutes. Given that COVID-19 was happening during the timeframe of the research, and because of the international nature of interviews, video conference technology was helpful for accessing participants, as well as saving time and research expenses (Heiselberg & Stępińska, 2022). Participants shared insights into the nature, opportunities, and challenges of formal platform partnerships in which they were involved. The interviewers employed a semi-structured, grounded approach, which allowed deeper delving into the recurring themes coming from the anonymized interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Interviews were professionally transcribed, following European and American institutional board ethics requirements.

The analysis process was collaborative and iterative. The qualitative data analysis software package NVivo allowed for exploratory coding to the point of conceptual saturation (Saldaña, 2011). Using NVivo, the researchers looked at the data independently, focusing on material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which the respondents produced and reproduced their understanding of the partnerships to fight against misinformation. Then, the researchers developed exploratory codes and conducted axial coding with the literature and concepts described above until theoretical validity was reached (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The following sections will unpack the results.

## **Results**

In this section, we review trade-offs that fact-checker partnership participants discursively make in their fight against misinformation. Respondents pointed to trade-offs concerning (1) resources and (2) news values. Coordination and cooperation of specialized expertise (human and nonhuman) is thus central to knowledge integration and joint efforts toward fighting misinformation in these partnerships.

### **Resources**

Given the different resources and capabilities in a knowledge coordination partnership, there is a need for specialization (area of concentration or expertise) for the partnership to work efficiently. Respondents related specialization with their need to rely on others for the sustainability and expansion of their businesses. These partnerships are part of the rhetoric of crisis (i.e., old ways are not working) seeking to help develop new kinds of relationships and partnerships with foundations, civil society groups, platforms, start-ups, and others. The justification for the platform partnership is that it pays for other fact-checking activities within the organizations. Such a partnership makes publishers and fact-checkers dependent on



platforms, and to a certain extent, combat misinformation. At the root, platforms know how to access and limit a body of misinformation fact-checkers cannot otherwise reach or manipulate (i.e., platforms give fact-checkers access to a new kind of intervention), while fact-checkers know how to evaluate (mis)information (i.e., have the credibility and expertise to make individual assessments).

Respondents claimed developing partnerships because they have the potential to result in increased resources and business capability; these include "organizational revenue," "consulting revenue," "traffic to their websites," "extra resources" to their operation, "growth" and "expansion," and "engagement with audiences" in a "mutually beneficial" interaction. Respondents talked about the need to be entrepreneurial and experiment in those partnerships because they would otherwise not have the resources nor the capability to do so. The resources and capabilities of these partnerships are key factors in the development of the field. Respondents talked about the possibility of expanding their operations through artificial intelligence (AI) bots. A fact-checker said: "We are able to scale it up on our end on a human level but if you are [a platform], it's a natural thing for you to want to develop your own technology to scale it up" (R105). Talking about AI, another said, "It's just an ongoing conversation with [platform] really, about what is feasible, what is manageable, and what we can do effectively" (R113).

Respondents described a "mutually beneficial" relationship and interdependence between a platform and particular fact-checking organizations. While there is a discussion of mutually beneficial partnerships, these are asymmetrical relationships:

[The platform] acknowledged they had an issue, that they needed to tackle this in some way, and that is when they started this [partnership] and approached various media . . . they are our biggest client for fact-checking globally . . . So it's, you know, a mutually beneficial arrangement in many instances, commercially it makes sense, and it's a time, you know . . . it's certainly a time when the media has to adapt to a changing online environment, and we have to find new avenues for revenue and this was one of them. But we're also responding to something that's a problem for people all around the world, you know. It's causing riots, it's causing deaths, you know, health misinformation. (R113)

Platform respondents also framed the arrangements as beneficial for fact-checkers, both in terms of revenue and reach.

A fact-checking organization is paid per reference article, and they're paid for every reference article that they write, and they are paid . . . and there's a cap on how many reference articles they can do per month . . . So that is kind of the incentive for them, the more reference articles they write to fact-check content on the platform, the more they're going to get paid. (R118)

Another representative described the partnership helping fact-checkers grow: "The focus, at least from the outset, and again from my personal reflections, the primary focus in the beginning was to help [European fact-checker] grow, and to help other [region in Europe] fact-checkers establish [themselves]" (R117). The mutually beneficial and inter-relational nature of the partnership is conceived within the

financial aspect of the partnership and the technological affordances, giving a level of autonomy to the fact-checkers.

