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**UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL FACT-CHECKING IN AN
ELECTION YEAR: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL FACT-
CHECKING BY DUBAWA GHANA AND GHANA FACT DURING GHANA'S 2020
GENERAL ELECTION.**

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DECLARATION

I declare that, with the exception of references made to other authors, this dissertation is an original product of my own efforts under the supervision of Dr. Lawrencia Agyepong.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my darling mother, Hawa Alhassan. I am forever indebted to you for your prayers, love and availability throughout this journey. Gone but can't be forgotten, Adams E. Mahama, my hero, role model, my daddy to whom I owe my intellectual prowess to, I dedicate this to you. To my selfless big brother, Misbahu Mahama Adams, In Sha Allah the dream shall come true. Naawuni chela ti ti. The legacy shall continue.

To my wonderful Banchiriga family, friends and colleagues, friends, I dedicate this thesis to you for your unconditional support thus far. My lecturers at the Faculty of Communication and Cultural Studies, University for Development Studies, Nyankpala Campus, you own this achievement and I mean it. The impact of your tutelage is enviable, unique and spectacular.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to enthusiasts of political communication, media and information literacy, particularly persons within the fact-checking industry. Wizkid FC, you got this.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

Content	Page
DECLARATION	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
ABSTRACT	vi
CHAPTER: INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Background to the Study	1
1.1 Problem Statement	5
1.2 Objectives of the Study	6
1.3 Research Questions	7
1.4 Significance of the Study	7
1.5 Organization of the Study	7
CHAPTER TWO.....	9
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
2.0 Introduction	9
2.1 The Internet, Social Media and Political Misinformation.....	9
2.2 Origination of Fact-checking (Political Fact-checking).....	11
2.3 Understanding Political Communication	12
2.4 Understanding Political Fact-checking	14
2.5 Theoretical Framework	15
2.6 Conclusion.....	16
CHAPTER THREE	17
METHODOLOGY	17
3.0 Introduction	17
3.1 Research design.....	17
3.2 Population.....	18
3.3 Sampling.....	18
3.4 Sources of Data	18
3.5 Data Collection Instruments	19
3.6 Data Analysis	19
3.7 Ethical Considerations.....	20
3.8 Conclusion.....	21
CHAPTER FOUR	22
FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS	22
4.0 Introduction	22
4.1 Presentation of Findings	22
4.2 Political Fact-checking During Ghana’s 2020 General Election	22
4.3 Equitable Media and Information Literacy Skills (Regional Balance)	23
4.4 Democratic Approach in Claim Identification	24
4.5 Political Fact-check Worthiness	26
4.6 Political Claims on Social Media	28
4.7 Automated Fact-checking, Human Fact-checking and Verdicts of Political	

Fact-checks	30
4.8 Verdicts of Political Fact-checks.....	32
4.9 Writing of Political Fact-check Reports	33
4.10 Media Partnership	34
4.11 Conclusion.....	34
CHAPTER FIVE.....	35
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	35
5.0 Introduction	35
5.1 Summary of Findings	35
5.2 Conclusion.....	36
5.3 Recommendations	38
REFERENCES	41
APPENDICES	49
Interview guide for fact-checkers at Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact.	49
Transcripts of Interviews.....	56

ABSTRACT

There is a paucity of literature within the field of fact-checking, particularly political fact-checking during elections in Africa and Ghana specifically. This dissertation therefore examines the conduct of political fact-checking by two fact-checking organizations namely; *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election with a focus on, among others, political fact-check worthiness, verdicts/ratings of fact-checked political claims, source and topic of fact-checked political claims and how political fact-check reports were communicated to the public. Grounded within the theory of echo chamber in politics and social media, the qualitative approach to data collection and analyses was used for this dissertation. Six (6) fact-checkers, thus three (3) each from *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* were interviewed, audio recorded, transcribed and findings thematically analyzed to understand the concept of political fact-checking in Ghana's 2020 general election. The study realized that the political fact-checking activities employed by both *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election included chronologically; the capacity building of journalists and media organizations across the country, searching for political claims by being active on the various social media platforms, mainly Whatsapp and Facebook, determining fact-check worthiness, using digital tools as well as desktop research and or contacting and accessing information from available, multiple and reliable sources, preparing the fact-check report and determining the verdict/rating.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

Fact checking media content is the act of evaluating, whether oral or written claims made by individual(s) in the media are true or false. This is normally performed by trained professionals known as fact-checkers. The fact-checker must evaluate previous statements such as speeches, debates, legislations, policies, and published figures or known facts, and use these, combined with critical thinking to determine the credibility or otherwise of a particular news content (Thorne & Vlachos, 2018). For instance, when a claim is made by an individual, either on legacy or new media, that is, print, broadcast, or social media, it is the task of the fact-checker, to prove the extent of truth or falsehood associated with the said claim. In essence, fact-checking seeks to cure misinformation amongst information consumers.

According to Cheruiyot and Conill (2018), fact checking media content has gained prominence for its role in mitigating the raging effects of fake news. Fake news basically refers to news that is not credible and trustworthy. Sanny and Selormey (2020) assert that fake news is as old as the concept of news itself but has come into intense focus through the emergence of social media. They further state that politicians and their respective political parties are the major agents for the spread of fake news, particularly in an election year. In underlying the cause of the rapid spread of fake news, Bounegru et al. (2017) observe that the rise in circulation of fake news is as a result of the rise in the use of social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, alternative media and blogs.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated safety protocols, political parties and politicians in Ghana leveraged on social media like never before to engage in political communication during the 2020 general election. The emergence and wide appreciation of social media, although effective and beneficial, is not entirely without excesses. The availability and circulation of fake news and hate speech is the most worrying phenomenon across the various social media platforms. For this reason, social

media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, have put in place various measures to tackle the menace of false news and hate speech.

A notable policy guideline that seeks to mitigate the circulation of fake news and hate speech on social media is that of Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook. According to Facebook Community Standards Integrity and Authenticity, Policy No. 20. False News (2017):

We are working to build a more informed community and reduce the spread of false news in a number of different ways, namely by: reducing the distribution of content rated false by independent fact-checkers, disrupting economic incentives for people, pages, and domains that propagate misinformation, using various signals, including feedback from our community, to inform a machine learning model that predicts which stories may be false, empowering people to decide for themselves what to read, trust or share by informing them with more context and promoting news literacy, collaborating with academics and other organizations to help solve this challenging issue. (p. 20).

The aforementioned policy guideline by Facebook emphasizes the role of fact-checking organizations in combating the raging effects of fake news and hate speech on social media. Estimating the expenses incurred by Facebook in implementing Community Standards Number 20, Bengani and Kabal (2020) hint that Facebook spent an amount of \$ 1.2 million on fact-checking. This clearly indicates the level of attention that some social media are giving to fact-checking.

Ghana's 2020 Presidential and Parliamentary elections held on December 7 marked the country's eighth general election since the birth of the fourth republic. Prior to December 7, 2020, the various political parties launched various campaigns and manifestoes, aimed at soliciting for votes from the electorates in order to clinch victory and occupy Parliamentary seats as well as the Office of the Presidency, Jubilee House. Politicians disseminated their messages to the electorates via all forms of mass media available. Examples of media used included television, radio, social media, magazines, podcasts, and the dailies.

During these media encounters, some claims were made by politicians to convince the electorates as to which political party or candidate best suits political office. Political communication cannot be underestimated in the quest to win political power. Osei-

Kuffour (2016) indicates that political communication is a requirement for leadership, thus political parties need good communication as it connects them to voters.

To ensure credibility and integrity in the art of information warfare, most of these claims were subjected to the truth test by independent fact-checking organizations such as *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact*. Ghana's 2020 Presidential election was a historic electoral event because it happened to be the first time a former President was contesting an incumbent democratically elected President; hence the stakes were high, especially for the two main political parties namely the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). The NDC and the NPP have conquered political power since Ghana returned to constitutional democracy in 1992 and have garnered over ninety percent (90%) of the presidential votes since 1996 with the other political parties like Kwame Nkrumah's Conventions People's Party (CPP) and other parties accounting for the remaining percentage (Brierley & Ofosu, 2014).

This research answers the question of how political claims were fact-checked in order to maximize media and information literacy and minimize false news. In unearthing the processes of the truth test, this study explores the style of fact-checking practiced by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election. After exploring the fact-checking of these two organizations, this study further conducts a comparative analysis, basically to find out the similarities and differences in the fact-checks of similar political claims.

The hurdles in the process of sharing information have been considerably solved since social media emerged. Social media users can easily share information in the form of text, image, voice note and video to many audiences (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Thanks to the internet and social media as well as digital and media literacy, it is possible to be well informed on electoral issues in Ghana without necessarily living in Ghana. However, having access to information on the internet does not automatically guarantee the authenticity and credibility of the information because the internet, particularly social media can be used to disseminate truthful information as false and vice versa (Vosoughi et al., 2018; Thorne & Vlachos, 2018).

Due to the rapidness in the sharing of information through social media across borders, researchers have written extensively on automated fact-checking (Cohen et al., 2011;

Thorne & Vlachos, 2018; Babakar & Moy, 2016; Graves, 2018). They are of the view that, automated fact-checking will perfectly cure the rapidness in the spread of fake news on the internet. Automated fact-checking can be defined as the use of digital technology in fact-checking. In other words, it is the opposite of fact-checking done by human journalists.

Fact checking covers all aspects of information ranging from health, sanitation, education, and politics among others. In February 2018, there were one hundred and forty-nine (149) active fact-checking organizations around the globe (Stencel & Griffin 2018). Media Foundation for West Africa (2016) found that more than half of the ninety-eight (98) political claims made during Ghana's 2016 general election campaign were false, half-truths, or misleading after being fact-checked.

Notably, verdicts of fact-checks are not just limited to either true or false. PolitiFact, a USA based political fact-checking organization deploys a mechanism known as "Truth-o-Meter". This consists of categories of verdicts like True, Mostly True, Half True, Mostly False, and "Pants on Fire" (Luengo & Garcia-Marin 2020, p .413). Fact checking occurs before and after news publications and broadcasts. This is to ensure there is maximum truth in the dissemination of information to the consuming public. For this reason, Mantzarlis (2018) observed that fact-checking websites verify news stories once they have been published by the media and/or been disseminated by users of social networks.

According to Mantas (2020),

Fact-checkers are being featured on national television programming, and fact-checking organizations are getting training requests from major outlets. Caroline Anipah, program officer at fact-checker *Dubawa Ghana* said the scale of fact-checking efforts in the 2020 cycle has outpaced previous national elections. "In 2016, we had Media Foundation for West Africa in collaboration with Joy FM do some fact-checking," Anipah said. "This time, we are seeing entire shows being dedicated to it." Rabiuh Alhassan, managing editor of *Ghana Fact* said in addition to outlets dedicating time and resources to fact-checking, many are reaching out to fact-checking organizations for assistance as well. "We are seeing

that anytime we publish our work, mainstream media organizations pick our work up and actually publicize it on the platform,” Alhassan said. (p.1)

Mantas’ indication is testament to the fact that, fact-checking political media content in Ghana’s 2020 general election gained significant attention from the Ghanaian citizenry, particularly journalists and mainstream media organizations. Therefore, this study seeks to provide empirical evidence on political fact-checking during Ghana’s 2020 general election.

1.1 Problem Statement

Due to technological advancement, particularly digital media, the internet, and social media platforms have enhanced the democratic process of the press but have lowered the entry barriers, as social media and blogging needs no prior qualification. All it takes to own a blog or social media account is to have a digital device like a smartphone or laptop, internet data and some bit of digital literacy. Agyepong (2017) referred to the proliferation of online media networks that allow wide circulation of political information on the internet. This reference by Agyepong underscores the fact that political information has advanced from the traditional radio and television to the internet and thus the need for accountable journalism, that is fact-checking, to be enhanced. Anipah (2020) observed that this technological advancement is disrupting mass production and distribution of information. For this reason, fact-checking as a profession seeks to serve as a watchdog to misinformation in both traditional and new media.

There is a significant volume of literature on fact-checking. However, available literature, (Amazeen, 2013; Graves, 2013; Nyahan & Reifler, 2015) have predominantly focused on fact-checking in the global north, specifically the United States of America. As a result of the vast literature on fact-checking, recent studies on fact-checking in Europe have gained attention from the computer science fraternity, with proposals being made to advance, particularly the speed and time used in fact-checking in order to quickly counter the rapidness of fake news as human fact-checking takes too long (Cazalens et al., 2018). Typical examples of research proposing computational fact-checking include Thorne and Vlachos (2018), Ciampaglia et al. (2015) and Long et al. (2016). They propose the use of natural language processing and machine learning among other datasets. Literature on fact-checking within the global south however seems to be largely

inadequate compared to that of the global north. This study will attempt to fill this continental divide.

Moreover, the global north again has convincing literature on political fact-checking. Scholars like Amazeen (2016), Froomkin (2012) and Graves (2016) have written on how fact-checkers play their role in presidential campaigns and elections in the United States of America. This cannot be said for the global south, specifically Ghana. Literature on fact-checking in Africa has focused on fact-checking as a whole – that is, fact-checking news in general but not political fact-checking (Cheruiyot & Conill, 2018; Jamiu, 2020). Studying political fact-checking in Ghana's elections is premised on the fact that Reporters without Borders (2018) describe Ghana as the beacon of democracy in Africa and ranks Ghana top amongst its peers when it comes to press freedom.

This study will contribute to enhancing the role of mass media in improving and maintaining Ghana's democracy by examining political fact-checking during the just ended 2020 general election. This study will again contribute to the emerging literature in media and information literacy by documenting the activities involved in political fact-checking. These will in turn guide media consumers, precisely social media consumers, to become active media consumers by differentiating facts from alternative facts. This dearth in literature can be attributed to the fact that political fact-checking is arguably a developing phenomenon in Ghana since the two independent fact-checking organizations in question are new to the country. The 2020 general election was the first general election observed by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact*.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

Based on the identified research problem, the main objective of this study is to understand the conduct of political fact-checking by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election. The specific objectives of the study include:

1. To examine the political fact-checking activities of *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election.
2. To identify what made a political claim worth a fact-check during Ghana's 2020 general election.

3. To examine the source, topic, and verdicts of political claims fact-checked during Ghana's 2020 general election as well as their verdicts.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to attain the identified research objectives, the study seeks to ask the following research questions:

1. What political fact-checking activities were employed by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election?
2. What made a political claim worthy to be fact-checked during Ghana's 2020 general election?
3. What was the source, topic, and verdict of fact-checked political claims during Ghana's 2020 general election?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to political communication, journalism, and the information industry in general by explaining the practice of political fact-checking, particularly in an election year in which misinformation is rife. It will also contribute to media and information literacy among the information consuming public as the main focus will be finding out how and what went into the selection of a fact-checked political media content. Through this study, media audiences will be enlightened on what to look out for in determining the level of truth and accuracy in the statements of politicians, especially during election campaign, day of election and day of declaration of election results. As indicated early on, there is a dearth of literature on political fact-checking in Ghana and Africa as a whole. This will arguably serve as a pioneering study into political fact checking which will in turn benefit the development of mass media and political communication in Ghana.

1.5 Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five (5) chapters. The first chapter begins with a brief introduction of the details of the entire study. It includes the research justification, research objectives, and significance of the study and research questions. In summary, this chapter sets the building units for the study by explaining what political fact-

checking is about, its evolution and practice in the global north and south with practical examples. It further discusses related thematic areas like social media and the rise in fake news, political communication and the role of media as watchdogs, filtering misinformation from credible information and explaining the rationale for the study. The chapter ends by presenting the why's, how's and what's of the study in an attempt to fully realize its stated objectives.

The second chapter which is titled the literature review, presents a review of literature grounded by a theoretical framework. This chapter recognizes and critically examines all related and relevant literature. Literature acknowledged and reviewed include the internet, social media, political misinformation and the origination of fact-checking, specifically political fact-checking.

The third chapter which is the methodology chapter, builds the foundation of the study by outlining how it conducts data collection and analysis. The methodology of the study is discussed and reasons are given for the choice of method in data collection and analysis. This is followed by the fourth chapter which explains and discusses the data collected using some select theories.

The fifth and final chapter concludes the study with a summary of findings, conclusion and recommendation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter recognizes and critically analyses already existing literature across related and relevant topics to this study. Topics slated for review include the internet, social media, political misinformation, and the origination of fact-checking, specifically political fact-checking, understanding political communication and political fact-checking. It also presents the theoretical framework of the study.

2.1 The Internet, Social Media and Political Misinformation

As indicated early on, the rise in appreciation and usage of internet and social media has contributed to the rise in political misinformation. Politicians, political parties, political pundits and political sympathizers as well as the already discussed pro political media organizations and journalists have presence across all the various social media platforms with huge following. Independent media organizations such as Media General Ltd, Multimedia Ltd, Despite Media, Omni Media, Excellence in Broadcasting (EIB), also engage in the use of social media and are not just limited to conveying information to the public using radio and television.

During election campaigns, politicians and political parties purchase time and space on these media platforms to convey their political messages to the electorates and the entire public and also leverage on their digital literacy to engage social media users through the live broadcasts of their events on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Their presence and activities online are aimed at complementing their offline campaigns.

Almost all stakeholders in a general election have presence on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter among others. In many instances, their offline and online campaign activities occur simultaneously due to technological advancement in social media. The 'live' option available on platforms like Twitter and Facebook makes this simultaneousness possible. For instance, a manifesto launch ceremony by the National Democratic Party (NDP) organized on ground can be broadcast live on

Facebook either on the social media page of the NDP or page of a party sympathizer, pro media house or an independent media organization.

This study seeks to explore the journalistic process of fact-checking political media content during Ghana's 2020 general election. In order to successfully do this, it is imperative to review literature on the fields of the internet, social media and political misinformation. This is because the essence of this study would not be feasible in the absence of the internet, particularly social media usage and political misinformation. There is convincing literature on the use of social media like Facebook and Twitter by politicians, political parties, party sympathizers and pro party media houses, to create and share misinformation during election.

