

# Fact-Checking during a Pandemic

How COVID-19 has changed the way we work

PESACHECK



CODE *for*  
AFRICA



# Topics to be covered

- Background on PesaCheck
- Experience of COVID-19 as an organisation
- Innovative ways of working that we have adopted during this period.

**PESACHECK** 



[www.pesacheck.org](http://www.pesacheck.org)

**PesaCheck**

East Africa's first public finance fact-checking initiative, looking into claims made by public figures and published on mainstream and social media platforms

# Experience of COVID-19

The main impact has been an increase in content to look into as a result of the spread of misinformation linked to the pandemic

At a time when people need credible information, mainstream media is going through a crisis.

The pandemic has led to loss of jobs and revenues for traditional media outlets, while social media, where a lot of people are now consuming news and other information from, has seen an explosion of false information.

Fact-checking is essential because it helps the public figure out who's telling the truth and who's lying.

# More remote work

One of the main changes we have had to implement is in adapting the remote work model that had worked with teams outside Nairobi that we had to start using ourselves.

# But less time to ourselves

The surge of false information means that we have had to adapt our approach because of the sheer volume of false claims we have had to look into.

One of the main consequences of this is the need for multiple calls and for editors to stay online longer so that content is published on time.

# Pointers for independent media

- Verification often needs multiple sources – It is useful to cultivate a network of multiple sources that you can turn to for credible insights that will help to debunk false claims accurately and adequately
- Misinformation can be personal – The nature of false information as shown in how it spreads through networks of trust such as platforms where one interacts with family members for instance
- The role of the infomediary – You may not always be able to reach the people consuming false information, meaning you will need to engage with the people you can reach and use them to get to the people you can't.

# What we're doing to fight misinformation

We have a WhatsApp newsletter that goes out weekly and is segmented by country, and this allows us to reach audiences on an 'opaque' platform.

You can sign up by sending your name to +254 754 999992



 **Fishy Figures &**  **Flu Shots:**  
It's been checked ... PesaChecked

**PesaChecked ✓ #007**

 An article claiming the WHO has halted trials of hydroxychloroquine and HIV drugs as a potential treatment for Covid-19 is **true**: [bit.ly/2W06jaP](https://bit.ly/2W06jaP)

 **No**, flu vaccines don't make people more vulnerable to infections: [bit.ly/2ZaAQog](https://bit.ly/2ZaAQog)

 Can you really tell a tyre's expiry date by reading the four-digit number stamped on its sidewall? **Nope**: [bit.ly/2O9eRrs](https://bit.ly/2O9eRrs)

# What we're doing to fight misinformation

- **Partnering with platforms** – We have a [partnership with Facebook](#) to look into misinformation on the main Facebook platform and on Instagram as well. This allows us to see what misinformation people are producing and consuming, and to devise a response.
- **Collaboration** – We are part of the [CoronaVirus Facts Alliance](#), a network of fact-checkers who collaborate and contribute fact-checks related to COVID-19 to a global database

# What drives the spread of false info?

Misinformation and disinformation have the potential to polarise public opinion, to promote violent extremism and hate speech and, ultimately, to undermine democracies and reduce trust in the democratic processes. From our experience, the main drivers of misinformation are:

- **Poor Journalism** - In the rush to be the first to 'break' a story, a lot of mistakes can be made which, if not corrected, can have potentially damaging consequences.
- **Desire for Political Influence** - Misinformation can be a powerful tool in a time as sensitive as an election
- **Financial gain** - There's money to be made in churning out fake content, especially once it goes viral.

# Questions to ask as you consume information

**Who produced it?** Real news content will contain the byline of a real journalist, or a team of journalists. Fake content often does not. Follow up with a check on the author's bio. If the content is sponsored or is an advertisement, it should state so clearly.

**What claims does it make?** Real news articles will include primary sources when discussing a controversial claim. When in doubt, dig deeper. Facts can be verified.

# Questions to ask as you consume information

**When was it published?** Look at the publication date. If it's breaking news, be extra careful.

**Where was it published?** Reputable news outlets have a strong fact-checking record. To learn more about any media outlet, look at their About page and examine their published body of work.

# HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS



## CONSIDER THE SOURCE

Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.



## READ BEYOND

Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?



## CHECK THE AUTHOR

Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?



## SUPPORTING SOURCES?

Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.



## CHECK THE DATE

Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.



## IS IT A JOKE?

If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.



## CHECK YOUR BIASES

Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.



## ASK THE EXPERTS

Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

<http://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11174> based on FactCheck.org's 2016 article [How to Spot Fake News](#))

# Four Ways to Fight False Information

- **Understand your audience** – What is it about the prevailing ideology that makes a story enticing enough for your audience to believe even when they should know that it's fake?
- **Increase media literacy** – How informed is the citizenry? Can they think about news sources beyond just the person that's sharing them? Audiences need to know who to ask for facts.

<https://www.jou.ufl.edu/videos/solutions-fake-news/>

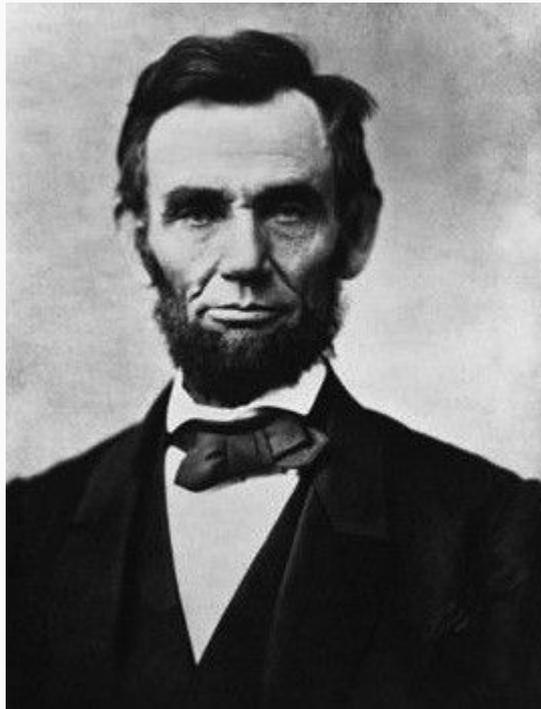
# Four Ways to Fight False Information

- **Make facts engaging** – Rumours spread because they're interesting and connect to things that we care about. To overcome this, we have to connect the truth to what the audience thinks is important, and make it concrete and tangible so that people actually remember what they know to be true.
- **Correct false information fast** – Countering misinformation with truth is a double task – you need to go against whatever prevailing misinformation there is, as well as to share accurate information with audiences that may not have been exposed to this misinformation to begin with. You need to do this quickly and accurately, otherwise you could worsen the situation.

# Fact-checking tools

We have a [list](#) of the fact-checking tools that we use on a regular basis. We try as much as possible to use free tools, and the process through which we produce fact-checks is explained [here](#)

# In Conclusion, Question Everything!



**“Don’t believe  
everything you  
read on the  
Internet just  
because there’s  
a picture with a  
quote next to it.”**

—Abraham Lincoln

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PesaCheck website: [www.pesacheck.org](http://www.pesacheck.org)

Code for Africa: [www.codeforafrica.org](http://www.codeforafrica.org)

Code for Kenya: [codeforkenya.org](http://codeforkenya.org)

Our Code: <http://bit.ly/CfAgithub>

Our #CivicTech Community: [bit.ly/HacksHackersAfrica](http://bit.ly/HacksHackersAfrica)

Our #InvestigativeTech Community: [bit.ly/AfricaCIR](http://bit.ly/AfricaCIR)