For respondents, increased resources and capabilities come with an increasing sense that the fact-checking field needs to rely on external expertise to grow. Unsurprisingly, respondents in partnerships talked about the potential for “growth,” through “sporadic, kind of like a Christmas bonus almost” or regular remuneration for helping “reduce the spread of misinformation” (R157, 239). Platform representatives claimed being “responsible for a tremendous growth in fact-checking around the globe” (R115); fact-checkers talked about using tools to bolster their reporting (R141) though they ultimately rely on their own judgment, as described in the next section (R233, R227).

Fact-checkers also described varying levels of reliance on the revenue from the platforms. A fact-checker stated, “Most of our revenue comes from the partnership” (R141, a specialized and relatively new fact-checker) whereas another from a large, established nonprofit newsroom described the partnership as contributing 10% of their revenue (R233). Revenue breakdowns, when possible, to obtain, can help reveal the diversity of the fact-checking field and the diversity of trade-offs in partnerships. Fact-checkers noted how partnerships with platforms can be U.S.-centric as other countries may not have the same “amount of misinformation being shared here”; however, global events such as COVID-19 have spurred change on that front for platforms to “have that more regional approach” (R239).

Regarding resources, respondents spoke of how partnerships enabled them to reach audiences. Publishers and fact-checkers talked about “outreach,” “expanding their audiences,” or “avoiding backfire effect” though we are uncertain if the fact-checkers provide guidance to the platforms on this front or what information they have from tech companies about dissemination. A fact-checker said:

We have this audience, now, from [platform] that’s like, “Stop censoring me. I’m going to get a lawyer to sue for fact-checking my posts” . . . “Why are you fact-checking me on [platform]?” [platform] is driving a lot of traffic to our site. We’ve got multiples of traffic thanks to the [platform]. (R143)

Another said, “We are a bit reliant on the social media platforms for revealing how many views or shares something has had” (R113), implying a lack of other options for understanding audiences in a digital context.

Another important aspect of partnerships relates to the expertise of social actors. Fact-checkers described internal specialization in connections. Within organizations, fact-checkers may oversee specific tasks, but all may be tasked to have a general overview of the 3PFC internal platform (R227). Platform companies talked about the importance of giving the freedom to fact-checkers to “decide for themselves which stories they choose” (R102) and “proactively queue it into the product and then they can carry out the fact-check” (R117). In the 3PFC program, this form of local expertise has been coordinated through the IFCN.

Respondents also described using a partner's differing expertise, depending on the question and problem at hand. One respondent said:

We were always looking for partners who could help us dig into this information, the propagation of accounts, the shape and structure of campaigns, who the actors are. But that's typically not something that we've been doing, internally, as a practice area within our business. (R109)

Another fact-checker said, "Technology is not what we're experts on. You know, we have people that approach us, suggesting certain technology that they'd like us to trial or something . . . they might ask us to look at whether it's effective, but we're not necessarily directly involved in the development of those technologies" (R113). Fact-checkers noted that a specific partnership gave them access to a particular kind of resource: Technological tools. A fact-checker described how they use an in-house tool that allows them to queue content proactively and quickly in the platform fact-checking product (R107).

Other forms of specializations and knowledge expertise occur through the affordances of the platform. Certain forms of technological arrangements lead to conceptions of misinformation. In reflecting on platforms' technological affordances, respondents used terms such as "virality," "ease of checking," and "labels." A platform representative described the meeting of journalistic judgment with "user base signals" in the platform, such as through prioritizing "highest virality" (R117). Another talked about "labels" available to fact-checks and the impact on distribution: "And depending on what label they give it, false and altered content are the strongest labels. If they give it that rating then we will apply that label, and then that will dramatically decrease the distribution of that piece of content" (R118). The coordination and collaboration in the development of technology is a trade-off publishers and fact-checkers are willing to make to pursue and grow their specialization.