Examining the widespread of political misinformation on social media in Italy's 2012 general election, Mocanu et al. (2015) found out that political untruths were highly shared by members of the public. They attributed the rationale behind the high circulation in political misinformation to the rising distrust the citizens of Italy had for mainstream media. This high circulation of political misinformation on social media is not limited to European and Italian politics but is evident in the politics of the United States of America, specifically the 2016 presidential race between the Republican's Donald Trump and the Democrat's Hilary Clinton (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) estimated that false political claims in support of the candidacy of Donald Trump were shared thirty (30) million times within three months on Facebook, whereas false political claims in favor of the candidacy of Barack Obama's former Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, were shared eight (8) million times on Facebook. It was further indicated that, in all, one hundred and fifteen (115) false stories and forty-one (41) false stories in support of Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton respectively, were circulated on Facebook during the 2016 Presidential election campaign. Other researchers like Guess et al. (2019) and Grinberg et al. (2019) have written on the circulation of political misinformation on social media during the election campaign of the 2016 US Presidential election. Notably, the 2016 U.S. Presidential election is arguably the most talked about in the literature of political misinformation on social media.

All these assertions of the creation and sharing of misinformation on the internet, especially social media platforms can be traced to the notion in Donati (2019) that the rise in internet and social media has substantially increased the accessibility to political information. Unlike Facebook, the availability of political misinformation on Twitter in the 2016 US Presidential election although significant, witnessed little circulation (Grinberg et al., 2019). This means that the Twitter's 'retweet' button was rarely used in contrast to the high use of Facebook's 'share' button during the election campaign.

There exists literature on social media and political misinformation within the African context. Digital devices such as smart phones and laptops were used to circulate political information via text message in the 2007-8 general election in Kenya (Goldstein & Rotich, 2010). Madrid-Morales et al. (2021) explored the desire and motivation for the sharing of misinformation on social media in some select African countries including Ghana and found out that humor could be the rationale behind the sharing of political misinformation. The study was however limited to the perspectives of university students and not an actual study of a particular Presidential election campaign (Madrid-Morales et al., 2021).

The Media Foundation for West Africa (2016) found that more than half of the ninety-eight (98) claims made during Ghana's 2016 general election campaign were completely false, half-truths, or misleading. However, the Media Foundation for West Africa did not indicate the rate of circulation of the said misleading claims on the various social media platform.

2.2 Origination of Fact-checking (Political Fact-checking)

Literature on the origination of fact-checking differs, depending on the researcher in question as well as the context. Common amongst all assertions on the history of fact-checking is that, the practice was initiated by journalists. Cassedy (1964), Sulzberger (2011) trace the history of fact-checking to the early 20th century where journalists rebutted the assertions of medicine producers. In addition to rebutting information from medicine producers, political information was also challenged by investigative journalists. This led to the indication in Amazeen (2013) that the attention to political misinformation began in the 1990s as a result of the 1998 U.S. Presidential election.

Graves (2013, p. 1) attempts to give an exact date as the birth of fact-checking. He states that “a fair date for the birth of fact-checking as it is practiced today is December 9, 2001”. Before giving this date, Graves traces the history of fact-checking to the 18th century in which proofreading was an activity in the US periodicals and further states that “full-fledged fact-checking departments emerged at national magazines in the 1920s and 1930s” (p. 2).

According to Graves and Cherubini (2016), the foremost media organizations dedicated to subjecting claims of politicians to the truth test were founded in the United States of America in the early 2000s, with Spinsanity being the first fact-checking site, founded in the year 2000, followed by Factcheck.org in 2003. As at 2016, Europe had 34 political fact-checking organizations. Graves and Cherubini further found out that political fact-checking played an active role in Presidential and Parliamentary elections across Europe (Netherlands, United Kingdom and France) since 2005. Most of the fact-checking sites surveyed by Graves and Cherubini were partnering news media organizations whereas few operated independently.

2.3 Understanding Political Communication

Statements made by politicians and political parties that have the potential to create a favorable image in the minds and hearts of electorates can be defined as political communication. For this reason, McNair (2011) observed that the electorates are the targets of political communication since they are the key elements in the political communication process and without them, there will be no political message.

These political statements become common during the period of political campaigns. Politicians attend rallies and ceremonies to make known, their track records in various sectors such as economy, education, health, transport, and security. During election campaigns, especially organized rallies, pressers and other political party events, politicians communicate freely without any form of scrutiny being done by the crowd, audience, and listeners. The reason for this is that they are usually talking to a gathering of party sympathizers who usually and instantly accept their statements, hook, line, and sinker.

Immediately after such rallies and political events, these statements make their way to media platforms. Mass media is critical in political communication since it serves as the

intermediary between the political communicator(s) and electorates. According to Diedong (2018), since 1992, mass media in Ghana has served as the channel for political enlightenment to the citizenry. Iyenga and Simon (2000) revealed that in recent times, politicians manipulate the mass media to promote political objectives for their survival. This revelation is pervasive within the field of political communication in Ghana as some political parties have media organizations that do their bidding.

In Ghana there are known television and radio stations as well as newspapers that are widely recognized as sympathizers of the various political parties (Amokohene, 2006). Their sympathy or acquaintance is either as a result of ideology which reflects in their content, media ownership and media financing. The aspect of media content being the basis for a media organization's supposed affection or disaffection for a particular political party is evident in Amokohene's 2006 publication which studied two newspaper organizations in Ghana: state owned Daily Graphic and the private owned Ghanaian Chronicle.

The study disclosed that the political news content of Daily Graphic favored ruling administrations like President Jerry John Rawlings' led NDC administration and President John Agyekum Kuffour's led NPP administration. Amokohene further found out that the political tone in the Ghanaian Chronicle was not friendly to any of the aforementioned political administrations but was rather against the regime of the NDC.

Furthermore, Coker and Afriyie (2018) defined two privately owned newspaper organizations as pro NDC and pro NPP; the Enquirer and the Daily Statesman, respectively. This assertion of media bias is reminiscent of what Agyepong (2017) highlighted in discussing Ghana's media and the political field. She indicated that a large number of media organizations advance the political agendas of their owners. The acquaintance of political parties and politician to mass media can also be traced to the assertion in Agyepong (2017) that the media landscape in Ghana has witnessed a shift from state-owned to a liberalized press in which private individuals own and manage media organizations.

That said, mass media in Ghana has been widely regarded as the 'Fourth Estate', particularly for its crucial role in calling for accountability from duty bearers in the state. The accountability role of the media has been supported by Sefakor (2008), who

indicated that mass media has a constitutional mandate for ensuring that politicians and people of power operate within the principles of good governance. Aside the media being the conduit for political communication, it also ensures honesty and transparency in their daily reportage by setting out facts from alternative facts. The rise in political communication on social media has undoubtedly translated into the rise of political fact-checking.

2.4 Understanding Political Fact-checking

Political fact-checking is the journalistic process that keeps false political statements out of the sight and consumption of the public (Amazeen, 2013). Political fact-checking filters statements from political figures in mass media. Fact-checkers are the watchdogs that minimize falsehood from politicians and political parties. Europe and North America have independent political fact-checking organizations working to minimize false news from politicians. They include *Politifact*, *Le Monde* and *Pagella Politica* in the United States of America, France, and Italy respectively (Henry et al., 2021). Conversely, *Code for Africa*, *Open Up* and *Africa Check* are leading major data and fact-checking operations in sub-Saharan Africa (Cheruiyot & Conill, 2018). Nigeria can boast of *Dubawa Nigeria*, which has a branch, *Dubawa Ghana* whiles Ghana can make mention of *Ghana Fact* and *Fact Check Ghana*.

This journalistic practice of fact-checking has proven to be a worrying phenomenon to some politicians and political parties simply because it prevents them from telling more lies, exposes their already told lies as well as places them on the radar for false news. Fact-checking does more than separating false news from credible news. It can also damage the reputation of politicians and political parties, hence the more reason it does not sit well with politicians. Nyhan and Reifler (2014) are of the view that fact-checking can be a monitoring tool for politicians to demotivate them from making claims that are untrue.

Notable amongst politicians that have expressed disgust at fact-checking is, Donald Trump, Former President of the United States of America. Kessler (2016, p. 1) highlights Trumps disregard for fact-checking, saying “Trump does not bother to respond to fact-checking inquiries”. In recent years, Donald Trump has become the popular choice for the discussion of fact-checking. On May 26, 2020, Twitter labeled a tweet from Donald

Trump as one that has either been fact-checked or needs fact-checking. This was part of Twitter's policy to minimize the spread of false news on their platform (Conger & Alba, 2020).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

A theory is an explanation of how a situation works or is expected to work. The underlying principle of a theory is that; it exists to explain how and why things happen (Nwabueze & Okonko, 2018). Therefore, the study of political fact-checking by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election will be situated within the theory of echo chamber in online political communication since the study seeks to understand how both fact-checking organizations arrived at their various political fact-check reports which sought to monitor and evaluate the factuality of online political information during Ghana's 2020 general election.

According to Hart et al. (2009), the theory of echo chamber relies on selective exposure to online media content in which people are inclined to favor political information that confirms and reinforces already existing political viewpoints and beliefs while ignoring information that is incongruent with already existing viewpoints. Sunstein (2009) also posits that echo chamber in politics is a metaphorical situation where only similar political news media content are shared amongst online political groups as a way of supporting existing political beliefs. However, Iyengar and Hann (2009) have examined selective exposure to online media content and concluded that individuals within an echo chamber tend to favor information that are in consonance with their existing beliefs and do not entirely avoid opposing views as highlighted by Hart et al. (2009).

The theory of echo chamber was first used to describe right wing American media talk radio, specifically fox news (Jamieson & Capella, 2008). Within the field of politics, when there is the tendency for a group of online political sympathizers of a political party to be privy to only a one sided debate of a political news due to their common interests even though that political news might not be necessarily factual, that social group of political sympathizers can be said to be in an echo chamber. For this reason, Dubois and Blank (2018) are of the view that the echo chamber effect is produced due to the advancement in high choice of media, particularly new media hence, in an echo chamber, 'anyone who disagrees is misinformed at best and willfully ignorant at worst'. (p.1). This

clearly underscores the role of fact-checking in online media content since the spread of digital misinformation has been suggested to be connected to the phenomenon of echo chambers (Tornberg, 2018). Critiques of echo chambers include Sunstein (2009) who has argued that selective media exposure exacerbates extremism and does not promote diversity of opinions, thus it is undemocratic in nature.

This study seeks to premise the conduct of political fact-checking employed by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during the 2020 general election within the theory of echo chamber in online political communication which describes how the online political community also referred to as social media users, selectively and deliberately regard political information that are consistent with their political beliefs and avoid counter online political information that are contrary to their political viewpoints. This situation can lead to the reinforcement of political polarization (Brundidge, 2010). Political polarization and extremism associated with news media on social media have been evidenced in studies including Lawrence et al. (2010) and Conover et al. (2011).

Additionally, Bücher (2012) states that due to the notion of selective exposure to online political information, persons within the echo chamber face little resistance since they are a community of likeminded individuals. Therefore, this study seeks to understand how the likely political polarization and extremism associated with the echo chamber effect was minimized and avoided by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election since digital media literacy which includes fact-checking has been noted by researchers including Dubois and Blank (2018) to be the best way to avoid the echo chamber effect in online political news.

2.6 Conclusion

This literature review chapter focused on understanding how the internet and social media contribute to the spread of misinformation, particularly political misinformation in an election year. The literature review also focused on the origination of fact-checking media content, particularly political media content and its evolution across the globe and concludes that the empirical evidence on political fact-checking is relatively low in Africa when compared to Europe and North America, hence the rationale for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

As indicated early on, this study explored political fact-checking conducted by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election. This chapter describes into detail, the methodology adopted for the study. It basically outlines how, why, and what type of data was gathered and analyzed for the study.

3.1 Research design

This study adopted the qualitative method in data collection and analysis, premised on the use of in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. This study's choice of qualitative methodology, particularly in-depth interviews and thematic analysis is a replication of the methodology in Cheruiyot and Conill (2018), who explored the operations of three fact-checking organizations in Africa namely, *Code for Africa*, *Africa Check* and *Open Up*.

This current study explores the political fact-checking operations of two Ghanaian based fact-checking organizations during Ghana's 2020 general election by conducting six (6) online in-depth interviews with fact-checkers of the aforementioned fact-checking organizations, thus it is suitable to premise its methodology on a similar study like that of Cheruiyot and Conill.

Qualitative research methodology is not about issues of statistics and numeracy, rather it deals with deepening an understanding of a particular situation or phenomenon by looking out for in-depth information (Almeida, 2017). This study's use of qualitative research methodology seeks to provide a deeper understanding of political fact-checking by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election. However, Showkat and Parveen (2017) opine that conducting qualitative research has its associated challenges such as high cost and time. For this reason, this study interviewed six (6) individuals to overcome the challenges associated with time and cost.

3.2 Population

Population refers to all units or elements within a group from which data is gathered (Parahoo, 1997). Fact-checkers of *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* served as the population for the study. *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* were selectively chosen because, fact-checking political claims during Ghana's 2020 general election was their first time of conducting political fact-checking in Ghana, thus understanding their operations relative to Ghana's 2020 general election is prudent and beneficial to both academia and the general public.

3.3 Sampling

Sampling for this study was selectively done to ascertain relevant data that would successfully answer the study's questions, hence purposive/judgment sampling technique was used for this study. Purposive sampling is arguably one of the most time-effective sampling techniques available to researchers. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that occurs when the sample agreed upon for the study is solely based on the researcher's sound judgment (Ken, 2010).

The sample size agreed upon by the researcher for the conduct of this study was six (6). This means that, understanding political fact-checking during Ghana's 2020 general election was derived from the narratives of six (6) fact-checkers, thus three (3) each from *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* because the researcher posits that the identified 6 individuals within the two fact-checking organizations, arguably possess relevant information needed for the study. However, the use of purposive sampling in qualitative research can be highly exposed to bias as highlighted in Sharma (2017). This study minimized the limitation on bias, by allowing participants to review the interpretations of the information they provided to the researcher to ensure accuracy and honesty.

3.4 Sources of Data

This study mainly derived data from primary and secondary sources. This means that primary data was directly obtained from the six (6) interviewed fact-checkers of *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact*. Secondary data used for the study included books, online news publications, conference and workshop reports, articles, journals, and PhD dissertations.

Additionally, already existing data was taken from the various websites of *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* namely; ghanafact.com and ghana.dubawa.org.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

This study relied on the qualitative methodological approach to data collection and analysis, hence data for this study was collected using in-depth interviews, specifically semi-structured interviews. This study's choice of semi-structured interviews is derived from Agyepong (2017) who indicated that,

In such interviews, questions can be modified or reordered, and unplanned questions can be posed to address matters that unexpectedly arise during the course of the interview. This approach also allows interviewees to expand on issues that they raise themselves in the process of answering the researcher's questions in a way that is not possible in fully structured interviews. (p.75)

These interviews were conducted face to face with 5 participants from *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact*. In all, six (6) interviews were conducted on separate dates and time agreed upon by both the interviewer and interviewee.

Conducting in-depth interviews has its associated limitations. For instance, Boyce and Neale (2006) state that conducting in-depth interviews reveal greater narratives from participants but takes lengthy hours, hence time consuming. To successfully overcome this limitation of the time-consuming nature of in-depth interviews, this study limited the number of interviews to six (6) in order for the researcher to meet the time frame given for the study.

3.6 Data Analysis

To enable the researcher analyze the in-depth interviews conducted, all interviews were audio recorded with the permission of all interviewees and transcribed accordingly. These transcripts were thoroughly read and subjected to thematic analysis to understand and compare the political fact-checking activities employed by both fact-checking organizations during Ghana's 2020 general election. Kondracki and Wellman (2002) posit that thematic analysis can be the most suitable analytic tool when dealing with responses and narratives from in-depth interviews. Furthermore, Downe-Wamboldt

(1992) opined that for a researcher to comprehensively grasp a situation or phenomenon under study, thematic analysis should be used in data analysis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

In obtaining data for this study, the researcher adopted generally accepted ethical attitudes including transparency, confidentiality, consent, and respect for authority.

The researcher submitted a letter of introduction from the School of Graduate Studies, Ghana Institute of Journalism, to both fact-checking organizations, *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact*. This was to formally inform the fact-checking organizations of the intent of the study as well as request for permission to interview six (6) workers from the fact-checking organizations. The researcher communicated to the authorities that the interviews were strictly for academic purposes. This was to uphold respect for the fact-checking organizations in question by seeking authoritative consent before commencing with data collection.

After consent was given, the purpose of the interviews was further articulated to all six (6) participants before the interview dates were scheduled. The researcher also availed himself for questions on the purpose of the interviews to ensure that all concerns of the participants were diligently dealt with, before the interviews commenced. Another form of consent the researcher sought from the participants was to audio record the interview sessions since they were to be transcribed for thematic analyses. Throughout the study, consents were duly sought for and duly granted by all participants.

According to Cropley (2021), “participants have a right to expect that data obtained with them will not be published or otherwise revealed in a way that makes it possible to identify individual respondents.” (p. 79). Therefore, the ethical principle of confidentiality and anonymity was essential to this research. Furthermore, the researcher conducted all interviews online, using Zoom Cloud Meetings in order to prevent physical contact since physical contact might expose both participants and the researcher to possible risks of contracting COVID-19. In all, the interview sessions were successful as it minimized ethical breaches associated with conducting research.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter contained a comprehensive understanding on how qualitative data was gathered and analyzed for the study. It explained what, why and how narratives on political fact-checking were collected from six (6) fact checkers at *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact*.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the thematic analysis of findings derived from the in-depth interviews conducted on political fact-checking during Ghana's 2020 general election by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact*.

4.1 Presentation of Findings

This study presents the findings into the following thematic areas; political fact-checking during Ghana's 2020 general election, equitable media and information literacy skills, democratic approach in claim identification, political fact-check worthiness, political claims on social media, automated fact-checking, human fact-checking, verdicts of political fact-checks, writing of political fact-check reports and media partnership. In fulfilment of the principle of anonymity indicated early on in Chapter 3 (see 3.7), this study identifies all interviewees using the following codes: INDUB1 (Interviewee 1 from Dubawa Ghana), INDUB2 (Interviewee 2 from Dubawa Ghana), INDUB3 (Interviewee 3 from Dubawa Ghana), INGF1 (Interviewee 1 from Ghana Fact), INGF2 (Interviewee 2 from Ghana Fact) and INGF3 (Interviewee 3 from Ghana Fact).

