

Beyond Verification: The Evolving Role of Fact-Checking Organisations in Media Literacy Education for Youth

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Abstract

This research investigates the crucial role of fact-checking organisations in promoting media and information literacy (MIL) amid the challenges of widespread misinformation. By educating and empowering individuals, these organisations and their educational branches are identified as emerging components within MIL ecosystems, particularly focusing on engaging youth. Using qualitative research methods, our study analyses the activities of seven prominent fact-checking organisations and two university-affiliated projects across Spain, Catalonia, Poland, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Argentina, and Brazil. Thus, our study aims to understand why fact-checking organisations have become involved in MIL education and training for youth and what types of MIL, approaches, and subjects fact-checking organisations employ in their MIL education and training initiatives for this audience. Our findings reveal a shift in these organisations toward actively promoting MIL education through dedicated divisions and teams driven by mission-oriented action and peer collaboration. Various institutions and political and educational policies support or hinder this transformation. A significant issue observed is the limited availability of open-access materials and general opacity regarding their pedagogical approaches. Although these organisations have integrated educational components into their models, achieving financial sustainability remains challenging.

Keywords

education; educational policies; fact-checking; media and information literacy; misinformation; youth training

1. Introduction

As media and information literacy (MIL) garners increasing attention from governments and institutions worldwide, there is a noticeable surge in actions and policies to elevate discussions and address their

significance (Flores Michel et al., 2017; Sádaba & Salaverría, 2023). Within this dynamic landscape, a new actor has emerged, offering promising opportunities for the field, particularly concerning education and training: the increasing participation of fact-checking organisations (Çömlekçi, 2022; Kuś & Barczyszyn-Madziarz, 2020).

UNESCO defines MIL as encompassing a range of essential skills for navigating the complex information and communication landscape. MIL empowers individuals to critically evaluate information and media, fostering informed and ethical participation in digital content and services. It integrates media literacy, news literacy, information literacy, and digital empowerment (among other terms) into a unified concept, equipping citizens for critical thinking and active, responsible engagement in the digital world. Other authors also emphasise the importance of critical media literacy in fostering democracy and developing critical thinking. They advocate for a shift from consumption-driven MIL to a more engaged and creative approach that promotes active citizenship and empowerment. This perspective aligns with the role of MIL in upholding democratic principles, addressing digital challenges, and supporting lifelong learning and ethical media use (e.g., Buckingham, 2003; Carlsson, 2019; Kellner & Share, 2007).

MIL has been interpreted and implemented in various forms across different contexts due to linguistic, cultural, social, and political differences. Despite its long presence in education worldwide, the recent surge in misinformation has renewed interest in MIL. Scholars recognise MIL as a tool to build resilience against misinformation and to empower citizens with critical thinking. Frau-Meigs (2022) highlights that fact-checking and MIL have emerged as key strategies against misinformation while cautioning that reducing MIL to merely news literacy could be detrimental. As pointed out by Frau-Meigs (2022), fact-checking has been institutionalised and professionalised within the MIL ecosystem. Thus, our study argues that fact-checking is pivotal in enhancing MIL, ensuring this momentum is well-spent by examining how these initiatives shape MIL education and training.

While fact-checking organisations have been involved in media literacy, the renewed interest shown by governments, supranational organisations, and other institutions in leveraging MIL policies in various countries emphasises the potential importance of these organisations in the broader MIL ecosystem. These fact-checking organisations have been playing a crucial role by providing essential services to the public, disseminating quality and truthful information, and contributing to the foundation of democratic discussions (Graves & Cherubini, 2016). The value of these organisations, particularly in the battle against spreading misinformation on virus-related topics in the “infodemic,” was observed during the health crisis. Additionally, it is unquestionable that dwindling trust in the media and global political instability further amplify the prevalence of fake news (Ceron et al., 2021). However, fact-checking organisations have also faced challenges, needing help maintaining their existence amidst an overcrowded and crisis-ridden media environment (Lelo, 2022).

At the same time, according to reports, young people are the least interested in the news (see Newman et al., 2023; Tamboer et al., 2023). Therefore, a critical aspect of MIL’s development is educating and training the new generations, teachers, and other stakeholders within the education systems, such as school staff, librarians, and other educational institutions (e.g., Kajimoto et al., 2020).