Trade-offs demanded by these partnerships emerged in relation to "routines," or patterns of practice or behavior. Respondents expressed how existing journalistic routines, such as source verification, needed to match the routines built into the platform's interface (i.e., pasting URLs, labeling, looking for duplicates), at times making them reconsider the work that they do or work around the affordances of the platforms (see also Helmond, 2015; Westlund, Larsen, Graves, Kavtaradze, & Steensen, 2022). Platforms may not be considering how routine tasks can have a significant cumulative effect on overall fact-checking issues:

If you're using [platform] and you do a search for a certain phrase in the title of some article or some video and you're looking for duplicates you get a search result that looks like a bunch of tiles with infinite scrolling and 60% of the tiles are links to the same article because they're just copies on different pages. You can then click a button and download a CSV file with all of these, but you get it by e-mail. You must open the CSV file . . . then a unique function on it and then copy-paste it. That takes work. (R141)

Another fact-checker noted,

It's useful to get a sense of what is being shared, but the problem is there is a lot of noise in it, and some days we might open it and it might say 300 things in this queue of potential misinformation, and it's trying to sort out what is misinformation and what can we fact-check, and what is just nonsense that ended up in the queue and didn't need to be there at all. (R239; see also Full Fact, 2019, p. 9, para. 6, describing how "the majority of items in the queue are not things that we either would or could fact-check").

Platforms experienced disconnects between fact-checker routines and their interfaces: "Obviously we need to make sure that it's well anchored into the system that [fact-checkers] fact-check" (R117). A representative claimed that identification of fact-checks is a routine bottleneck:

This queue can be very, very long, and there can be a lot of noise, you know, hiding the real signals. So, there's also one of the areas where we try to invest and make it better to remove some of the noise and obviously help them in their work to better identify what needs to be looked at. (R117)

Former partnership participants claimed leaving partnerships in part because of ongoing "bandwidth" issues, exacerbated by these disconnects. Fact-checkers described how much time it took them to identify and input URLs, using the 3PFC platform. In a Poynter interview about their leaving the 3PFC partnership, a Snopes vice president said that it takes a lot of time to enter information manually into platforms' dashboard: "With a manual system and a closed system—it's impossible to keep on top of that stuff . . . Do you need fact-checkers to stop and do all this manual work?" (Funke, 2019, para. 6).

### ***News Values***

News values refers to how respondents discursively make sense of the partnerships through knowledge claims, methods, scope, and validity of the knowledge creation process. Respondents described trade-offs particularly around two main overarching concepts: (1) news judgment (the processes and values that journalists rely on to determine what is newsworthy) and (2) credibility (being trusted and believed in) and related discursive practices like transparency (the practice of making processes transparent to the public).

Respondents referred to news judgment as an arena for trade-offs. The rating systems instituted by platforms can be limiting and can potentially restructure practices in the newsroom; yet, via these systems, fact-checkers find checkable claims. Respondents described how sometimes they will spend hours on a fact-check and then if "the data is not findable, or . . . the claim is very difficult" (R141), they will delete it, acknowledging the overall practice to their audience. Respondents also described the problematic lack of standardization among platforms' policies for identifying and labeling misinformation, which can complicate news work routines (see above) and impact news judgment practices. A fact-checker, describing the different categories of what constitutes misinformation or not, said,

If you want to work across platforms, you do need this weird part of your brain that understands all their weird slicing and dicing. Which is interesting because not only are there different categories, different terms, different definitions, but often they have different implications, and they point to different enforcement strategies and different teams. And so, it's true that now I have this weird part of my brain, which I'm not sure is helpful for any other purposes, that knows this type of problem, [platform] would define it like this, that will happen, and it will be enforced on by this team. (R154)

The news judgment trade-off relates to choice of content and what fact-checkers can emphasize. Fact-checkers described virality, by different measures, to identify and prioritize what to fact-check. This tracks with a new orientation of the field toward debunking instead of just political fact-checking (Graves, 2018). It also implicates questions of news judgment impacts from partnerships. Do platforms choose or nudge fact-checkers toward what should be fact-checked? Or do they have more and more control over what is fact-checked through these partnerships, where they allow some choice but not enough context on the part of fact-checkers? What are the implications for the broader misinformation landscape, when one of the main issues is the sheer, overwhelming amount of misinformation? Putting limited fact-checking resources in certain arenas is a political choice.