4.2 Political Fact-checking During Ghana's 2020 General Election

This section attempts to satisfy the first question posed by this study: what political fact-checking activities were employed by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election?

Basically, the political fact-checking activities employed by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election included chronologically; the capacity building of journalists and media organizations across the country, searching for political claims by being active on the various social media platforms, mainly Whatsapp and Facebook, determining fact-check worthiness, using digital tools as well as desktop research and or contacting and accessing information from available, multiple and reliable sources, preparing the fact-check report and determining the verdict/rating (INDUB3 & INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021).The aforementioned

activities were applied during the election campaign, on the day of election (December 7, 2021) and day of results declaration (December 9, 2021).

4.3 Equitable Media and Information Literacy Skills (Regional Balance)

Findings from INGF3 (personal communication, October 04, 2021) and INDUB3 (personal communication, October 27, 2021) indicated that both political fact-checking begun with building the capacity of select journalists and media organizations across all the sixteen (16) regions of Ghana to equip them with the requisite skills needed to confirm or debunk political claims during Ghana's 2020 general election. This meant that the capacity building was all inclusive since it included all the 16 regions of the country, hence there was no geographic discrimination in the selection of journalists and media organizations. Both fact-checking organizations ensured equitable distribution of essential skills to all regions, thus all regions were equipped with the technical know-how on fact-checking political claims in their various regions and or providing competent assistance to the head offices of *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact*, when called upon to visit the ground and give first-hand information to assist in fact-checking claims (INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

For both organizations, building the capacity of media organizations and the general public appeared to be the solid foundation upon which they conducted political fact-checking during Ghana's election 2020. The impact of, particularly their trained media personnel in the sixteen (16) regions proved to be beneficial to their output because mobility, although possible, would not have ensured timely fact-checks. According to INDUB1 (personal communication, September 29, 2021), *Dubawa Ghana* conducted training for a number of media organizations, bloggers and some members of the election related bodies as well, just to train them on how to spot fake news, how to cross check and verify or debunk. Also, they organized capacity building and training for journalists across the country and engaged in some media literacy activities to equip the general public with the needed skills and knowledge to stop the spread of misinformation and disinformation (INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021). Furthermore, INGF2 (personal communication, October 02, 2021), noted that three (3) months to elections, *Ghana Fact* went round the sixteen (16) regions and trained newsrooms on how to conduct fact-check(ing). Additionally, *Ghana Fact* created the Fact checking Network which was made up of more than 100 journalists spread across the country,

drawn from more than 30 media organizations. Through this network, *Ghana Fact* helped set up fact-checking desks in the newsrooms of these media organizations (INGF3, personal communication, October 04, 2021).

These statements also indicate the level of nationwide collaboration and partnership the fact-checking organizations engaged in during Ghana's 2020 general election as well as the awareness creation on media and information literacy. Both fact-checking organizations are headquartered in the country's capital city, Accra but their fact-checking activities stretched as far as to every nook and cranny in the country, when necessary, with the support of their trained journalists and media organizations (INGF3, personal communication, October 04, 2021). A typical awareness creation dubbed 'Seven Ways to Spot Fake News' was published by *Ghana Fact* on December 1, 2021, few days to Election Day. Additionally, 'Pay Attention! Don't Fall for Cloned Websites' was published by *Ghana Fact* on December 3, 2021. *Dubawa Ghana* also published 'Beginner Tips for Fact-Checking Videos: A Case of Study of EC's Purported Verdict Declaration Video. All these aimed at equipping the citizenry with the basic media and information literacy skills needed in Ghana's election 2020.

4.4 Democratic Approach in Claim Identification

Both fact-checking organizations deployed a democratic approach as to who was on the lookout for political and electoral claims regardless of one's position within the organizations as opposed to the top-down approach in organizations. When asked who determined what was fact-checked during the 2020 general election, the theme of democratic selection appeared from both organizations. There were suggestions from both senior and junior staff in the identification of claims that were fact-checked. That is, all manner of persons from within and outside the organizations suggested a claim(s) to be fact-checked, after meeting the fact-check worthiness test (virality, prominence, national interest) which again appeared to be similar across both fact-checking organizations. Additionally, before fact-checking begun, a claim must have been within the ambiance of the editorial policy of the International Fact Checking Network (IFCN), the international body of which both fact-checking organizations are signatories to (INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

However, at Ghana Fact, although, any staff could research and come up with a claim to be fact-checked, fact-checkers were tasked to monitor “key media stations and social media handles” for political claims (INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021). This does not suggest the absence of the democratic approach because Ghana Fact received claims from outside their organizations as well. To suggest a claim, one must have actively monitored both legacy and new media, particularly social media during Ghana’s election 2020. This unrestricted nature to claim identification is attributed to appreciation of digital technology and digital literacy particularly the use of social media, hence it was easy for social media users to come across and send in claims. The organizations have active presence across the most common social media platforms as well as verified accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp. On Instagram, only *Ghana Fact* has a verified account. Dubawa is present on Instagram but operates as Dubawa official, based in Abuja Nigeria, which is the mother organization of *Dubawa Ghana* (INDUB1, INDUB2 & INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021). The following opinions were given when asked on the assigning of fact-checking responsibilities;

According to INDUB1,

It works both ways. Actually it is more than two ways. At times, our readers will flag claims to us, sometimes we find claims ourselves. It can be a junior or senior editor, so we are not waiting for someone to say do this or do that. Everybody is fact checking, everybody's debunking or verifying something. (Personal communication, September 29, 2021)

It was both ways, so all of us were on social media. For instance, I'm on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and I also visit YouTube. So it's not like one person's responsibility. It included all of us, including our communications team. (INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

All these opinions suggest that during Ghana’s 2020 general election, not only fact-checkers were tasked to look out for claims, but other staffs within the fact-checking organization as well as the public.

4.5 Political Fact-check Worthiness

This section answers the second question posed by this study: What made a political claim worthy to be fact-checked during Ghana's 2020 general election?

The fact-check worthiness of a political claim was what determined if a political claim should be subjected to scrutiny by a fact-checker or not. Both fact-checking organizations considered similar factors before confirming the fact-check worthiness of a claim. This meant that not all claims were fact-checked but only claims that were determined to be fact-check worthy. The factors which dominated the fact-check worthiness of political claims across both fact-checking organizations included in no particular order; virality, national interest such as security and the prominence of the claimant. This study realized that: if a political claim was being widely circulated on social media by the citizenry, it was considered fact-check worthy, if a political claim had the tendency to influence the favorable/unfavorable image of a politician or political party and influence the outcome of the election, it was considered fact-check worthy, if a political claim came from a prominent person, with large following, mostly individuals in the NPP and NDC, it was considered fact-check worthy and if a political claim had the potential to cause insecurity, it was considered fact-check worthy (INDUB1 & INGF1, personal communication, September, 29, 2021).

When interviewed, INGF3 (personal communication, October 03, 2021) and INDUB2 (personal communication, September 29, 2021) indicated that political claims by and or against the two leading contenders in Ghana's 2020 presidential election namely, incumbent President Nana Addo Dankwah Akufo-Addo of the NPP and former President John Dramani Mahama, were fact-check worthy and were given significant attention due to the virality and prominence of their personalities. Also, political claims on Election Day, particularly at the various election polling stations and the regulatory body, the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana gained the needed attention from both fact-checking organizations due to virality, national interests, and the potential to disrupt national security as well as the ability to influence the outcome of the election (INGF1, INDUB1 & INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021). This did not mean that a claim from a person or group with somewhat little prominence was not fact-check worthy. Various fact checkers described what constituted political fact-check worthiness:

It doesn't depend on the personality. We've had instances during the elections or prior to elections where party communicators at the district, municipal and the regional level will be using their social media handles to spew a lot of lies... we will not say because that person is not prominent or the proximity is not there so we will not fact-check. As far as the content has to do with the public and has the tendency to misinform and disinform the public and it falls within our editorial policy, we will not hesitate to fact-check. (INGF2, personal communication, October 02, 2021)

Furthermore, both organizations confessed that some political fact-check worthy claims were not fact-checked due to understaffing and the overwhelming nature of claims they encountered during Ghana's 2020 general election (INDUB1 & INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021). Admittedly, both fact-checking organizations hardly missed viral claims, particularly those which involved leading political candidates and political parties and the Electoral Commission as well as political claims that bothered on national security (INGF2, personal communication, October 02 & INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021). INGF2 (personal communication, September 27, 2021) further explained that,

Personality is a key factor. For example, when you find President Akofe Addo, Gabby Otchere Darko or Vice President, Dr. Bawumia, saying the economic growth rates that we recorded in 2016, the last year of John Mahama as President of the country, was the worst in the history of the Fourth Republic. This is a serious message ahead of elections. So we consider personality and the content.

INGF1 (personal communication, September 29, 2021) also underscored that personality was key and indicated that,

We were a very experienced team but were still small and so what we were looking at, like I mentioned earlier, particular people or institution. If, the general secretary of the NPP was saying something at a time, and he said something that sounded too good to be true, we hold it a right to just check whether indeed that was true or not, especially because of the propaganda that can accompany some of these things.

Additionally, both organizations questioned the virality as well as the personality of the claimant. They tried to fact-check as wide claims as possible and did not pick particular ones based on whims. *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* tried their possible best not to miss political claims that went viral and bothered on national security, but the issue of understaffing appeared to be the major setback they encountered in fact-checking political claims Ghana's election 2020 (INDUB1 & INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

4.6 Political Claims on Social Media

This section answers the third question posed by this study: What were the source, topic, and verdict of fact-checked political claims during Ghana's 2020 general election?

According to INDUB3 (personal communication, September 27, 2021) and INGF1 (personal communication, September 29, 2021), both fact-checking organizations picked most of the political claims fact-checked in Ghana's 2020 general election from social media platforms including Facebook, Whatsapp political pages and Twitter as well as blogs and some known media websites. This study realized that Facebook, followed by Whatsapp and Twitter users led in the dissemination of political and election related claims which were largely made against and or by the two main contending flag bearers and political parties namely, incumbent President Nana Addo Dankwah Akufo-Addo of the NPP and former President John Dramani Mahama of the NDC. The most fact-checked topics included but not limited to education, economy, vote buying, bribery and corruption, Covid-19(INGF2, personal communication, October, 02, 2021). These topics are typical of almost all general elections in Ghana, hence is not a new phenomenon. For instance.

Mahama's alleged money sharing when he went to campaign. Basically the main presidential and parliamentary candidates were implicated in stories. Typically you will find topics of like I mentioned votes buying, or violence. (INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021)

In addition, INDUB2 (personal communication, September 29, 2021), reiterated that, most of the claims fact checked were from social media. For example, the viral video that Akufo Addo had received a bribe of 40,000 Ghana cedis or dollars in 2017 while he was still President was taken from social media. Social media was the predominant,

especially Facebook because Facebook has groups made up of NDC and NPP members where people can just push misinformation to (INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021). Other fact-checkers explained that;

It was evenly spread. Social media, of course, because of how fast it is, it tends to carry a lot of disinformation but then it goes both ways. Some information is carried from television onto social media and vice versa and you will not be able to trace exactly where it is coming from, but I can say that the bulk of it came from social media. (INDUB1, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

Most stories we fact checked were both from traditional and new media. Internet penetration in Ghana is gradually going up so we relied more on social media. (INGF2, personal communication, October 02, 2021)

Facebook and Whatsapp groups like those political groups where people can just push misinformation. The NDC and NPP both have social media groups so those are the places you would find fake news. (INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021)

Facebook and Whatsapp were monitored since they are the leading social media platform in the country. Also, Twitter is a platform that generates lots of attention and engagement (INGF3, personal communication, October 4, 2021). Aside the two leading Presidential contenders, claims were also by and or against Members of Parliament. A typical one involved the then Hon. Member of Parliament for Awutu Senya Constituency cum Deputy Minister for Communications and Digitalization, George Andah (INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021).

Moreover, this study found out that political and electoral claims did not necessarily refer to claims made by and or against politicians and political parties but included all kinds of claims that could influence not just the decision making of electorates, but the entire political climate of the country. For example, this fact-check report ‘Four heavily built men arrested for impersonating security officers’ by *Ghana Fact* with an unknown source. The wording of this claim suggests that this is not a claim made by and or against a politician or political party. However, what qualified as a political and electoral claim was not limited to the mention of politicians and political parties, but rather the mention of all electoral related information including polling station, ballot boxes, voters,

security, and electoral logistics among others, hence qualified as a claim which was fact-checked in Ghana's 2020 general election (INDUB1, INGF1 & INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

4.7 Automated Fact-checking, Human Fact-checking and Verdicts of Political Fact-checks

This study also gathered information on the processes which led to the verdicts or ratings of political fact-checks. INGF2 (personal communication, October 02, 2021), INGF3 (personal communication, October 04) and INDUB3 (personal communication, September 27, 2021) stated the two main processes included the use of digital tools and contacting sources of information, thus automated fact-checking and human fact-checking, respectively. According to INDUB3 (personal communication, September 27, 2021), the choice of process used in political fact-checking by both fact-checking organizations was claim dependent. This meant that no particular process was applied to all political claims, but rather the choice in process was dependent on claim typology, that is the nature of the claim. Fact-checkers used either digital tools, desktop research or contacted readily available, multiple, and reliable sources of information to either debunk or confirm a political claim.

The use of digital tools appeared to be the simplest and quickest way that provided political fact-check reports for public consumption since it did not need any form of contacting individuals to access information pertaining to claims (INGF3, personal communication, October 04, 2021). This use of digital tools to debunk or confirm political claims during Ghana's 2020 general election is a testament to the notion indicated by researchers including Graves (2018), that automated fact-checking best cures the rapid spread of fake news on the internet. Digital tools used in fact-checking political claims during the election included but not limited to Google reverse image search, Google map, forensically and in video verification (INDUB1 & INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021). Other interviewees noted the following

We have the reverse image tool and the geo location tool which are also claim dependent. So maybe if a picture comes out that there is a fire outbreak at a particular polling station, you can use geo location to see if indeed there is a fire outbreak at that polling station. You can also use a Google reverse to find out

when a photo was published online to find out if this really is a recent picture or it is an old picture that has been edited or used in a different context. (INDUB1, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

I see a picture on Twitter that says, this is Lukman and I know Lukman. I know that it is not Lukman so I can quickly do a Google reverse image search without needing any external sources. In that case, I can produce my fact check within an hour or even less. (INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

Forensically was the digital tool used to fact check Akufo Addo's alleged bribe. That's what we used to check if a video is doctored or not, or, or photo or whatever, is doctored or has been photo shopped. (INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021)

We used reverse imaging. We can use Google for that so we're able to track when an image was first shared. (INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

We used Google reverse image to verify when an image went viral and with a simple click of a button or two, you should be able to know whether the image is truly representing the scenario in which is being depicted or some old image which is the image misrepresented. (INGF3, personal communication, October 04, 2021)

INGF3 (personal communication, October 04, 2021) noted that, while relying on automated fact-checking was simple and quick, the other process which included contacting sources of information proved challenging to both fact-checking organizations, hence resulted in fact-checkers spending close to days in debunking or confirming a political claim. Sources of information, mostly government officials were not forthcoming with the needed information and were not also reliable. According to INGF2 (personal communication, October 02, 2021), one can be contacting the source and they might not be forthcoming with information. The difficulty in human fact-checking was further highlighted by the following interviewees;

One of the challenges is with getting enough information from the right people to cover as many claims coming from all over the country (INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

Sources at the backbone of our work. You call a ministry and the ministry will tell you the same thing that you want to verify, even though it may or may not be true and once you mention to them that you are a fact-checker sources are a major issue (INDUB1, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

It has mainly been access to information resource persons (INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

If you need to speak to somebody and the person is not forthcoming with information, it stalls the work a little bit. (INDUB3, personal communication, September, 27, 2021)

4.8 Verdicts of Political Fact-checks

According to INGF3 (personal communication, October 03, 2021) described verdicts, also known as ratings in the context of political fact-checking, as the outcome of a claim, subsequent to thorough scrutiny which included the use of digital tools and human sources of information. Verdicts used by both fact-checking organizations included true, false, mostly true, mostly false, partly true, partly false, unproven, misleading, insufficient evidence, more context needed among others. None of the fact-checking organizations had a definitive set of verdicts, but rather verdicts were arrived at based on the analysis of fact-checking processes but most political claims that were fact-checked appeared to be false and misleading (INGF2, personal communication, 2021 & INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021). Other opinions from the interviewees on their verdicts/ratings of their various fact-check reports included;

Some could be misrepresented, some can be not entirely true, some can be inaccurate, some can be nearly true, and hence they varied (INGF1, personal communication, September 29)

Okay, we have satire, we have not proven. For example. So, sometimes a certain claim may warrant us to even introduce another verdict. (INGF2, personal communication, October 02, 2021)

The common ones were either false or misleading. It was not just false or misleading. If the information that we had at that time was not enough to establish like a very conclusive verdict to say it's true or its false, we said more context needed. (INDUB3, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

We have false, mostly false, mostly true, misleading, more context needed, insufficient evidence. We have satire because sometimes some of the things are just jokes that people consume as misinformation. (INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

We also have true false mostly true, mostly false. We have more contexts needed that's when the claim is probably taken out of context, but has some element of truth in it (INDUB1, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

4.9 Writing of Political Fact-check Reports

The study also realized from the interviewees, the various stages that political fact-check reports passed through before they got published on the various websites. Starting from the fact-checker who worked on the claim, the report passed through two additional persons before getting published (INGF2, personal communication, October 02, 2021). In all, three stages and persons and sometimes more than three individuals edited and approved the report before it got published. INDUB2 (personal communication, September 29, 2021) confirmed that the fact-checkers appreciated teamwork throughout all stages of the fact-checking process and were never quick to debunk or confirm a political claim because of their level of professionalism. Also, the fact-checkers made available in their responses all sources they relied on to ascertain the level of truth or otherwise of political claims. These were other responses when asked about the processes that led to the outcome of political fact-check reports;

Once the researcher is done, they send it to the first level editor to be sure that every information there is correct, then I send it to our next level editor who does

a final proofreading to be sure that everything is concrete before it is published. (INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

We have the first editor and the second editor. So after you work on your story, you need to self-edit, then you push it to your first line editor who would look at it and send it to the second line editor who would also look at it and then there's a group of people who would review it, before it's published. (INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021)

Three eyeballs had taken a look at the script before it ended up online. (INGF3, personal communication, October 04, 2021)

The most senior person in the office is not the final person so he runs it by his superiors, but then also there are particular instances where we would have to speak to legal persons to be sure if we are not veering into things like contempt. (INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

4.10 Media Partnership

Both fact-checking organizations did not only rely on their platforms to disseminate their political fact-check reports. They partnered with other media organizations to further engage the public on the findings in their political fact-check reports. During one interview, INGF3 (personal communication, October 04, 2021) noted that *Ghana Fact* made available, their political fact check reports on the radio and television platforms as well as online platform, which included Ghanaweb and Eyewitness news on Citi fm. Also, *Dubawa Ghana* had media partners that helped spread the word. For instance, Starr fm and *Dubawa* collaborated on a program called Star fact checker which was basically reading out fact checks that have been done (INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed qualitative content analysis of the findings of the interviews conducted. It basically talked about the approaches used in fact-checking Ghana's 2020 general election.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This concluding chapter of the study provides a brief of the findings and analysis of the interviews conducted and gives closing comments on the entirety of the study. It further provides possible ways on how best to ensure Ghana derives the full benefits of media and information literacy, particularly in an election year.

