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Peer Review

Review of: "When Checkers Mislead: A Study of (Dis)information Flows in Fact-Checking Practices in Poland"

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The article addresses an important, timely, and methodologically demanding topic: the role of fact-checking in shaping flows of information and disinformation within the Polish media ecosystem. The choice of research problem itself should be assessed positively, since fact-checking increasingly functions not only as a tool for correcting false information but also as an actor influencing the public debate agenda, the hierarchy of social problems, and the way in which information is defined as reliable, questionable, or false.

A significant value of the text lies in shifting the reflection from the question of whether fact-checking "works" to a more complex question: how it participates in information flows, what epistemological assumptions it adopts, and what social consequences it may produce. The author rightly observes that fact-checking practices are not neutral technical procedures but are embedded in institutional, political, cultural, and ideological contexts. In this sense, the article offers a valuable contribution to the discussion on the status of fact-checking as an intermediate practice: partly journalistic, partly expert-based, partly educational, and partly regulatory.

The author's recognition of the problem of material selection also deserves emphasis. Fact-checkers do not merely verify claims; they also choose which claims will be subjected to verification. This stage of work has an agenda-setting character and may influence the public perception of where the "problem of disinformation" is located. Another strength of the article is its attempt to distinguish between different types of disinformation and to point out that not all content can be verified in the same way. The verification of a manipulated photograph requires different tools than the verification of a politician's statement, a false context, or a worldview-based, pseudoscientific, or propagandistic claim.

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At the same time, in my view, the article would benefit from strengthening in several areas. The first concerns its grounding in the existing body of research, especially Polish scholarship. The author refers to the Digital Poland report, EFCSN and IFCN standards, and selected sources concerning Polish fact-checking platforms but makes limited use of the work of Polish researchers dealing with disinformation, fact-checking, disinformation discourse analysis, and political communication. This is a significant limitation, since many of the conclusions formulated in the article — regarding the selectivity of fact-checking, the influence of political context, the role of institutional sources, the limited effectiveness of corrections, or the tension between verification and persuasion — have already been addressed in both Polish and international literature. A stronger grounding in this scholarship would make it possible to show more clearly whether the article confirms previous findings, extends them to a larger number of platforms, or proposes a different theoretical framework.

The second area requiring further development concerns methodology and operationalization. The author formulates ambitious research questions and hypotheses, including the hypothesis that the main Polish fact-checking portals act in a biased manner and pursue a specific political agenda. The problem, however, is that the concepts of “bias,” “political agenda,” “objectivity,” and “due diligence” have not been operationalized with sufficient precision. It would be useful to distinguish more clearly between the selective, argumentative, institutional, and reception-related levels of analysis.

The third issue concerns the scope of the empirical material. The study covers one month, that is, the period of the election campaign. This selection is cognitively justified, but it should lead to more cautious conclusions. A one-month analysis is not sufficient to assess the lasting characteristics of Polish fact-checking as an institutional field. Similarly, the content analysis of fact-checking publications is not sufficient to assess the real impact of these publications on social reception, changes in beliefs, the reach of disinformation, or the dynamics of further sharing.

At the theoretical level, it would be particularly interesting to develop the perspective of narrativity. Disinformation rarely functions as a single false claim; more often, it is part of a broader story about threat, betrayal by elites, hidden truth, an innocent victim, or the need to defend the community. A narrative perspective could therefore help better capture the sources of fact-checking bias and distinguish fact-checking as a correction of falsehood from fact-checking as a narrative intervention.

In conclusion, the article *When Checkers Mislead* is a valuable critical voice and may serve as a starting point for further discussion on the role of fact-checking in Poland. Its scholarly potential would, however, be strengthened by a more rigorous methodology, more precise operationalization of key concepts,

broader engagement with existing research, and the development of a narrative and argumentative perspective.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.