Some fact-checkers have opted out of different nudges. A fact-checker involved in platform partnerships described how their organization no longer "work[s] to promote traffic to our site" (R107), choosing instead to only use revenue from contracts, including from partnerships. They are also reluctant to criticize a platform because their "whole industry would be a lot thinner and less effective if not for the support of [it]" (R107). In contrast, another respondent seemed to espouse a traditional journalistic norm of informing the public, not just striking information, and contrasted themselves to other partners:

That's how I differ with some of our fact-checking organizations or colleagues who are doing fact-checking. We believe both in fact-checking and in providing vital information. That it's simply not good enough to sit there with a whistle like a referee in a game and say that's a foul, that's a foul and all the rest. We also believe that we should be in a game where we have publicized the rules. (R106)

Respondents expressed skepticism about the partnerships regarding how they may impact their "credibility" and independence as media professionals. "I'm a little skeptical of collaborating with technology companies. I don't think that they necessarily have journalism's best interests at heart" (R111). And "there was also the aspect of not wanting to take money from [platform]" (R132). Certain respondents described partnerships as "exploitative" and alluded to opposing interests: "It's a tumultuous relationship with [platform] just because obviously their business model is to profit from people's fears and people's, uh, emotions. And, um, that doesn't work well when you're in the game of fighting misinformation" (R112). Another said: "We talked to them once, but [platform] is to us a little bit fishy" and it "really requires high standards, and if you work together with somebody who also sets low standards, then it affects your own work" (R233).

Platforms are trading-off the journalistic credibility of the "independent" fact-checkers and need fact-checkers to maintain that independence (or performativity) as best they can, even through furtive

support. A platform representative said, in describing their initial relationship with a fact-checker before it was able to join the IFCN and become a 3PFC partner, “Yes, we do have financial agreements with the fact-checkers we work with. We don’t go into detail about how they’re structured, but we are . . . *we try to be transparent with how they are set up*” (R117; emphasis added).

Publishers and fact-checking companies may engage in their own set of practices to become more credible, as added by the platform representative:

A few of them . . . have their own transparency requirements, so you can go to their website and see what funding they have received from different sources, and they will also list [platform partnerships] of course. So, you can, if you want to, sort of decode that from reverse engineering, but we do support the fact-checkers financially . . . But we also want to be very mindful and wary of a situation where a fact-checker, even if they’re not in reality dependent on us. Just the perception of them being dependent on us is a bad thing, right? Because it questions their independence and their credibility, so, you know, there is also a sort of natural lag or limit in terms of how much, to what degree support can go to finance that work . . . it’s nowadays much harder to describe what ratings exist and what kind of enforcement we take for different ratings, because it depends on the context. (R117)

Respondents related credibility with development of complexity and even mismatch of priorities in the partnership and outcomes. One arena in which this can be explored is transparency, especially as it is a key aspect of the IFCN’s Code of Principles (cf. Steensen, Bélair-Gagnon, Graves, Kalsnes, & Westlund, 2022). Fact-checkers must commit to various practices to ensure the excellence of their work, including transparency of sources, funding, organization, and methodology. These commitments are required to join the IFCN and then be cleared for participation in the Meta partnership; however, Meta requirements around secrecy seem to counter IFCN principles. We found this type of trade-off exemplified in NDAs. Respondents described them as making the field more secretive and industrial rather than collaborative. “[Platform] kind of discourages us from talking and sharing experiences with each other,” a fact-checker (R239) said. Others claimed they could not share information with researchers because of their NDAs. The rationale was varied; a respondent told us often that they had to “go off record” because platforms claim they do not want general platforms users to manipulate the tools (R239). Others brought up the NDA in the context of Meta being one of their main sources of revenue; they were not willing to jeopardize that support.