5.1 Summary of Findings

Findings from this study indicate that political fact-checking by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* contributed significant efforts to consolidating Ghana's democracy by serving as the information filter through their various political fact-check reports during Ghana's 2020 electioneering period, mainly campaigns, day of election and day of declaration of results. These fact-checking organizations established their historic essence in Ghana's information landscape, particularly politics and media. Their approach to fact-checking was comprehensive, participatory, and systematic. Starting from the training of journalists and media organizations to collaborating with electoral stakeholders including the Electoral Commission, Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), Ghana Police Service and International Observers like West Africa Network for Peace building (WANEP).

The objectives of both fact-checking organizations included upholding national interest, particularly national security, ensuring that electorates elected candidates based upon the consumption of factual information and not propaganda and also ensuring a fair media brand for the contending flag bearers and political parties namely, incumbent President Nana Addo Dankwah Akufo Addo of the NPP and former President John Dramani Mahama of the NDC.

Additionally, social media platforms including Whatsapp, Facebook and Twitter served as avenues for political and electoral claims which appeared to be mostly false and misleading. Also, claims made by and or against the leading politicians and political parties appeared the most and were duly fact-checked in order to promote the interests

of the general public. This study revealed that sources of the various political false claims that were fact-checked during Ghana's 2020 general election included Facebook and Whatsapp group pages made up of individuals belonging to the NDC and NPP, hence the argument by Hart et al. (2009) that the echo chamber relies on selective exposure to online media content in which people are inclined to favor political information that confirms and reinforces already existing political viewpoints was realized in this study although it's potential to cause extremism and polarization was not convincingly established.

Topics that gained maximum political scrutiny from the fact-checking organizations ranged from the typical education, infrastructure, economy, and health among others with the new topic being Covid-19. Political fact-checked reports by both fact-checking organizations concluded mainly with false and misleading but had verdicts such as more context needed, not convincing, satire, mostly true and mostly false among others. The political and electoral claims fact-checked were made available to the public to aid them in evaluating political and electoral claims prior to making a choice in the election.

Lastly, this study found out that the partnership and collaborations between both fact-checking organizations and media organizations like Citi newsroom of Omni Media and Starr FM of Excellence in Broadcasting as well as media organizations based in the various regions of Ghana was significant to the role of fact-checking in Ghana's 2020 general election. Also, this study realized that, in spite the challenges associated with accessing information from individuals and that of limited staff, the role of *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* in sanitizing Ghana's 2020 general election is incontrovertible.

5.2 Conclusion

This study sought to understand the conduct of political fact-checking by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* during Ghana's 2020 general election by examining among others, how political-fact-checking was conducted, what constituted political fact-check worthiness, the source, topics, and verdicts of fact-checked political and electoral claims. Grounded within the theory of echo chamber in politics and social media, this study reviewed existing literature within the scholarly fields of; the origination of fact-checking, specifically political fact-checking, understanding political communication and political fact-checking, the internet, social media, and political misinformation.

The theory of echo chamber in politics and social media posits that when people online are confronted with a variety of political information, they tend to agree with information that are in line with their political viewpoints and avoid information that do not reflect their political viewpoints. This tendency to agree with information that are in consonance with one's political ideologies leaves little chance for the authenticity of information, hence the likelihood for the circulation of fake news (Jamieson & Capella, 2008). This study highlighted that during Ghana's 2020 general election, political misinformation was thriving amongst the identified echo chamber platforms namely; Whatsapp and Facebook groups made up of members and sympathizers of the NDC and NPP. Both fact-checking organizations came across political news and subjected them to the truth test and usually concluded that they were false and misleading. A typical political claim was President Akufo Addo's alleged bribery scandal which Dubawa Ghana fact-checked and concluded that it was false.

The political fact-checking activities of Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact considerably ensured that citizens were exposed to only factual information. It was also established that the conduct of political fact-checking by *Dubawa Ghana* and *Ghana Fact* were similar. For instance, in the run up to Ghana's 2020 general election, both fact-checking organizations engaged journalists and the public on the basic skills in fact-checking political claims. Also, both fact-checking organizations had similar criteria for what constituted fact-check worthiness which mainly included virality and national interest. Understaffing also appeared to be the challenge both fact-checking organizations encountered during Ghana's 2020 general election.

This study has provided empirical evidence to the effect that fact-checking in Ghana's 2020 general election was obviously laborious considering the fact that the number of fact-checking organizations and fact-checkers were undeniably insignificant. The current status of fact-checking organizations cannot satisfy the numerous claims from the general public. Besides, fact-checking is applicable to all forms of information and not just politics. The respective fields of communication that demand fact-checking are overwhelming. Therefore, the current status of fact-checking organizations means that fact-checkers have to fact-check claims regarding almost every sector of the country. As indicated in the findings, some political fact-check worthy claims were not fact-checked due to issues such as accessing sources and limited staff.

In conclusion, political fact-checking in Ghana's 2020 general election by *Ghana Fact* and *Dubawa Ghana* sought to enlighten and empower the citizenry on consuming accurate political and electoral information in order to enhance Ghana's democracy, promote and protect the general interest of the country. Political fact-checking is relatively new and gradually emerging despite having, in most cases, difficulties accessing information as well as inadequate number of fact-checking organizations.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, this section of the study proffers possible ways to enhancing the concept of political fact-checking in Ghana, particularly in an election year. The recommendations highlighted below are targeted at all stakeholders that envision Ghana's political and media landscape as a conduit for development.

This study recommends the establishing of more fact-checking organizations in the country to possibly respond swiftly to all fact-check worthy claims from the public. The study again recommends the establishment of political fact-checking organizations and or the creation of political fact-checking units within fact-checking organizations who will mainly focus on political claims because of the critical nature of political claims, particularly in an election year like Ghana's 2020 general election. There are available spaces to be filled in the fact-checking industry. It is not an overcrowded space yet, hence individuals and organizations as well as international bodies can contribute their quota to ensuring a well-informed and discerning Ghana. A typical example is Politifact, a US based fact-checking organization that deals with political claims only.

Also, Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Skills should be incorporated into the country's various educational curricula. It should not be limited to fellowships, seminars and workshops because almost all humans are audiences of the various media of communication. One is either a radio and or television listener, newspaper reader or social media user. In the various educational curricula because students are consumers of all kinds of information including political information, and are active users of social media, hence must be equipped with the basic skills in media and information literacy in order to be discerning audiences. Once a significant population of the Ghanaian citizenry can boast of knowing how to subject claims to scrutiny, the widespread circulation of

fake news, mainly on social media will be drastically mitigated. The trait of media research should be inculcated in Ghanaians, right from the basic levels in schools.

Fact-checking organizations and well-meaning Ghanaians should liaise with the various educational authorities to make this a reality. Being exposed to truthful claims is the utmost responsibility of every citizen and can even be considered a moral obligation considering Ghana's touted credentials in morality. Talk of morality, sources of information, particular government officials should constantly make available to fact-checkers, reliable, relevant and timely information and desist from the practice of withholding information which has no potential of endangering national security. Additionally, despite the time characteristic associated with fact-checking, fact-checking organizations should report legitimate difficulties regarding accessing information from sources to the Right to Information Commission to serve as deterrents to other institutions.

Accessing information that seeks to promote the greater good of society must be possible when needed. Measures to criminalize creators of misinformation regardless of personality involved can as well be advocated for by individuals and organizations who envision a healthy political and media ecosystem for Ghana. However, what constitutes criminalization for the creation of misinformation should be carefully stated in a way that will not mean the stifling of freedom of speech.

Furthermore, this study was embarked on due to among others, the dearth of literature on political fact-checking in Ghana as well as the gap in literature that exists between the global north and south. For this reason, this researcher recommends that more research should be conducted to explore all other aspects of political fact-checking in Ghana. Researchers and organizations should show interest in studying and funding political fact-checking in Ghana. Also, misinformation is rife due to the level of social media penetration in Ghana. For this reason, social networking companies including Facebook, Whatsapp and Twitter should contribute effectively to preventing such circulation on their various networking sites.

As explained early on in Chapter 2.4, during USA's 2020 electioneering, Twitter labeled a political claim from President Donald Trump as that has either been fact-checked or needs fact-checking. This was part of Twitter's policy to minimize the spread of false

news on their platform (Conger & Alba, 2020). This kind of intervention by Twitter should not be discriminatory on the basis of geography. Ghana is equally a democratic country like the USA, hence must be provided with the kinds of services provided to western democracies. The likes of Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp can liaise with fact-checking organizations like Ghana Fact and Dubawa Ghana in that regard.

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APPENDICES

Interview guide for fact-checkers at Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact.

I am Lukman Mahami Adams, a student at the School of Graduate Studies, Ghana Institute of Journalism. I am conducting an academic research on political fact-checking during Ghana's 2020 general election and would be thankful if you could kindly participate in this research by accepting an invitation for a face-face interview on This interview will be a semi-structured interview guided by the following questions. Please note that confidentiality will not be compromised and your narratives will be used for academic purposes only. Thank you.

1. How did you conduct political fact-checking during Ghana's 2020 general election?
2. What made a political claim worth a fact-check?
3. How was the role of fact-checking assigned to fact-checkers during Ghana's 2020 general election?
4. How long did it take in fact-checking political claims during Ghana's 2020 general election?
5. Which persons, topic, and media generated the most fact-checked political claims during Ghana's 2020 general election?
6. What verdicts were used in describing claims that were fact-checked during Ghana's 2020 general election?
7. This happened to be your first time of conducting political fact-checking in Ghana. What is your opinion on media and information literacy in Ghana?
8. What is your relationship with other media organizations in Ghana, relative to your fact-checking operations?
9. What were some of the challenges you encountered in fact-checking Ghana's 2020 general election?
10. Are there any lessons learnt from your 2020 fact-checking experience?

Transcript of interview with INGF1

Interviewer: Hello

INGF1: Okay, that's fine. How long does it is?

Interviewer: It might just take 25 minutes.

INGF1: That's a long time. It's been a long time.

Interviewer: The first is just a general overview of how you conducted political fact checking during the 2020 general election campaign.

INGF1: So in 2020, I work with an organization called Ghana fact. One of our key things was to just cross check and you know, the electioneering period is a time where people peddle a lot of truths and untruths, half-truths, and all those other variations of truths, and then falsehoods. So our main job was to fish out those kinds of things. And then quickly, fact check them. Do them timely so that people get the right fact checks out of those claims that were made. So basically, that was it. So the idea was to look out for institutions, individuals, as any anybody or even just institutions, individuals, most especially who we thought were or had some clouds, such that when they see something it carries a lot of weight. And then we're just keeping tabs on them to ensure that I'll just check if we saw anything they were making or saying that needed fact checking. And so basically, so it was it was an all around the clock team will start from the night of the election, the night before the election, to the Wednesday, first day of the election, I think, the very night the election results were declared. Yes, that was it.

Interviewer How about during the campaign period?

INGF1: Well, we didn't do much. During the campaign period, we did one or two, but it wasn't as intense as what we did during the election period itself. I mean, within the heated elections. Anything prior to that were just general claims. Like I'm saying it wasn't as intense.

Interviewer: What made a political claim worth a fact check because several claims were made but you decided to fact check certain statements or political claims and not the other?

INGF1: Like I said, we couldn't throw our tentacles, everywhere else. It was impossible. Whereas a very experienced team, but we're still small. And so what we're doing was we were looking at, like I mentioned earlier, particular people or institution. If the general secretary of the NPP was saying something at a time, and he said something that sounded too good to be true, we hold it a right to just check whether indeed that was true or not,

especially because of the propaganda that can accompany some of these things. And so that was how we weighed what was fact checker able or not. Otherwise, we also had a network of other fact checkers from across the country. What they did was that any time they also had something they shared with us and so it was a WhatsApp platform, a network where all of them just share and there are tens of them on it. So we were working in between that platform.

Interviewer: How was the role of fact-checking assigned?

INGF1: An editor will assign a claim for me to fact check or I could just come up with a claim. So for me like this I am a little senior, so the only thing I needed to do was to run it by my immediate senior that's my most senior person and then he would think about it or I just tell him that I think we should do this and he would put us okay, how do we go about it? Who do we speak to? Who do we get confirmation from? How do we cross check? Which way are we getting the other facts from, but every other person would also do an equally similar thing, they would run it by either myself or my most senior person. Yes and then we will weigh the importance or the relevance as well as its timing as whether it was necessary. Some of them will be difficult to actually fact check immediately if not we will do a shoddy job. So some of those ones we shielded them and didn't need to fact-check. And of course, fact checking never go stale so we can always go back and check it and so on.

Interviewer: So the next question, are you able to give me a definite answer as to how long it took you to fact-check a particular claim?

INGF1: Some of them can take days okay. So the idea is not that it has to drag for long. But you know how information flow in our parts of the country is? Yeah, most of the time. Most of the time what we do is that we will do deep researches or searches online and if we have to contact particular people or authority. We call them over the phone and not everybody will be willing to give you information just because you've called and said my name is Etse and I work with Ghana Fact. Many people might not even or you tell them we are a fact checking organization, they might not be ready to answer some of those questions immediately so you need to find another way around it. Others could be as easy as anything because some other people understand that you are just cross checking information. So when you call them some can last just a few hours but others to can go into days okay.

Interviewer: Amongst the fact checked topics, which topic appeared to be the most fact checked?

INGF1: Are you talking in respect to last year's elections?

Interviewer: Yes, yeah during the election campaign 2020.

INGF1: Okay yes so like you mentioned a number of those, the free political campaign messages from the politicians. So we look broadly at sectors. Economy was a big thing. We knew either parties, I'm talking about the main contenders NPP or NDC would come up with their own figures in relation to all kinds of things, say inflation. We looked at education, education was huge on our list because of the free SHS and then the promise by the NDC candidates that I can't really remember but education and economy were key. Yes, I think generally those were health, yes, health as well. Health was a big area that we looked at. Yes so those are the main things.

Interviewer: So what was the source of the political claims you fact checked

INGF1: Most of our claims came by social media. Also a few people who visit our websites or social directed and sent us claims and information so that we're able to do the proper fact checking and platforms on social media, Twitter and Facebook are both verified. So people can trust that when they send things there and it gets fact checked. I mentioned that there are not too many checking organizations in Ghana so the few ones talk of Ghana fact, talk of Dubawa, or talk of the Media Foundation for West Africa

Interviewer: fact check Ghana

INGF1: Yes, this fact check Ghana, that's it and so yes just those. So those who know are willing to share information with us and then we run with it if we feel it is strong enough.

Interviewer: What were the sources of the political claims? Like individuals from the political

INGF1: So they were mostly from anybody who has enough clout to command as indicated. So as long as they can command a lot of attention. Yes, as long as they could do that, whether you're an MP, whether you are an assembly member within a particular district where something is happening, as long as there's anybody in the chain of leadership. Yes, that was it.

Interviewer: What were some of the verdicts you used in your organization?

INGF1: Yes so not all claims were false or true. So some can be misrepresented, some can be not entirely true, some can be inaccurate, some can be nearly true. Well there are variations and not the express True or false? Other variations of all of those, because the

truth is that some of the things we captured eventually or along the way of fact check. Hello, oh sorry, I was getting an incoming call. So I'm saying that some of the claims that we worked the details of some of those claims that turn out factual and others do not actually turn out to be as factual or there are portions of those claims that we were fact checking or investigating and that turned out to be true. So it will not be fair to just conclude that is false or true so we'll need to have a different way of saying, Okay, this was this, but it is not entirely true. It is fairly true or something like that.

Interviewer: Looking at your experience in the 2020 election campaign, related to fact checking, what's your opinion on media information literacy amongst Ghanaian consumers?

INGF1: Well, I think that one of the things we need to understand is that the internet already is something that people pay a lot of use and one of the things we noticed during the electioneering period was that a lot of people, you know they're a lot of online users who are gullible. They are susceptible to all kinds of false information so people who understand the game of propaganda were fond of just going back and pulling back information or things to misrepresent. For instance, the most classic example, what's happened in Techiman South. Anyone could go pull up some video of maybe a confrontation between the police and then the youth, and then spread it on Facebook or Twitter or wherever. And caption it as chaos happening at Techiman or say police and youth clash. Unfortunately, because of how competitive the electioneering period or times like that there are a number of media organizations, let me call them blogs that always run with things like that. And then they also add up to spreading falsehood. So my experience from at least the last year's election was that I noticed how much of fact checking is needed, we need a lot of fact checkers. And the truth is that too many people are getting away with peddling falsehood. And because there are little or there a few people to actually counter those, they get away with it. Maybe rejoinders and all of those but it might not adequately attack those things. So I think that the truth is that we have a lot of false, or a lot of propaganda out there so there's also the need for enough fact checkers to also do the thing. But also, let me just add this quickly. I don't blame us a lot because there is a difficulty, especially because many people who do fact checking do not have a background in journalism. So there is also the lack of you know finding the right words. So there's also the missing parts of people specializing so fact checking becomes like just a branch of the main thing. People do know many just want to stick to fact checking because its research intensive

and so yes, that's the thing. That's how I felt about those elections. A lot of fakes would be out there but not too many people out there to cross check them.

Interviewer: Early on, you did mention of some digital tools you were using for checking videos and images. Can you please share with me some of the tools you used?

INGF1: I will need to get you the exact ones but we used reverse imaging that's something that we used. We can use Google for that so we are able to track when an image was first shared. There's a possibility of doing that so that you can tell whether or not indeed is. Yes, I would send you the list.

Interviewer: Aside the challenge of accessing information from your sources to either verify or do otherwise. What other challenges did you encounter in your checking activities, particularly political fact checking?

INGF1: I think one of the challenges we noticed was that there are a few fact checkers outside the main cities. We get a lot of claims in very remote places on rural places or other parts of the country. But there are a few people to fact check them. And like I'm saying we are here perhaps in Accra, or Kumasi and something is happening in Chereponi but then we need it to be checked. We don't have a contact there but would have wanted to work with maybe someone. So sometimes what we do is that we work with some of the local, I don't like to call them local, some of the journalists based in the communities or community based journalists. If we have their contacts, then we'll ask them to check or they are able to get us to the right contacts. And we are able to follow up on. I think one of the challenges is with getting enough information from the right people to cover as many claims coming from all over the country. Yes, that's a huge challenge. And then one of the challenges is so fact checking is quite intensive and it's still a new area. One of the challenges is that it's ill resourced people don't pay as much to have fact checking done, or there isn't as much money within the industry to get as much done, because there are times that we need to move beyond just sitting behind a mobile phone and travel so now we can have our own on the ground. But that's also because it is a new industry. And so people are still moving into it.

Interviewer: Let's say I'm a fact checker under your organization and I fact check a claim, what are the stages it passes through before it gets to Ghana fact website?

INGF1: Yeah. Okay, so common editors like... My most senior person in the office is not the final person on the ladder and so he runs it by his superiors but then also there are particular instances where we would have to speak to legal persons to be sure or not if we are not veering into things like contempt or jumping the gun case. So those kinds of

things, but there's always an editor even for my most senior person. When he works on reports he asks me to look at them. We always want to have a second and third eye. I'm looking at things so he always asked me to look at them and ensure that everything is in place. If I have any additions or subtractions I easily do them so we are always checking each other to ensure that what we are putting out is airtight and one of the things I need to add is that we are never in a hurry to push a fact check. Okay is just like a research we are never in a hurry to post a fact check. A fact check must be airtight so we will give it as much time and as much room to get all the details before we go we got to publish.

Interviewer: Was there any instance where you missed or let's say a particular information that you needed but didn't have at the time of the fact checking and did you retract and come up with a new report again?

INGF1: There are always updates on things. And so if we carry this claim that was Akufo Addo never bathed in the presidential jet then we work on it and we find out that it is true that he never did and there we go with our fact check and eventually there's information from the Ministry of Interior or defense or whoever is in charge or from the president that shows indeed, the President, bathed in the presidential jet. We always go back so one of the things we don't do is we don't exactly update, we might have it once in a while, but it would be better to do a separate fact check just to update and say that, yes we'll do a separate fact check than merely having an update within an old one. Actually, there were instances that will do it within the same story that yes that is not common as the other one so I will do it separately.

Interviewer: I think you said almost... maybe I might have missed something. You can if you want to add anything beneficial towards this thesis.

INGF1: That I mentioned, we need a lot of fact checkers. Okay. The job is still new. There are a lot of tools. And like you mentioned, digital tools that you need exploring. What did you mention your thesis title? It needs publishing.

Interviewer: Political fact checking during Ghana's 2010 election campaign, a comparative analysis of fact checks by Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact.

INGF1: Okay, so the idea is, this is what I think and beyond the fact that you're looking at political checking, especially within 2020 elections, there continues to be a lot, a lot of information that is peddled online, or that goes around online that aren't as accurate as they are supposed to be and so there is a need for continuous fact checking. There is a need for that continuous recently due by our date, a fact check on this vital information

that Ghana was number two, when it came to the countries from where people searched the most for used the porn website. Yeah, yes, you saw that?

Interviewer: Yes, please.

INGF1: So it turned out that wasn't accurate. Indeed, there was a portion of the website and there was a certain particular web search that the Pornhub people had done an analysis of that Ghana was number two on that list of the countries that searched for that particular thing. So they are searching for slim woman. Okay, Ghana was number two, but then that information was shared online so we did a fact check. And so you see something like that was not completely false. So Ghana was number two was true in the sense that only under a certain portion, but a main claim that Ghana was number two entirely in the world was inaccurate. So there is a need for continuous fact checking. Okay, so that that would be it. Yeah. I think that's, yeah. I wish you the best.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you, sir.

Transcript of interview with INGF2

Interviewer: Thanks so much. So basically the interview seeks to understand how political fracture was done during the 2020 general election campaign. So the first question, can you please give me an overview of what went into the fact checking activities relative to the election?

INGF2: Okay, thank you so much for having this session with me. All we did at Ghana fact especially, the election was a little over a year since we started our operation so it was a massive thing for us to face in terms of operation. We knew how bad it was when it comes to misinformation and disinformation in the country, especially when electorates are being convinced to go for either party a or by b. Politicians will be churning out all sorts of information just to get the endorsements of the electorate. So in terms of our preparation, we started fact checking way ahead of the election itself. The political campaigns both on traditional and social media, rallies and even went as far as monitoring the social media handles of these politicians and the political parties. So whatever they said in terms of the economic performance, education sector performance, enrollment ratio whether it has gone up or not whether the economy has expanded under this administration or not. We were looking at all those things and conducting fact check reports in that regard to help sanitize the information space and ensure that whatever they say will not be lies being churned out just to influence the decision of the electorates. So with a lot of this work, in terms of our preparation, we had data about the major areas

now we thought this will be part of the areas that politicians who will be speaking about when they are trying to tout their performance. For example, for the first time in Ghana's history, we saw the education sector playing a dominant role in terms of political discussion and that was a result of the free senior high school which has increased the enrolment ratio very significantly. So the government was using that a lot in terms of its campaign messaging. There were a lot of figures mentioned that you find the ministers saying the ratio has increased by 400,000 by 1.2 million and you find the President also saying something else. So we have to go for the official figures from the Ministry of Education and look at the enrolment ratio with the Ghana education service. All these things, even with the World Bank, because it is the same government that supplies data to the World Bank to provide what sort of analysis whatever they want to do in terms of the analysis and policymaking and even the supports that they roll out to the Ghana government. So we are we are covering all these things, and ensuring that we leave no room and no stone unturned in terms of having their opposite information to arm ourselves so that if there is anything that has been put out there will not be having difficulty in terms of finding the data to either confirm or downplay what the politicians will say. So generally, our preparation was to gather enough information to know where to go to intel if we needed information, so that when there is any piece of claim that we need to fact check, it will be much difficult for us

Interviewer: What made a political claim worth a fact check? These factors are a key in even considering to fact check a claim or not. Personality is a key factor. For example, when you find President Akofe Addo, Gabby Otchere Darko or Vice President, Dr. Bawumia, saying the economic growth rates that we recorded in 2016, the last year of John Mahama as President of the country, was the worst in the history of the Fourth Republic. This is a serious message ahead of elections. So we consider personality and the content or Dr. Bawumia describing that performance as the worst in the history of the Fourth Republic. This is a serious message ahead of elections. When the incumbent is telling you the last economic performance of its contender is the worst in the history of the Fourth Republic. It's carried with the President, the Vice President, so they say this and you go to check and it's not true. So first of all, the personality especially because it was an election season, we are much focused on the politicians as well as the social commentators and others, but our focus was on the politicians what they said in terms of their campaigns and stuff. So we consider personality, then the content is also key. You understand if the message that has been sent, that has been said, falls within our editorial

policy as a claim that is worthy of fact checking? Why not? It doesn't depend on the personality. We've had instances during the elections or prior to elections where party communicators at the district, municipal and the regional level will be using their social media handles to spew a lot of lies... we will not say because that person is not prominent or the proximity is not there so we will not fact-check. As far as the content has to do with the public and has the tendency to misinform and disinform the public and it falls within our editorial policy, we will not hesitate to fact-check. So yes, the personality involved and the contents. You can never verify it doesn't even fall within the editorial policy. It cannot be described as a claim but is such a piece of information, you just need to let it slide. Okay, for example, in the last four or five years, we've been hearing lots of words the debt stock of this country how much Ghana has borrowed so far under the Akufo Addo administration and how much Ghana borrowed under the John Mahama administration. This has played out a lot in the elections. But we could not fact check because we didn't have the information, the data to help us determine whether who has borrowed more in terms of public debt stock in terms of the borrowing that we see our governments embark on or go for. Interest rates at the time which you were borrowing is a key factor in determining how much one has borrowed. So I could have borrowed 10 million cedis then those who borrowed 10 million cedis borrowed that at 20% interest and he brought that 10% interest. The same money by mine will be expensive because the interest rate is higher and over time, over time when exchange rate also affects the strength of the currency. And maybe the rate of the dollar goes high if I borrowed in dollar the same amount because dollar has gone up so I will need more cedis to get that same amount of dollar to pay. So when you convert in local currency, you find that the levels have gone up so the politicians who are using this to confuse Ghanaians but we couldn't do anything because they have the data and they are not ready to release to help you conduct fact check during last year elections.

Interviewer: How's the role of fact checking assigned?

INGF2: Any of the other plus anyone can come to you and we'll set it up, please can I fact check this. Also as Monitoring is very key when it comes to fact checking and I believe journalism as well. Because you can only get a claim, we can only get to hear and get to see a lot of what's happened a lot more. So even though a number was small, just because you know fact checking is emerging and people are beginning to know it. What we did was, so maybe I want to

Interviewer: Hello, I didn't get the beginning of the monitoring.

INGF2: Okay, Can you hear me now? Yeah, can you? So what I said is that monitoring is very key in the work of a fact checker, and journalism at large. So all we did during the elections were to assign media, key media stations and social media handles and taught team members and we had our also WhatsApp line active, and our social media handles active. We had a small promo like an ad now we deployed on social media, encouraging people to share with us any piece of information that they need fact check. You understand? So we saw a lot of people

tagging us on Facebook and sending to the whatsapp line. What we did is that we assigned key stations and social media handles of the key politicians, the contenders and the political parties, to our team members. We had a zip line also where people could share with us claims that they have seen information that they want fact checked. When we come to the office in the morning or wherever we are in the morning, we go to the pages social media handles of these politicians, political parties and surf the internet. We had digital tools also that were helping us to find trends maybe post that is gaining traction on social media and also there's a tool developed by Facebook called crowdtangle it helps you to get whatever is the latest. You get the latest piece of information on Facebook, who is trending and what people are saying. So based on these things, because it was election we were able to gather a lot to do. It doesn't mean you're an editor or something the job is for each just go around listen watch, go around the internet and find claims for us to fact check.

Interviewer Yes, please the name of the tool again by Facebook?

INGF2: Don't worry I will send it to you in the chat

Interviewer: So which topic appeared to be the most fact checked? You mentioned education as a result of the free SHS can you run me through the most fact checked topics?

INGF2: Well, the economy Okay, of course, dominated and healthcare delivery access to health care. Then infrastructure who has done more roads than the other?

Interviewer: How about a source was it mostly from social media handles of politicians?

INGF2 The most stories we fact checked were both from traditional and new media. You know, if you look at the internet penetration is seeing that gradually, the penetration is going up. And we are moving out from the traditional system of media to the online. So sometimes you don't want to miss any other political program on a tv or something and if you miss we just go to the to the radio stations, social media page. If the live stream of course do a live stream in almost all their shows and programs, then we just play back

and listen to the conversation. We relied more on social media but also individuals were sending us claims and sending us links of complaints and events where politicians have gone to say a, b, c and let's not forget in the sense that we had the election amidst COVID-19 so there was misinformation also around the vaccines. This information around the disease itself was also dominant in activity in 2020. So while looking at the election, also our focus was on COVID-19 which was more prominent than the election itself.

Interviewer: So a visit your site one will realize verdicts that include true or false mostly true and the likes. At Ghana fact what is the criteria of verdicts you always choose from?

INGF2: Okay, we have satire we have not proven. For example, if a politician comes to see something that's you go, maybe just two months ago, the President talked about the economic recovery and gave some figures as far as the second quarter was concerned. He said a recession has grown the economy 3.8% in the second quarter of 2021 that is from April to June. This was two weeks before the Ghana Statistics Service which is mandated by law to give you economic data. So he came and gave us one for two weeks later this month to give a different data which may say what he said was not true. So, in that regard, because we know that statistical services are yet to publish the data, we can conduct a fact check on his claim and the verdict was not proven because the data is available for us to just show Okay, the claim and the content will determine the for the verdict. Sometimes a certain claim may warrant us to even introduce another verdict.

Interviewer: During the 2020 general election, was there any situation where you updated or reversed a verdict.

INGF2: for reversing? No we haven't done that but we've had an instance where because we have a correction policy, where we've done some work and in our in our report if there was a mistake. So because we are IFCN certified. IFCN is the international financial metric more or less like yeah and you can you can google about them when you're done because we are signatory to that alliance and also part of a lot of international alliances. When I fact check your claim and in my report and I'm making a mistake I just don't go back and edit and issue reports to indicate that the earlier report there was a mistake because there should be openness in in the process, So where I had in our early days we've had an instance where even in our reports there was a mistake which the figures and we had to come back to update it and this because our job is monitoring the back end.

Interviewer: How do you process fact checked a claim before it gets to your website that's before it gets published?

INGF2: I always describe fact check into the writing phases. Sometimes you spend a whole week or two on one report because there's no room for mistakes. So what we do is that once fact checking journalist come up with a claim we discuss and see if it's worth it. In our conversation on our platform, we decide who is going to work on it. Okay, so Lukman you have to go to the bank of Ghana sites, you have to go to the Ministry of Finance, Ghana statistical Service, go to the IMF site, and go to the World Bank site. So we discuss all the resource that you will need to conduct the fact check. If it's about agriculture, planting for food and jobs, okay, go to the World Bank's, FAO Food and Agriculture Organization because the Ghanaian government supplied these international partners with data accurate data about all the activities because they support them and some of the activities have been financed by them. So even when look go on the international platforms, you will find the data and then you understand. So when we discuss all the resources you need, then you read around, you cannot or just when you gather your evidence and your counter claims or even information to corroborate the claim made by the president, if it's true or otherwise, or any other person, then you start to write your reports. And if you have gone to our site, you see that in almost all the posts that we do provide links of the data and the information that we've got a social feeder, confirm or downplay so that the reader can also visit and see for himself or herself the information, we are not generating it, we are not making it up. So when you do all that, then it comes to the first editor also painstakingly follow all these links to confirm what you have done. Sometimes it needs three eyes before final report is issued to ensure that everything is intact. We go over again and make sure we have covered all the angles. And indeed, while we are issuing ads to either confirm or downplay a claim.

Interviewer: This happened to be like the first time of Ghana Fact engaging in political fact checking in an election year in Ghana. What is your perception on media and information literacy?

INGF2: Occasionally, we measure that our country has become so politically polarized. The minds of people with the greatest deal of respect is either blue or green. So that is people see and thing from that perspective. So when we started with, and maybe you, you fact check claim made by Mahama you find their support. So turn on Facebook, and then the staff are being threatened. You know, in between all manner of things. But with time the middle class began to appreciate the importance of accurate information and

decision making. We understand so we are still not there because fact checking is new in our ecosystem. But people are beginning to appreciate the relevance of accurate information. Be tagging us sending us claim videos and things of information or for people have said about COVID-19, about politics, about the elections and all that stuff. And even during the election, we were engaged by the Center for Democratic Development CDD, Ghana. So we were we were in the strong rooms of one which is the National election Task Force, where you have stakeholders, from the EC of stakeholders from the National Christian Council, the National Muslim Council, the political, traditional authorities, the political party where you had everyone. So first hand, okay, so we were there I was in that room, whatever piece of information comes as far as let's say there is tension here or there people sending videos, people have snatched ballot papers. Now, this and that, because we are in the information technology age where people can manipulate contents, just to see to the propaganda motive. So when these information come, the first thing is they give us the videos and the images for us to fact check. And a lot of times these things were not true, for example, there was a video that a polling station in Medina has been bent down.

And the video came to the strong room. They were calling people mobilizing to deploy the security force to go there. We fact checked and we saw that the video was an old video that happened, I think in some time long ago. But the people downloaded all these videos, and you know, that as you edited it's such an increasing fear and panic. So we're able to help them to know what is true and what was not true as far as the information that were being sent to them is concerned. Okay.

Interviewer: So what are some of the tools you used? I'm sure with this video you just mentioned, there was no need to contact any source.

INGF2: Yeah, we have a lot of tools that we use. We have reverse image search. So I will send you all those things on WhatsApp.

Interviewer: Also about your relationship with other mainstream media, other factors. During the election campaign, was there an instance where you had to partner or like double check with other organizations?

INGF2: I gave points when we did. There were only two ahead of the elections, we saw almost all the media houses setting up fact checking news desks even though some of them were not really effective. What we did was that ahead of the elections three months ahead of the elections, we went round across the 16 regions, and trained newsrooms on how to conduct fact checks. How to subject these information that they receive to the fact

checking process. We exposed them to the digital tools that we were using. We took them through how to use it, how to conduct when we receive information as a journalist, what to do, what not to do. So we made sure we built the capacity. In that regard, you understand. And we formed an alliance and network of more than 200 journalists across the country. We were all on the same platform. So we still have the platform and it was very active on Election Day for example, wherever you find wherever you receive you dump it there. I've seen this in Cape Coast so because we have journalists from Cape Coast, they will quickly move in and call and confirm whether it is true or not still issue a report, so there was a network of journalists across the country and that's what we used in the election.

Interviewer: You did mention about the difficulty in fact checking like you can be contacting the source and they might not be forthcoming with information.