In terms of other arenas of transparency, fact-checkers also compared platforms’ approaches to informing users of fact-checked material. In comparing purely consultative partnerships with partnerships with more active moderation by fact-checkers, a respondent said,

It’s imperfect . . . but I think the Meta model is the one that should be emulated, because it’s the most transparent. It gives you more information instead of less. If you disagree with it, at least you know what you’re disagreeing with and why and who, while on the other platforms, users sometimes have the impression there’s this faceless they or them trying to keep the truth from me. (R202)

Respondents also talked about engagement in gatherings or coalitions, such as the Credibility Coalition, in developing “common standards for information credibility by incubating activities and initiatives that bring together people and institutions from a variety of backgrounds” (Credibility Coalition, 2022, para. 1). They described their relationship with a platform by taking care to emphasize their “independence” (R233).

Another arena of credibility trade-offs involves the geopolitical positionings of partners. A fact-checker expressed such concerns in describing partnerships discussions, given self-understandings around the platform’s connections to a foreign government.

I was very suspicious about the [country] thing, just for a second. It’s also just something I don’t trust you know, it’s like I don’t know, but I’m not to work with them. If somebody doesn’t accept high standards, it’s run by some people, I can’t check whether they are now working with some secret services. (R233)

For credibility trade-offs, fact-checkers engaged in discursive practices that allowed them to bolster their own values and practices. Talking about the difficulty of NDAs, describing the challenges with geopolitical interests of platforms, and engaging in coalitions are ways for fact-checkers to speak of this uneasy relationship partnered publishers and fact-checkers have with credibility. But the same goes for platforms that are bound by whom they can let in those partnerships specifically because the emerging field has set rules on who can join the field.

Respondents were aware of the trade-offs they must make in those client-driven partnerships that also have combating misinformation as a chief goal. Different socio-technical arrangements lead to different trade-offs. These forms of knowledge—that are articulated through (a) resources and (b) news values—provide a helpful window into how knowledge is articulated in these partnerships. It also relates to the difficulties of humans and nonhumans in coordinating and collaborating in those settings on a global scale, which we develop further in the following section.

## Discussion

This study examined discursive participation in platform and fact-checking partnerships. It focused on how, through discursive practices, partnered fact-checkers and platforms develop knowledge of the ways in which people document, articulate, formalize, and share information. The findings showed that resources and news values are part of that discursive expression of platform partnerships in fighting misinformation. Fact-checkers discuss entering those interdependent (and potentially unequal) partnerships because they provide revenue for growth, online traffic (another source of revenue but also an avenue of informing the public), and particular forms of expertise and training around tech. “Producers lacking substantial resources and organizational support continue to face barriers that preclude the ability of cultural [and information] workers to participate in platform-based cultural [and information] production” (Poell et al., 2021, p. 21).

Platforms and fact-checkers are marked by both asymmetric and mutual dependence. The latter becomes salient with the European Union developing policy that would require platforms to collaborate with fact-checkers in every country where fact-checking is available. Even though fact-checkers are not there in every country of the world, platforms would need to create the opportunity and depend on the presence of fact-checkers. Large organizations like the Agence France Presse could put capabilities worldwide because they have

the resources to scale up. Larger organizations may also experience fewer and less significant trade-offs around their daily routines because of their lesser reliance on the business models of platforms. There are also variations by country; respondents said that most of the resources, especially before COVID-19, were focused on U.S. fact-checkers. Platforms also have quotas, objectives, and policies that affect regional coverage, such as the physical-harm policy of Meta. Regions use different platforms with different affordances. Regions may use Facebook and benefit from these affordances while others, whose audiences may be on Signal, a cross-platform, encrypted messaging service, may not have the same benefits and may allow for more business growth for others. Fact-checkers are given access to platform interfaces for the identification of misinformation. In the case of the 3PFC program, fact-checkers need to be IFCN-certified and maintain in-house specialized knowledge of the internal platform to have full access even though they can say they are not using it. For those outside the 3PFC program, it is almost impossible to access certain information; measuring outcomes and impacts of fact-checking on these platforms then becomes different and more difficult.