INGF2: Yeas access to data was a key challenge. And as we know so, because fact checking is very new in our information ecosystem, we don't have a lot of people in Ghana, there's only Ghana Fact and Dubawa.

Interviewer: Any lessons learnt from your experience with election campaign relative to fact-checking?

INGF2: Well, I think the most important lesson in our work is the fact that you need to be to be suspicious of anything you receive as far as information is concerned. Because we've had high level personalities in the country, saying things with confidence with vim and vigor, yet you go and confirm and it is not true. So very embarrassing. You understand? Yeah. And the lessons that we will also we think we need to have more fact checking organizations in the country because the rate at which people have been misinformed is alarming. Once we have more hands, we will help to do the work. And I think also traditional media organizations have a key role in helping to sanitize the information ecosystem. But unfortunately, they are not doing much. Sometimes most of the claims we fact-checked during the election were new stories published by myjoyonline, citi news online, daily graphic. These are media platforms with higher reputation but we allow politicians to use them so they become carriers or big or key actors in informing the public. Yeah. So if they have fact checking desk, in the respective media houses and whatever politicians say, before they do a story out of which they fact check, then it will help us in the first place and the piece of lies will not even get to the public in the first place because it has been fact checked. And then also the increase in

the number of bloggers and websites parody websites and and it's, it's wrecking the whole problem, very complex.

Interviewer: Thank you so much.

Transcript of interview with INGF3

INGF3: Lukman Yeah, I can hear you.

Interviewer: Okay, so first of all, please during the election campaign what made a claim worth a fact-check?

INGF3: Yeah, before you start I said congratulations for completing your, your program.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

INGF3: When are you graduating?

Interviewer: March 2022 or December 2021. They usually graduate in March the following year. Ours is a 15 month program, but we were made to do only 10 months from January to October. So because of that we are likely to graduate this December

INGF3: So I think you fired one question.

Interviewer: Yes.

INGF3: So you know, Ghana fact is fully a project of Fact Space West Africa, which is a nonprofit social enterprise fact checking organization that has been verified by the International fact checking network and we are one of only six on African continent that has been verified by the IFCN so we operate based on some codes of principles that have been laid out by the IFCN which is a global metric standard. So as part of that, we are to lay out how we select our claims and the methodology we use in executing our projects on our platform. So if you visit our platform that is the website, you see the methodology we use in putting together our reports and debunks and also what we look out for in selecting a claim so when selecting a claim, we pay attention to how widely circulated the claim is. We also pay attention to who exactly is making the claim and the claim should be based on something that has happened in the past or something that's currently unfolding and should not be an opinion or something that's projected into the future. If it is an opinion based on the ratings, I would rate it accordingly. So these are things we do in selecting claims to verify if I could just sum it up that way.

Interviewer: The next is how was the role of fact checking assigned? Yu as a senior editor were you the one assigning the roles?

INGF3: So what we did was we put together a team of I think, 11, or 10 to fact check the presidential and parliamentary elections. So we were all at one location. We also put together some form of collaboration and multi-agency collaboration that involved a number of civil society organizations and also technology companies. I should add also that we created the Ghana Fact checking Network, which was made up of more than 100 journalists spread across the country, drawn from more than 30 media organizations. And as part of the network we created, we were helping these media organizations to set up by fact checking desks in their news rooms. So after doing the training, we decided to cross publish our fact checks on the radio and TV platforms were part of the network, as well as even the online platform, which included Ghanaweb. So this was the structure we had for covering the election. Now, the partnership involved, we using a platform called the check platform which belongs to check global. And that meant we were able to track the fact checks we were producing using the Check platforms. So if this is something we find on online, on Facebook, on Twitter on WhatsApp, we simply have to drop it into the chat platform and assign any of the team members who were present. The central point where we were covering the elections, the two team members were sent to the CDD Situation Room, which is where also CODEO operated from which is a largest domestic election observer group. And we had another team member also in the West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP) Situation Room. They were coordinating efforts with regards the national elections response to so the two team members were relied upon to help clarify whatever viral claims that needed the input of the election observers belonging to one these election observers are spread across the country. So we relied on these layers, together with the team members present at the central location to verify the claim and there was no particular order with regards to this work. We only had the editorial team that included myself. And Etsey who you interviewed. The rest of the team members were also contributing by putting together the report, so you put together the report, it's either Etsey or myself, but preferably, we wanted it to go through Etsey before it comes to me. So you put together the report, Etsey takes a look at it, does the first edits that I do the second edit. So we made sure that there were at least three eyeballs that have taken a look at the script before it ended up online.

Interviewer: So, averagely like a typical fact check, how long does it take?

INGF3: What we did was we how would I say this we kind of divided whatever we did during the whole election period into stages, or into layers basically. So we did the pre-election coverage, which we had a different strategy in dealing with. Then we did the

election coverage itself the day of the election, then we also did something that related to the post-election coverage. With the pre-election coverage, what we did was we were very proactive in putting out fact sheets and putting out explainers that was meant to provide clarity to the public in understanding very topical issues that was generating debate, both online and offline. So we put out things like how to identify false information or fake news, we put out reports that related to cloned websites that were being put out, or doubt that was gaining attention. And these websites mirrored very critical well known digital platforms, I think there was one that was that there was a website that was created to look like myjoyonline. There was another that was created to look like Citinewsroom. There was another was created to look like was the name of this. There were several of them. Anyway, there was a so called fact checking platform that was created that kind of was doing the political bidding of one of the political parties. So we put out reports to alert people to be wary of these platforms and to pay attention to whatever platform they're consuming their news from. So that was the first leg of our habit. Then on Election Day, we decided as part of the strategy that people will not have the time to consume maybe 500 to 1000 word articles. So what we did was to tackle misinformation where they were found, which is on social media. So you could see us produce graphics and illustrations on rotation of the text directly for publication on social media and not through our websites. So we did that as well. Then after the elections, we also paid attention to whatever was happening on social media and for that period, we started producing scripts and publishing them via the websites. So this was throughout the period. I don't know if answered your question.

Interviewer: yes please. So you made mention of social media, Whatsapp, meaning you monitored only social media or you monitored other platforms?

INGF3: So we monitor Facebook. So Facebook is the leading social media platform in the country, Whatsapp is the leading platform in the countries, we monitor Twitter, which is a platform that generates lots of attention and engagement. We deployed a WhatsApp tip line to encourage people to send in claims via WhatsApp. Anything suspicious, they could send it to us for verification. We publish some of our reports via Instagram as well. We encouraged the public to also send in claims via our website. So the concentration was not only on social media, we paid attention to traditional media. And don't forget, we have created the Ghana fact checking network, which included all these reporters across the country. So anytime they were suspicious claims that popped up anywhere around the country in all the regions, we could simply be alerted to pay attention to these

claims via the network. And all the journalists shared a common platform, Whatsapp platform so we could be able to work together.

Interviewer: So with a focus on the pre-election, political fact checking, which topic appeared to be the most fact checked? Were they issues on free SHS education, economy, and health infrastructure?

INGF3: I'm not sure I understand your question. Well, a collaboration with DW, the German international broadcaster. Yeah, so we did a collaboration and we produced the promise meter. You know, ahead of the election, there was some efforts to understand whether the promises made by politicians ahead of the last election in 2016, whether they managed to execute those promises before this election and they were very topical ones like the free SHS one district one, factory, the election of MMDCs and what have you. So together with DW Akademie, we produced the performance meter. I think five or six of the key promises that were made during the 2016 elections, to see if they've been implemented, or they've been executed. So that is what I can see about that. And some of the very topical issues like how to identify fake news. Like what do I do?

Interviewer: So what were the typical verdicts you used at Ghana fact? When I look on the website, I see things like true, false,

INGF3: So what we do is we apply, can you hear me? There's so much noise out here, but I hope it doesn't affect you

Interviewer: That's fine.

INGF3: We find the available public information that we can use to either confirm or debunk. As you can see on our platform we laid out the explanations as to why rules apply what's evaluating. Based on our findings, we just applied the ratings. I don't think there's any frequency that tends to dominate reports that we publish. So we only look out for a claim and attach the ratings based on whatever we find

Interviewer: So this happened to be the first time because Ghana fact came into existence in 2019. This was the first time you engaged in political fact-checking, particularly in an election year. What's your opinion on media information literacy amongst your audience? How does the public react to your claims?

INGF3: So before we launched, there was no full time fact checking operation in the country at all. There was some attempt to do some fact checking work during the last election, but it ended after the elections. Okay, I think since we launched, till now, I wouldn't be a good judge of our own work. I think you should be a good judge. Fact checking has gained a bit of attention and has been missing, especially during the election

where we were seeing even politicians call for facts checks. People would make claims and say if you like fact check it. Since we launched till now, even beyond our efforts, we've seen other fact checking organizations also launch operations. And we've seen increased attention being paid to fact checking beyond what we've done our platform and across social media. And even with our partner, traditional media platforms, we've seen some of the leading TV or radio platforms pay attention to our work. We published some reports, and we were invited to discuss our findings on Eyewitness News on citi fm. So yeah, I think we've managed to increase attention to verify information, not just among the subjects, but among TV in mainstream media platforms ordinarily. The fact checking is part of the work of a journalist. Before you put this out there, but that has largely been the case. So maybe whatever we've done, has whipped up interest in doing the needful as journalists in the country. But for the general public, I think the there is an interest there. If you look at how people are reaching out via the tip line, how people are letting us to claims on social media, how people are able to send in claims they are suspicious of via in the website, you can see there is an interest. But inadequate resource both human and financial to be able to deal with the number of claims that are being sent in would be another thing altogether. We are trying our best, I'm sure there will be the need for more fact checking organizations or more traditional newsrooms taking up the role of fact checking and allowing the public to alert them to suspicious claims or the needed resource being made available to already existing fact checking organizations to be able to work effectively and deal with the huge number of suspicious claims that are coming through. I think this would be my brief response to your question.

Interviewer: The challenges you encountered during the 2020 election campaign. So from the previous interviews, I gathered the most pervasive challenge includes accessing information from your sources.

INGF3: Yeah, of course. That's true but I think even beyond that, we should also highlight the challenge relating to the volume of suspicious claims that we are alerted to as compared to the personnel we had available to debunk or confirm whatever information that is. So I mentioned that, to be able to overcome this. We worked several civil society organizations and plugged into a lot of network that was going to seamlessly help us get verified information. We were co-opted onto the national elections response group, which included the Electoral Commission, the Peace Council, the Ghana police service, top civil society organization,

Interviewer: Meaning you were considered a major stakeholder in the 2020 elections?

INGF3: Yeah, we tried, we tried to make sure we had the necessary contacts with the relevant stakeholders so we could do our work and do it well. We also worked with CODEO as I mentioned who had election observers. We engaged the EU election observers group, we worked with Deutsche Delle. Even with the Facebook work, we were expected to pick up whatever suspicious claims would come up within the Situation Room, which included other civil society organizations, they channeling whatever they found through our Facebook. We worked a bit with WhatsApp, we verified our WhatsApp tip line. So people could be sending in suspicious claims by the tip line. So yeah, we tried to touch base with all the relevant stakeholders to ensure we were up to it when it came to the coverage of the election. I don't know if I missed your question on this.

Interviewer: Oh, no you answered everything perfectly. So this study seeks to understand how political fact-checking was done and conduct a comparative analysis of your fact checks and that of Dubawa Ghana so this next question is, was there any instance during the 2020 election campaign were you published a report and can I say revised or updated it based on additional information?

INGF3: During the elections they said the Electoral Commission wanted to announce the results I think the day after the elections, you know, it was very controversial.

Interviewer: Yeah, I remember I read you from your site.

INGF3: We were alerted to it. We reached out to one of the commissioners I think the deputy in charge of operation or something like that, Dr. Bossman and he denied that it was not coming from them. But later on we heard him saying on other platforms that it was them and so we got we were a bit confused. So we reached out to him and he said we didn't get the question well.

We had to update our reports with regards to that one.

Interviewer: I also realized like in your website you always make mention of your sources. Is that part of your principles?

INGF3: It is very important that you use publicly available source in confirming or debunking whatever information. So you use the publicly available sources to ensure that the ordinary person who is reading the fact check can also use the methodology that you used in producing your fact check and arrive at the same conclusion. So if I'm using a report from the bank of Ghana, which is publicly available on the platform, I should be able to cite that report and provide access to that report so anybody who is reading a fact check, can come with a simple click on the button, go into the source document and be

able to verify things for himself. So the person shouldn't take your word for anything. The person should be able to independently verify, verified.

Interviewer: And your digital tools. I remember you made mention of some tools you used during the election campaign.

INGF3: Times have changed, things have evolved, and we've changed from when we had journalists playing the digital gatekeeper role of ensuring whatever information was put up on radio and TV. Separating facts from fiction. Now, social media and the digital space has created a level playing area so people are now able to go onto these platforms and put out whatever information without it being verified. For journalists who have operated in the traditional normative role in the journalism space, it will be important that they either reinvent themselves or build the necessary capacity to be able to know how to use very simple digital tools to verify information because social media and the digital space is increasingly becoming a crucial space for us in terms of operation. So a very simple tool like reverse image search, you can use to verify images when an image went viral. And with a simple click of a button or two, you should be able to know whether the image is truly representing the scenario in which is being depicted or some old image which is the image misrepresented. Okay. There is another tool like invid video verification, you can simply use in verifying videos, whether the video is truly being captured in the right sense or the image misrepresented. There are tools that you can use to see if an image has been doctored or not. It's very important for any journalist who would want to operate effectively into the digital age.

Interviewer: I would like to find out any lessons learned from your experience in the election campaign related to fact-checking?

INGF3: What can I say? Lots of lessons learned. I think it would be very important for collaboration to be up and much higher, and collaboration here I'm talking about collaboration between fact checking units and traditional media for maximum impact. It will also be very important for social media companies to up their game in terms of dealing with misinformation that are weaponized on their platforms, irrespective of what country it is. It shouldn't matter whether it is an African democratic country or a western country. I would have to repeat that these countries regardless of wherever they are found. Because if people are fearful of the weaponization of disinformation in western established democracies, you can imagine the impacts the same equalization of misinformation would have on very nascent young democracies in Africa. I think it will also be important for these decoders to realize that the digital space could easily be used

for good and for bad. Bad information can lead to chaos, and can be used to undermine democracy. They should understand the information disorder. They should understand the information ecosystem in the country. And know that it would always be important to build a channel of communication with fact checking units to ensure prompt debunking of suspicious claims. So yeah, this is what I will say as the last one.

Interviewer: So was there any instance where Ghana fact came up with a verdict and let's say Dubawa Ghana comes up with a different verdict on a similar issue?

INGF3: I wouldn't know because I wouldn't say we monitored each other/

Interviewer: I am asking because of the EC related story. When I read it, I read it and realized that you both had different sources.

INGF3: That would be maybe something that you have seen as a researcher, I wouldn't say that we were monitoring each other to know to know. So of course, what is important is we are all signatories of the IFCN and we are all supposed to lay out our methodology in how we produce our projects on our platform. And we are supposed to stay true to the application of the methodology. It will be expected that we arrive at the same verdict anytime we produce similar projects. It's great that you're working on this. Yeah, I don't know when you will finish

Interviewer: by Wednesday

INGF3: Wow. Yeah, share the piece with me and let me check it out and get in touch. Okay,

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Transcript of Interview with INDUB1

Interviewer: Hello

INDUB1: Hello yes this is much better. So if you want to use both, then you have to put the other one on mute so that the feedback doesn't come because my voice will still come through and cause feedback. How are you?

Interviewer: Fine thank you. So glad you made it.

INDUB1: it's my pleasure.

Interviewer: so first of all, I'd like you to know how you conducted political for checking in the 2020 election campaign.

INDUB1: Okay, please first tell me why the interest in this topic.

Interviewer: Okay, so the interest is I observed that there is a gap in literature in terms of that of global north and global south, for example, the third world countries, like Ghana, in particular, there is no literature on political fact checking and little literature

for fact checking in general when compared to that of the developed countries. So that was the main reason I decided to explore particularly during the general election campaign and your organization is new to Ghana, although they've worked in Nigeria and other countries, but this was the first time they did political fact checking in Ghana so that's why I chose to study this.

INDUB1: Not necessarily the first time doing it in Ghana, but maybe doing it in an election year.

Interviewer: Exactly In an election year.

INDUB1: Yeah. Yeah. Okay, that's fine. You can proceed.

Interviewer: So I'd like to know how you conducted your political fact checking like a general overview of what went into your political fact checking activities, particularly during the 2020 election campaign.

INDUB1: Okay, so preparation started long before the elections itself. Okay. We conducted training for a number of media organizations and bloggers, and some members of the some election related bodies as well, just to train them on how to spot fake news, how to cross check and verify or debunk, and all that. And then during the elections, we had an elections hub or desk where we, of course, conducted fact checking in collaboration with these partners that we've trained and election monitoring bodies.

Interviewer: okay so what made a political claim worth a fact check? For example, we could hear a political statement, a political statement A and B where you decide to fact check A and not be so what made a political claim worth a fact check?

INDUB1: Things we look at, for instance, the virality of the claim, is it viral, is it been widely discussed is being widely questioned or agreed with or stuff like that, we'll look at who is making the claim as well. And as much as possible, we try to fact check as wide as possible. It's not as though we pick particular ones based on whims, you know, and also, of course, because of the size of our team is not every single thing we can work on. So for political claims, usually we look at virality and the nature of the claim who is making the claim. And yeah, this is some of the things we look at.

Interviewer: So how was the role of fact checking assigned? Say newsrooms can have someone who tackles this particular aspect. So did your supervisor or editor say Rosie, please do this or you had things that you also looked out for? How were you assigned?

INDUB1: Since our sole purpose is fact checking, you know we are not really comparable to news organizations because we don't go looking for news, we are always looking out for claims, right? And it is what we do. So we are not waiting for someone

to say, do this or do that. Yes, it everybody is fact checking, everybody's debunking or verifying or something. So it's not as though it's a new thing, because it's a political period.

Interviewer: So for example, the fact check you did, did you identify them on your own, or your supervisor identified for you to actually work on them.

INDUB1: It works both ways, actually is more than two ways. So at times, our readers will flag claims to us. Sometimes we find ourselves that time someone else in the team who may be my supervisor may find it, you get it. So it's various ways of coming to the same conclusion of getting a claim to work on okay.

Interviewer: So a typical fact check tool like how long, like any one you worked on during the general election campaign?

INDUB1: It is varied. I don't want to mislead you. Okay, let's see and say it will take like an hour oh no.

Interviewer: Like any particular one you did and how long it took you.

INDUB1: Okay, so I did one on some transportation for members of a political party. Fortunately for me, I was able to call and then the person responded so it was within an hour or less, I was able to conclude with my fact check. Okay. So that's an example. But it's not applicable to everything.

Interviewer: Was that claim from the one you called to find out?

INDUB1: No the claim was not from the person, or the claim was not from the person or work, you know, and there were a number of contacts given if you wanted to use that transport. So I just called the numbers. Some were not responsive and then I was able to go get one that was responsive to give me the information I needed. And I was able to cross check with other sources as well.'

Interviewer: Okay so among the stories you fact checked, like what topic appeared to be the most trending and the source, whether it was on social media, or was from television or radio, as well as the individual?

INDUB1: It was evenly spread. Social media, of course, because of how fast it is, it tends to carry a lot of disinformation but then it goes both ways. Some information is carried from television onto social media and vice versa and you will not be able to trace exactly where it is coming from, but I can say that the bulk of it came from social media.

Interviewer: And the topic?

INDUB1: Topics were varied. Vote infringements, stolen ballot boxes, you know, those kinds of election related information. Yeah and individuals were about the individual

political parties. A lot of them were political party related. Somewhere targeted to specific members of the parties/

Interviewer: So I realized most fact checks that I came across into were mainly the two political parties in Ghana, the NPP and NDC. Was that deliberate or you had others concerning the likes of CPP and others.

INDUB1: It wasn't deliberate as I said there are a number of criteria we look at in checking claims and if the majority of people are interested in knowing or interested in discussing a particular thing would maybe put some more efforts in finding that out for the public. Because it's something that they have, like, you know, obviously very interested in.

Interviewer: So this during my literature review, I came across Politifact, a US based organization limited to just political fact checking. As part of the criteria they used included verdicts like false true, mostly false, mostly true. And there's another well-known verdict as pants on fire in quotes. When it comes to your organization, do you have a criteria for verdicts?

INDUB1: Yes, we have ways that we do. We also have true false mostly true, mostly false. We have more contexts needed when that's when the claim is probably taken out of context, but has some element of truth in it.

Interviewer: applied to all and not just political fact checking?

INDUB1: All fact checks. We don't like you said PolitiFact mainly does political fact checks, but we do all around to every fact check. You will be able to find them on our websites

Interviewer: I will cross check. So this happened to be the first time of doing political fact checking in an election campaign by Dubawa.

INDUB1: In an election period?

Interviewer: Yes, please. Okay, so what's your opinion on media and information literacy amongst media consumers in Ghana? Like, how would you say, our media landscape, particularly the audience, how do they react to your fact checks? And how understanding is it?

INDUB1: You know this fact checking thing is relatively new to us. You find that engagement is not as high as in countries that have been at it for a long time. So even though it's improved, as compared to when we started it still not as much as we'd like it to be. You know, and there is a science research that say that people tend to spread fake

news more than they do verified news and unfortunately it applies to us, you know, okay. You see, but they do not share it as widely as they would with the false one.

Interviewer: Tell me about your relationship with other media organizations in Ghana for example, like other fact checkers or just the mainstream media people like do you sometimes collaborate in your fact check activities, like during the election campaign?

INDUB1: Okay. Yes, we do. We have a lot of collaborations actually with them. We've collaborated with Ghana fact. Okay, I don't know if you've heard of Ghana fact. Okay we collaborated with Ghana and media organizations like citi, you know, the main major mainstream media. We collaborated with bloggers.

Interviewer: So where your collaborators just in Greater Accra?

INDUB1: no, it's across West Africa, it is across the region. Like if you want to speak to someone in Tamale or Bolga, you have someone who spoke to you. Yes, we have people because. We have a lot. We run fellowship programs as well. And we are able to have people who we can use like for verification purposes all across the country from some of these fellowships.

Interviewer: Please can I get the name of the fellowship program.

INDUB1: The present one we are running is professor Karikari fellowship program.

Interviewer: Like the name changes with its focus.

INDUB1: The focus is not actually varied because its fact checking that is the main thing. But the we gave it this year because we didn't have a particular name per se and we felt we wanted to honor Professor Karikari because of you know, his work in the media

Interviewer: But early on, you mentioned the fellowship you conducted prior to the election campaign. So what name was that?

INDUB1: It was just a Dubawa fellowship at the time, and so we named it

Interviewer: In Ghana?

INDUB1: It was a training actually not a large scale fellowship like we are doing now. Because now we have actual researchers on hand for that one it was a training for journalists in the major news houses. Yes, in preparation for the elections.

Interviewer: So the last question. Anything learnt from your first experience with political fact checking during election campaigns?

INDUB1: Yeah, I mean, what I would say is that we need to do a lot more media literacy, you know, they need to know where they stand, what their power is, what they can do as well. And yeah, it's vital. Aside the fact that there are so many problems with getting sources to information for our verifications. So we need we need to do more. As a fact

checking organization like the sources, they need to be forthcoming with information if you get what I mean, because sources at the backbone of our work. So it's something we need to work on more actively, to be able to make a fact check or political fact checking and other fact checking more sound.

Interviewer: Well, any challenges that you encountered during the 2020 election campaign, pertaining to your work?

INDUB1: So like I just said, sources. I mean you call a ministry and the ministry will tell you the same thing that you want to verify. Even though it may or may not be true. So sources are a major issue.

Interviewer: So what are some of the digital tools you used during the election campaign? If possible, what particular claim did you use it to fact check?

INDUB1: There are a lot of digital tools. We have the reverse image tool the geo location tools, and it's also claim dependent. So maybe if a picture comes out, that's let's say, there is a fire at a polling station, you can use a geo location to see if indeed, that is what's that's a place that has been claimed looks like, okay, or you can use a Google reverse to find out when a photo was published online to find out if yes, is this really a recent picture? Or is it an old picture that they just edited or, or used in a different context? Or you can also get photo forensics, for instance, that helps you tell if a picture has been edited or not, but that is also tricky, because it depends on the type of image you're working on is usually claimed dependence on the tools that you use.

Interviewer: Was there any situation where you fact checked a political claim and had your verdicts and another organization say Ghana Fact did similar political claim and your verdicts were contradictory?

INDUB1: No. we did not have any such instance

Interviewer: So the verdicts were almost the same.

INDUB1: I haven't had an incident like that.

Interviewer: You have exhausted my questions. If you just want to add anything to this, you can just tell me any other thing that might help this work,

INDUB1: You've interviewed my colleagues so, you will interview our program officer as well. So I'm sure if there is any gap it will balance out from those interviews as well.

Interviewer: Maybe you might have an idea or a suggestion or something that even a program officer might not.

INDUB1: not necessarily Lukman. Because your focus is mainly on political fact checking so for the Ghanaian context, you may be a bit tied up even if people are able to

come up with examples because it's going to definitely be between these political parties, you know, but it definitely minimize the gap in academia in Ghana.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for this contribution

INDUB1: Thank you very much for having us. We'll keep in touch. Take care.

Interviewer: You too.

Transcript of interview with INDUB2

Interviewer: Hello, I'm so glad you made it

INDUB2: I'm glad also. How far with my colleagues

Interviewer: I agreed with Rosalina and I did two days ago with Maxine.

INDUB2: How many do you think you need? But do you need three or more at least so I can get few others.

Interviewer: Rabiou has assured me and given two contact from Ghana Fact.

INDUB2: I'll put you in touch with Nelson if he can talk to you.

Interviewer: Thank you for making time of your business. I can see how busy you and your colleagues are. Are you back in the country?

INDUB2: I am still out.

Interviewer: Oh I hope this time is convenient?

INDUB2: I just came out of from another meeting so my head is a bit cloudy enfant. I hope I'm able to tie in telling you.

Interviewer: I trust you I trust you to. It will be as short as possible and I trust you you'll be able to do that.

INDUB2: But I see the screen. Who is the user?

Interviewer: So I have lost sound on my pc so I normally use my pc for zoom meetings but I have an issue with the sound so the sound is not clear. So I usually record and use this to speak

INDUB2: Okay, that's fine.

Interviewer: So just an overview of the political fucking activities you engaged in during the election campaign.

INDUB2: Okay, can you remind me again of the objective of this interview?

Interviewer: So just to identify how the professional act of fact checking was done relative to political information during the 2020 election. The main reason is that there's no literature on political fact checking and the available literature we have on fact checking in general is very little when compared to that of developed countries so

political fact checking will be something I would like to explore even not just for my masters but for other things. Also political fact checking is on its own in developed countries but in Ghana we have general fact checking. This is why I'm giving you pressure.

INDUB2: Then you should have reached out earlier than you did because you wrote like and you wanted us like yesterday?

Interviewer: Yeah, so that's the deadline is 31st October but 8th October for me.

INDUB2: Yeah. But you know, you can say in political fact checking. Another term is debunking so maybe you should look it up some more. Just to bring that to your attention.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. And before I even proceed your thesis on framing. I know it's different from my study but I relied on it a lot. And I reached out to you on Twitter for like, it's been a year now. But no, you never got back to me.

INDUB2: You reached out to me on Twitter.

Interviewer: I just followed and I used to mention you since last year, I just wanted to, like get closer and learn.

INDUB2: I don't remember seeing that.

Interviewer: Early days of COVID I used to watch you on Tv3. So that was when I started, I was like I need to get in touch with this personality and learn more.

INDUB2: Making me feel like a star. Okay let's get to the show.

Interviewer: How did you conduct political fact checking, an overview of what entailed political fact checking, particularly during the 2020 general election campaign

INDUB2: Dubawa as certain you know, is a transnational project and organization. We have offices in Ghana, Nigeria and we work in Liberia, and then the Gambia. In all of these countries, especially in Nigeria, where we started. We do general fact checking, like you've identified. We do a fact check in and around the economy, health and mostly we debunk myths but then also during elections and even before elections, we fact check politics related claims but then election periods are when the misinformation become a lot more common. They are on all platforms, mainstream media and on social media. So in Nigeria, we do some activities during elections to stem the spread of election related false information. And so in Ghana, where we started in 2019, we decided to pay attention to the political ecosystem to find out what was going on and how we can help people make sense of all the barrage of information we were getting so we did some what you're calling political fact checking. And basically how did we do it? So aside from the fact checking, we did a number of activities. We had a number of projects to

help people understand information that they see and then make informed decisions during the election. So we had capacity building, training for journalists across the country. And then we also engaged in some media literacy activities because we believe that if people are one way to stop the spread of misinformation, and disinformation is to equip people with the skills and knowledge to be able to discern so that if they see something they know that this is false or it is true. So that's why we're fact checking election related misinformation. The other, which your thesis is about is fact political fact checking. So we did that quite rigorously. So what we did was to assign my researchers. At that time I had in house researchers or had like some fact checking fellows who are working in various newsrooms, and those that we had trained were also like a cohort and very key and instrumental to us fighting misinformation. So all of these people had to find social media platforms where they had identified to be hotspots for misinformation. So in all of these platforms, or groups on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp for all the potential misinformation. And then some of them also followed traditional media. We listened to radio stations, TV, particularly attention was on some of the local language speaking stations, and because we know that some people say all sorts of things and get away with it. And so once we identify that something is potentially false or misleading, we discuss to see if it is worth fact checking. The reason why we do this is that fact checking organizations, I think, all fact checking organizations have the criteria, like a checklist that they follow to decide if something is worth fact checking. So one of them is virality, or potential of a claim becoming viral. Okay, so this is very important, because there is literature to indicate that false information creators rely on fact checkers, and traditional media to amplify misinformation. Okay. So if fact checkers come across misinformation anywhere, that is just maybe not viral, it's in a group of about five people and they're the only people that have seen it, it hasn't appeared anywhere else then we don't go ahead and then just fact check. We wait, we monitor it to see if there's a potential that it will escalate if it will become big. If it will be then we fact checked. Another criteria we used is implication. What is the implication of the claim if left unchecked, would it affect national security? Would it cause damage to lives and properties? And then we also talk about national interest? Is this something that people in the public would be interested in? We were in an election year in 2020. So if someone tells us if we see a claim on social media that John Mahama said he would not donate his hard earned money towards the fight against COVID-19. Is this something we should be interest the public would be interested in? You know, so those are some that. We have a checklist that we

use. So if they, the researchers identify a claim like that, and we feel that it meets these criteria, then we go ahead and then fact check it. In the fact checking, we have to contact all the relevant sources. In fact checking, you'll notice that we have rules regarding the sources of information that we use. So one thing we say is that all our sources have to be mentioned in the report. And then we also say that our sources have to be independent. They have to be credible. You know, we also have to ensure that we include links, hyperlinks and all of those things in our report so that it makes our reports replicable. If Caroline does a fact check on a claim that President Akufo has put out there, Lukman should also be able to do the same fact check and come up with similar or the same conclusion. So we list all of these, we put out all of our methodology as clearly as possible. So basically these are the steps that we used. So once the researcher does a fact check, he or she sends them to the editor, which at the time was me. And then I make sure everything is sound. Then it goes to the second level editor, and then it is published. So that's the basic process we used if I understood your question.

Interviewer: Yes, please. The next was what made a political claim worth a fact check which you have already answered so how was the role of fact checking assigned. So for instance, if you are the editor, will you contact Lukman to do this, or Lukman just tells the editor I feel like doing this. Like, how did you assign the role of fact checking?

INDUB2: It can, it was either ways, it was both ways. So all of us were, all of us were on social media. For instance, I'm on Twitter, I'm on Facebook, I'm on LinkedIn, and visit YouTube and all of those. So if I come across a claim that I think it is worth fact checking, I assign it to a researcher who is not busy at that time. The researchers main tasks was to look for claims and then fact check it. And if they had any issues, they needed assistance with they can reach out to their editor or colleagues for assistance. So it was mainly their job but the editor also played a role. The role Yeah, so it's not like one person's responsibility. So that's, that's all of us. All of us, including our communications team. And my organization is actually part of a big organization called Premium Times Center for Investigative Journalism. So everyone in the organization or the company can come across an information and can just send it to the team to fact check.

Interviewer: Please take me through the gatekeeping process again. For example, if I'm just a fact checker, I come up with my fact check the process it passes through before it gets to Dubawa's website.

INDUB2: So if you are researcher, and you come across a claim that you think needs to be fact checked if you're certain in your head that it meets all the criteria that some of which I've earlier mentioned to you, you go ahead and then do a fact check. If you're not too sure you contact your editor, and then she will walk you through it to decide together if it is worth fact checking so that's the first process. The next process is the research. The researchers main job to research and contact the sources, make sure it's up to date, everything is perfect including hyperlinks. We mentioned all sources and once the researcher is done, they send it to the first level editor which was me. So I will also verify to be sure that every information there is apt and correct. Then I send it to our next level editor who does a final proofreading and assessment to be sure that everything is concrete before it is published by our publishing team. So the reason why we go through all of these processes is that you know we are fact checkers. So we say we are trying to correct misinformation. So we do not want to be the ones to misinform so it goes through a rigorous process. So even between the researcher and the fact checker, there is a lot of back and forth. Once a researcher shares a documents we work on an app where we can edit simultaneously so that I leave my edit she sees the corrections or my comments. So there's a lot of back and forth once everything is rectified, it is approved by the first level editor before it goes to the second level editor. The second level editor also picks something that they think needs to be done well or treat or change, then it comes back to the editor and goes back to the researcher and the same person, it looks tedious. It looks like time consuming and all of that but again, we won't misinform.

Interviewer: With this question, I know you can't give a definite answer, but how long did a typical fact check take?

INDUB2: A typical fact check like you just answered depends on what the claim is. Because we are talking politics so let me give example, I see a picture on Twitter that says this is Lukman. Right and I know that it is not Lukman. I can quickly do a google reverse image search without needing any external sources. I will go and use Google reverse image search and then I'll see that all the times that the picture has appeared online, the name that has accompanied that picture is Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo. In that case, I can produce my fact check within an hour or even less and will go through all of these processes and be published. But political fact checks are a bit different, a bit difficult and time consuming because you need to work with other human beings and because usually, it's either going to say a politician or someone is told a lie or misrepresented a fact. The fact they're not so open, they're also not available for you to

talk to. It can take some time and we really had a tough time during the elections because access to information was a problem. They weren't forthcoming so it depends on the kind of thing that you're working on.

Interviewer: Among the topics you fact checked during the election campaign, which topic appeared to be the most fact checked?

INDUB2: Most fact checked? What do you mean by the most captured?

Interviewer: For example, we had stories on maybe free SHS, economy and infrastructure. What topics did you fact check the most or appeared to be the most trending amongst your activities?

INDUB2: Right now, I cannot say this if I knew you were going to ask this question. I would have looked at our fact check log and then tell you the sectors that came up a lot more during the elections But I will think, off the top of my head that some of these were a comparison. You know, what the Mahama administration did, what the Akufo Addo administration did. You know, this fights between NDC and NPP. And then because we were in the COVID period, there were certain claims around COVID and the personalities of John Mahama and Akufo Addo. And one claim that I remember clearly that was big in Ghana was the viral video that Akufo Addo had received a bribe of 40,000 Ghana cedis or dollars in 2017 while he was still President. You know, that came, I think, in December, just a few days to the election and we did a fact check on that. And we saw that the video had been doctored, you'd see it on a website. So that was one of the things so I can't really remember but there were things around the economy, around infrastructure who built this and that and the personalities.

Interviewer: That's fine but I would appreciate if you could get that from your catalogue anytime. Which media source? Was it through TV, radio or social media that you took your claims from?

INDUB2: We took our claims from all of these channels, platforms, to media and legacy media, but most of the claims we fact checked was from social media.

Interviewer: And also the example of PolitiFact I gave, their criteria of verdicts. So they have true false and you also see that on your website, true false, mostly true. At Dubawa Ghana, do you also have like definitive criteria that you have for verdict?