Fact-checkers engage in partnerships for reasons beyond remuneration; partnerships are seen as a way for fact-checkers and publishers to further make a difference in combating misinformation. Fact-checkers involved in the beginning of partnerships and design also have more opportunity to set partnership agendas; this may lead to a lesser impact on their news values. And smaller organizations may see more impact on the type of content that they seek to fact-check, which impacts news judgment and the forms of fact-checking with which they may be engaging (see also Helmond, 2015). Fact-checkers may also benefit from more established journalistic credibility than organizations that are more on the fringe. This also varies in terms of the political ideologies of fact-checkers and the audiences that they serve, such as right-leaning fact-checkers who debunk legacy media.

Partnerships may be standardizing organizational and professional practices and approaches in different ways—not only through the ways in which organizations must arrange themselves to sync up with the partnership but also in their subsequent connections to fact-checking competitors/colleagues and their strategies (see Helmond, 2015). Human-machine and human-human arrangements lead to certain informational priorities (or how misinformation is defined and by whom). Researchers have pointed to fact-checking via platform partnerships leaning toward debunking over more “traditional” political fact-checking (Graves, 2018). Fact-checkers described accelerating production and shortening fact-checks to reach platform targets more quickly. Certain types of digital affordances amplify types of information: Information that can be easily checked, information that is viral or potentially harmful, and so on. Revenue models, connected to “caps” or limits on work instituted by platform partners, may also affect whether an organization may decide to focus on debunking or fact-checking. Partnership dynamics are thus more complicated than just market imperatives. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to efficiently use and integrate specialized and relational knowledge (cf. Grant & Baden-Fuller, 1995). A central problem in these partnerships thus lies within coordination (socio-technical, as to how to integrate different efforts by multiple people and systems), cooperation (different organizations have different goals), and the power asymmetries within the entanglements of the socio-technical system.

The platform companies own and control their platform, and thus oversee how their algorithms operate, and what functionalities, data, and reimbursements they provide to their partners. As Poell, Nieborg, and van Dijck (2019) wrote, “The power relations among platform operators, end users, and complementors are extremely volatile and inherently asymmetrical as operators are fully in charge of platform’s techno-economic development” (p. 6). Financial remuneration aside, fact-checkers might depend on a specific platform



and its socio-technical infrastructures to be able to work effectively and efficiently with fact-checks. The platforms can be said to depend on independent fact-checkers to show that they work toward depolluting their platforms from misinformation. However, they do not depend on a specific fact-checking company but can choose from several, depending on the region of focus. As Poell and colleagues (2019) suggest, scholars and policy makers need to recognize the inter-relational and dynamic element of platform companies and how they relate to a larger platform ecosystem.

This study has limitations. First, using in-depth interviews, it uncovered how journalists and fact-checkers discursively conceive partnerships. An observation of practices of those partnerships would account for whether the cognitive matches the practice. Second, future research into factors affecting partnerships' power should explore a combination of heterogeneous factors that influence power asymmetries, including: Network membership and access to platform interfaces (e.g., IFCN/Meta partnership); regional composition and size; size of the organization; location; type of misinformation considered from fact-checkers' and publishers' perspectives; platforms' quotas and objectives/policies; if a company existed before the partnership; and socio-technical arrangements. By identifying these factors and their effects, researchers can better begin to understand how platformization and related partnerships shape the work of fact-checking and knowledge production. Future research must consider how inter-relational aspects of fact-checking may lead to power asymmetries embedded within those partnerships. Future research should explore further how platform fact-checking practices, which are variously mediated through policy making, become institutionalized and increasingly shape the field of fact-checking and misinformation.

To conclude, the fact-checking world must eventually reckon with, advocate for, and take serious steps to serve communities not served via social networks or through U.S.-based, English-speaking fact-checking organizations. It is worth noting that in practice, fact-checkers have only come so far by partnering with one or two platforms. There are additional platforms without partnership programs and/or with encryption. Such are especially problematic both from fact-checker and user perspectives (see Westlund et al., 2022). The newly launched Factchequeado (2022), "an initiative created to counter mis and disinformation within the Hispanic and Latino communities in the United States," is a step forward coming from civil society and the fact-checkers' community, but the call goes well beyond fact-checkers, journalists, and civil society who do good work and are interdependent with platforms (para. 1).

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