INDUB2: Yeah, I think you even mentioned it. So we have false, mostly false, mostly true, misleading, more context needed, insufficient evidence. We have satire because some of the things are just jokes that people consume as misinformation.

Interviewer: So this question has to do with your personal view based on your experience. What's your opinion on media information literacy amongst media consumers?

INDUB2: So I think that one of the ways to stop the spread of misinformation is to preempt it and you can preempt by through media and information literacy. And so what do I think about that in Ghana. I think a lot of work still needs to be done. Because there are still people who believe that once you see something in the newspaper, or on TV, or social media, right, or once you hear this person saying it is true, it's coming from the president. So you cannot be like lot that needs to be done. And like I said, Dubawa tries to do that, but I think we need to do more. There are other organizations I know DW is does some of that. I think Penplusbytes or not. So there are some organizations who are doing it, but still a lot needs to be done and then one needs what is currently being done also, most of it is in the urban areas. We forget in the towns, the villages, you know, the remote areas. They're not active in media, but they also some workplace misinformation. And so we need to go down to the grassroots also.

Interviewer: The onset, I heard you mention of trained fellows across Ghana, and sometimes you relied on them, like as your sources. So for instance, if there's a claim you're working on, and it's really something about an event, whether political or not, it just happened in tamale. And you are in Accra. So like, how do you get in touch with the contact, he made mention of some having some trained fellows all over Ghana, or just within Accra?

INDUB2: So no they are not just within Accra they are across the country. We had someone in the Northern region and someone in Central region and people in Eastern and Western and Ashanti. So let's say across the country, and even by then I think that even that was not big enough, you know, the country is big. So we usually relied on these people to help us verify information and then also to help us circulate our fact checks which helped us a lot during the elections, and I think I should it was all including Ghana Fact and Fact check Ghana was to partner with CODEO, Coalition for Domestic Election Observers to partner with them to fact check election related information on December 7. I think this partnership helped a lot. That was the first time we're doing something of that nature. So but it still helped a lot. So what we did was, you know, CODEO deploys observers across polling stations in the country. So we relied on the observers to verify misinformation. So if someone said, there was ballot snatching at a police station in

Savelugu or something, there was an observer there so they will check and then get back to us to see if it's actually what had happened.

Interviewer: You got the name of Savelugu right. I'm surprised

INDUB2: So that's all we did. Our media partners also helped us to verify misinformation. And they also helped us to spread the word for instance, Starr FM, Dubawa had a collaboration with Star FM where we had a program called Star fact checker which was basically reading out fact checks that had been. We cross published our report on Ghanaweb.

Interviewer: And this even leads to my next one. So was there any case during the 2020 general election campaign where Ghana fact or Fact check Ghana checked a claim and came up with contradictory verdicts?

INDUB2: Interesting question. There was one funny experience like that which happened in Ghana fact and Dubawa but none of us have changed our verdict anyway. Let me remember this so on December 8, there was an invitation advert, purportedly from the Electoral Commission that the results would be announced on a particular time so they're inviting certain people. So when we saw it, we contacted Dr. Bosman Asare I think and Dr. Asare said, what said no it was not coming from. And then we did a fact check and we said false it wasn't from the Electoral Commission and then I suddenly saw Ghana fact had done theirs and said true so quickly I think Rabiou called me or I called him and he said so why do we have conflicting verdict? And then he said they spoke to Dr. Serebour and I said we spoke to Dr. Asare. So we decided that we're going to leave our verdicts like that. So there was obviously some confusion going on at the EC at that time. We just conveyed to the people what we had.

Interviewer: But aside that your verdicts have been similar.

INDUB2: The same things we worked on were similar and same verdicts.

Interviewer: Your experience for the first time of Dubawa Ghana doing a fact check during an election in Ghana. Tell me about your experience and also aside the challenge you have in dealing with sources, what were the other challenges?

INDUB2: Okay, you're running out of timing four minutes 30 seconds. Because fact checking last year was basically new and I must say that fact checking was new and people were very receptive and open to it. So it's kudos to Ghanaians, politicians and everyone. So basically sometimes backlash from the public but it never got to the point where last year we felt threatened in any way. I must tell you that when we did the fact check on the video that the president had accepted a bribe, we were a bit uncomfortable

because I was worried about the fact checkers who did it. So both of us Maxine and I, and then Silas, our colleague in Nigeria worked on it but Maxine and I obviously leave in Ghana so we were a bit uncomfortable, but nothing happened. We woke up the next day and were like, okay, so they've accepted it in goodwill. So yeah, it's mainly been access to information and trying to get visibility trying to make get people to consume fact checks, to accept fact checks. You know, people live in these political bubbles, confirmation bias and cognitive dissonance. So it's just acceptance of the fact check but otherwise, attacks wise, we've been good it's just the occasional you are lying thing just to make us feel insecure.

Interviewer: So we know fact checkers are also human beings. Sometimes you can just do some minor mistakes, was there any instance where you revised a verdict?

INDUB2: No, we have not reversed any verdict. Yes, we are open to the public submitting claims to us on social media and on our WhatsApp channel. And last year, we did receive a number of that.

Interviewer: If you'd like to add anything to this, please do me.

INDUB2: Just that collaborations and partnerships worked. They should encourage more collaboration with legacy media and relevant stakeholders. And other fact checkers because really, there's no competition. It's just working for the same public good.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you so much.

INDUB2: It's been a pleasure.

Interviewer: Please look at your catalog and share with me the most fact checked topics.

INDUB2: Okay, please remind me if I don't get back to you.

Interviewer: No worries. I will. Oh, thanks so much. Bye. I'll keep you posted with my thesis.

INDUB2: Bye

Transcript of interview with INDUB3

INDUB3: Nice to meet you. I'm Maxine. Your thesis is on political fact checking a comparative analysis of that of Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact so what are you looking out for?

Interviewer: Basically to understand the operations that went into fact checking relative to the 2020 general election.

INDUB3: So what's, what's the problem? What are you investigating?

Interviewer: Just to understand how it was done and then conduct a comparative analysis. So the first one is how did you conduct political fact checking during Ghana's 2020 general election campaign?

INDUB3: Well, I don't think political fact checking was done any different than the usual process of fact checking so that's to say that the process of political fact checking still had the same format as the same procedure of general fact checking. That is you're confronted with a claim and you'd have to verify the claim. Before verification, we need to go to the unit to give the context of the claim. What is the surrounding narrative around this particular claim? On what basis is this claim being made? If they say that well, this has got nothing to do with politics, but a recent one that we saw on Facebook, someone said that Akufo Addo has called for the order of the military people in Guinea so it's not that the claim was made in a vacuum. You need to establish the background. On what basis is this person making the claim and we know that recent engagements of Akuffo Addo with ECOWAS and Guinea and he was in Guinea at some points to you know have discussions over Alpha Conde's release that sort of thing. So you give a background to how that claim is made and why that claim is possibly emerging. After establishing the background, you know the context given. Now you go into your verification, that's where you start your investigations. With this, you can investigate by yourself through a simple desktop researching. Sometimes your information is just a click away. Just a Google search away, you would find that so many news or stories concerning what you're looking for would pop up, which would either affirm or deny what you're looking for. So sometimes it's as simple as a click on Google search then you find what you're looking for. That is basically what is called desktop researching. You can also get a bit more complicated and you would need to use or employ digital tools to do your investigation. If they say that on Election Day there was a traffic jam in a particular area, and so people were not able to get their centers to vote. I mean, you can use your Google Maps to check. There are other investigative tools that you can use to check and assess whether truly there was a traffic jam or there was a riot. Anything that has to with location, geo location is there to help you. So that is to say that when it comes to things that confront, a bit more technical, you employ a digital tool to verify. You can also do it through going on site yourself to verify. There are times that you may not be able to go yourself because the location of the claim is very far from me. That's why we have what I will call them correspondents. Yes sort of correspondents but sort of partners in newsrooms across the country. And so they help us if we need something in Kumasi or something happened in

Kumasi, we can call a fellow or we can call one of our cohorts in Kumasi and ask them, is this really happening there, please verify for us but it will still require them to go on site anyway. So there are times you need to go on site to verify. I remember there was a claim, which is also not really election related. But there was a claim that we had to do, we had to go to the secondary schools to verify if what was being alleged was true or not. So there are times you know you can't sit in your room, or you can't sit in your office and say that you found the answer but you need to get to where it's been reported to have happened. The other way you can investigate or verify content is, which I find that the toughest is speaking to sources because sometimes sources are not readily available to speak on a matter. So especially when it is politically motivated or it has a political nature. So there are times you need to speak to people. This was alleged to have happened, is this true? Is this not true? Did this or did you really say this? You know, there are times you need to speak to people. So basically these are some of the ways in which you verify information, maybe I'm leaving something out, but what readily comes to mind now these are some of the ways in which we used in verifying a claim whether it was political, health or whatever. So this is basically what we did with political fact checking.

Interviewer: You made mention of, in most cases reaching out to colleagues in other areas where the event is actually happening and you want it fact checked. Are these colleagues, part of the Dubawa?

INDUB3: No they are not, they are not friends. Because again when it comes to fact checking you can't really trust when someone is telling you something you need to verify to be sure that you have the fool proof verification. So what's happened is that and I thought we were going to get to that a bit more lately. What happened was that we established a relationship with newsrooms across the country. So we already trained journalists in some newsrooms, at the beginning of last year. We already have a relationship with some journalists in the newsrooms across the country. These are the people that we fall on if some of the things are beyond us. And we also have bloggers that we also trained. So we have a relationship with bloggers, our relationship with journalists that are spread across the country. Also, we have a fellowship program for journalists. Journalists and researchers are on a fellowship program. So they are also sort of like our correspondents in other regions beside Greater Accra region. I would say that to some extent, these people are sort of affiliated to Dubawa because they've undergone our training, they know, they understand the vision of the work here.

Interviewer: After you get the information from them you also need to do further checks again.

INDUB3: If it necessitates that we do, we will, because if the verdict is glaring, if the proof they've provided is glaring I think it is enough, but if it means for us to do further checks we will.

Interviewer: What made a political claim worth a fact check because there were many political statements made?

INDUB3: We have a criteria for claim selection anyway and again that is no different from choosing a political claim. I mean if a claim bothered on national security or instability, we would fact check

Interviewer: So it's a general criteria not limited to political fact-checking?

INDUB3: Yes, a general criteria really and also depending on the urgency of the situation. So if the claim was and it bothered on national security or instability we would have to fact check it if it had potential to cause public unrest, we would fact check if it was misleading and was going to influence people's decision whether electoral decision or whether a decision to maybe like take the vaccine or not. We would fact check it causes an unrest and makes people uncomfortable. You know, it makes Yeah, we would have we would fact check it if it also has potential to harm. When it comes to the period of elections, propaganda was really thriving. There were times that you know that propaganda was the norm during elections. So people just say what they want to say. But then, of course, some we let go, you are right. We did not have that, that time and the capacity to fact check all of it. But of course, some that had potential to wrongly disfavor an opponent that we could not let go of an example I'd give you is one that I did. One that I did a week to elections, where there was a video in circulation that Akufo Addo had taken a bribe when he was president in 2017. You know that if it is not fact checked, it has the potential to disfavor that presidential candidate. So we had to check and investigate to come up with a verdict that hey, guess what, this was manipulated. This was a doctored video and bring out all the information that needed to be brought out pertaining to the truth of that particular fact check. So yeah, that is stuff like that will definitely fact checked.

Interviewer: How was the role of fact checking assigned to fact checkers?

INDUB3: I get what you mean. Okay, so there wasn't any, like strict say, you do this. It was the availability of the fact checkers. If I was working on my story and a colleague of mine was working on a story, whoever was available at the time to work on a particular

story. It was basically based on availability and the capacity to do it at that time. So there are times that your editor would see a claim and say who's available to do this? And then you do it all? Yeah, there are times that you would also see a claim and pick it to your sometimes your editor and ask Can I go ahead and do this? Sometimes you could find claims yourself or the team could find it. Anybody could find a claim and again it goes back to availability.

Interviewer: How long did a usual fact-check take? Let's just use the example you gave on Akufo Addo's alleged bribe.

INDUB3: Fact check takes a long time, especially when you have to wait on someone to give you information. It can drag because sometimes they aren't readily available. They can't find information. Earlier I started telling you that that's one of the toughest, speaking to sources. Yeah but I mean, if you can just readily find it, you have your digital tools to verify. You can just find that online to do that yourself. You know, another party is not involved and you are not waiting on somebody else to conclude. It depends on the claim but with the particular one you mentioned it took me just a night because considering the urgency of the situation, we needed to apply speed and mind you because I realized the urgency of it, I did it with another colleague of mine and so we spent the entire night working on it and so we it was it took us one long sleepless nights to finish about 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 pages worth fact check doing and so that's it. It took us a long sleepless night to finish that fat check. We use digital tools to check if the video was manipulated. And some of the digital tools we used included forensically for that particular fact check. That's what we used to check if a video is doctored or not, or, or photo or whatever, is doctored or has been photo shopped or whatever. And on the day of elections, we moved with more speed, because hey, it's Election Day and there were there was misinformation coming from, like, all over the world. So it didn't take us more than an hour. Because on the day of election, there was another fact check that I had to collaborate with a colleague of mine to do quickly. That was another video that was seen that Akufo Addo had had inspired some tribal agenda in the Volta Region that was a case of another manipulated video. In fact, it wasn't just a manipulated video it was a video taken out of context. They had just lifted his words from a video and they had left out the entire conversation. So we had to work on that quickly. So on the day of elections, we did not write full blown checks. We had to do something called quick facts, where we just say, yeah, it wasn't like a full blown report. Usually our reports are like detailed we show you the entire

investigation. But on the day of elections, it had to be just okay, this was false, this is true because we did not have the privilege of time.

Interviewer: You made mention of an individual like so the next question is like, which person, which topic, which media or the radio, TV, or online and topic?

INDUB3: It started with the presidential candidates we had to deal with of course the two main presidential candidates, candidates. They were the main targets of the misinformation. Yeah, so with Akufo Addo I've given you two examples of what we have to work on. I think there was more. But yeah, his bribery scandal and his tribal agenda thing. With Mahama they said they had accused him of sharing money when he went to campaign. So there was also Mahama's alleged money sharing when he went to campaign. The fact checked involved the two main political party flag bearers here, presidential candidates and there was also the case of once in a while you'd see some of the Members of Parliament being implicated in stories. For example, another one I worked on was George Anda he was alleged to have shot a gun at his constituents a polling station. I mean these are the kind of persons that is basically the main presidential and parliamentary candidates that were implicated in stories. And typically you will find topics of like I mentioned votes buying and tribalism. We had instances where military people were stopping people from registering due to their voter registration exercise. We've almost a minute.

Interviewer: and the source?

INDUB3: Social media was the predominant, Facebook and Twitter, especially Facebook. Because, you know, Facebook and Whatsapp groups like those political groups where people can just push misinformation. The NDC and NPP both have social media groups so those are the places you would find fake news

Interviewer: So far, we've talked about the major political parties NPP and NDC. Did you get anything on the lesser ones?

INDUB3: Yeah what's his name? I have forgotten. There were times that those people also made some misleading statements.

Interviewer: Was there an instance where an individual on social media drew your attention towards a claim?

INDUB3: We actually make room for that. So we'll say that if you see something that is suspicious, let us verify. So there were times that we would have people send us claims. The common ones were either false or misleading

Interviewer: and the verdicts?

INDUB3: It was not just false or misleading sometimes we have more context needed if the information that we have at that time is not enough to establish like a very conclusive verdict to say it's true or its false it would say more context needed. It is based on the conclusion of our investigations so we don't just randomly say this is false or true. We have true, false, mostly true, and mostly false, more context needed and misleading. So these are like verdicts that we used based on the conclusion we arrive at the investigation.

Interviewer: This was the first time of Dubawa Ghana to engage in political fact checking in Ghana. What would you say about information literacy in Ghana?

INDUB3: Based on the research we conducted after, generally, you would find like 50% believing the information and you find 50% just consuming anything and everything.

Interviewer: So quickly take me through the categories of verdicts again.

INDUB3: So we have false, mostly false, we have mostly true or false, partly true and misleading, and more context needed.

Interviewer: This is the last part but I think you've already answered your relationship with other media organizations.

INDUB3: At Dubawa, we really believe in collaborations and partnerships and having all hands on deck to tackle the menace that is misinformation. So like I said, at the beginning of last year, we trained over 20 journalists in newsrooms across the country. Months prior to elections to trained about 10 bloggers across the country in a bid to get people in the media space, to also be aware of the dangers of misinformation. And particularly because we realize that bloggers were also sometimes accustomed to spreading misinformation themselves, especially given the political season that we were in. And we train all these people. It did not end there, we established like a partnership collaboration with them. So that if they saw, if they saw a claim or the source of misinformation somewhere, they would forward to us or they could take it upon themselves to work on it and then we would cross publish. Even with Star FM, we had a political segment where they would read out fact checks that we had done during the week.

Interviewer: So if you are asked to fact check a story, what are the processes that you go through?

INDUB3: There are two different categories of editors. Like we have the first line editor and the second editor. So after you worked on your story, of course, you need to self-edit, and then you push it to your first line editor who would look at it and send it to the

second line editor who would also look at it. And then there's a group of people who would review it, and then it's published.

Interviewer: Can you quickly take me through some of the challenges we experienced during the election?

INDUB3: So if you need to speak to somebody and the person is not forthcoming with information, it stalls the work a little bit. You have to do it yourself. I mean, you get the say the president says something right, and you need to find that information. Sometimes you can have access to it but what I'm saying is the source is the same. The President's source of the information is also government. If the President makes a financial claim that Ghana had 7% growth rate. The information available will be from Ministry of Finance, and guess what Ministry of Finance is affiliated to the President so it's the same source you will be getting.

Interviewer: Any lessons learnt from your first time of engaging in political fact checking in Ghana?

INDUB3: I would say that the collaborations really helped. That's the major lesson that we got for the collaboration is great.

Interviewer: Please any further information from you that may be helpful to my thesis will be welcomed.

INDUB3: So well, maybe I would say more digital tools that you can use for a fact checking. I mentioned forensically that helps you to check if the video is doctored or not, or the photo is photo shopped or not.

Interviewer: Thank you so much

INDUB3: Bye, take care