Fact-checking agencies’ increasing participation in MIL educational and training initiatives also poses interesting questions about MIL motivations, sustainability, and which factors might influence the decision

to establish educational verticals or teams within their structures. Thus, we have chosen to concentrate our analysis on offerings for youth, as prior studies have indicated a need for improvement in this area (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that this demographic has grown increasingly distrustful of news sources and has decreased their consumption habits (Newman et al., 2023). Hence, the study aims to shed light on current affairs by posing the following research questions:

RQ1: Why have fact-checking organisations become involved in MIL education and training for youth?

RQ2: What approaches, types, and subjects do fact-checking organisations employ in their MIL education and training initiatives for this audience?

This study endeavours to ascertain whether substantial evidence supports the claim that there has been a transformative shift in the primary services provided by fact-checking organisations, transitioning from mere fact-checking and debunking to actively providing MIL education and training to a broader and more diverse audience. At the same time, the possible influence of MIL educational policies, offers, and curricula that these organisations provide and are influenced by in the field prove to be valuable stakeholders in the MIL ecosystem.

This study concludes with recommendations for the current global developments surrounding MIL and the increased involvement of fact-checking organisations in education and training initiatives, especially for youth. These developments underscore the urgency of further exploring these emerging trends. The findings from this study have the potential to contribute significantly to the ongoing discourse on MIL and the evolving role of fact-checking organisations in shaping a more informed and media-literate society.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. A MIL-Based Solution to Mis- and Disinformation

As we endeavour to understand, map, and define MIL training and education provided by fact-checking organisations, it becomes crucial to conceptualise MIL. Despite the efforts by numerous public bodies and researchers to harmonise the understanding of MIL globally, many participants within the MIL ecosystem still need help with its concept due to varying languages and cultural contexts. We adopt UNESCO's comprehensive framework as our foundational conceptualisation, which describes MIL as a set of interlinked competencies essential for accessing, analysing, evaluating, and creating media. This education enhances critical skills necessary for informed, empowered citizenship in democracies founded on principles of equity and justice. Key MIL topics include critical thinking, misinformation, media modalities, news and information literacy, digital safety, and technological proficiencies (Mesquita, Pranaityte, & Castellini da Silva, 2023; UNESCO, 2013).

Moreover, as many recent studies have pointed out, media literacy education is essential for fostering resilient media among young citizens (e.g., McDougall, 2019). According to McDougall (2019), incorporating critical media literacy as a mandatory school subject and teaching it dynamically would better prepare young citizens

to handle "information disorder" than reactive measures like fact-checking tools. Critical media literacy fosters resilience against misinformation by enhancing analytical and critical thinking skills. However, most global MIL approaches have adopted reactive, cross-disciplinary methods rather than establishing MIL as a standalone subject, often neglecting the focus on critical thinking (Mateus, 2021; Mesquita, Pranaityte, & Castellini da Silva, 2023). While it is challenging to prove that MIL enhances resilience to information disorders definitively (Rodríguez-Pérez & Canel, 2023), there is a recognised correlation between media literacy and increased trust in scientific discourse and journalism (see Lessenski, 2021).

Despite the growing momentum behind MIL education and training, a significant gap exists in ownership and the overall scarcity of national-based curricula and educational programmes designed to educate and train the youth. In this context, diverse organisations' increasing participation in formal and non-formal education and training for all audiences (Oliveira et al., 2024; Van Audenhove et al., 2018), even if some EU documents on tackling disinformation provide evidence of an aggregation of generations into a homogeneous group, not explicitly recognising their heterogeneity (Brites et al., 2021).

Recent studies have acknowledged the expansion of MIL education and emphasised the crucial roles of collaborative educational efforts, adaptation to socio-political environments, and sustained funding in enhancing the success and impact of these initiatives (see Çömlekçi, 2022; Kuś & Barczyszyn-Madziarz, 2020). However, these studies often need to be broadened to incorporate other analysis instances, such as educational systems and policies that influence the MIL environment in the countries examined. Although they provide some contextual information, they need more detailed knowledge about the MIL ecosystems and the specific criteria that define a training or educational programme as MIL-focused.

In many parts of the world, the rapid growth of social media and digital technologies has fueled the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Misleading or false information can influence public opinions, create divisions among different social groups, and erode trust in institutions and the media. These issues are often amplified in polarised political environments, leading to increased societal tensions and challenges in maintaining a healthy democratic discourse (Li & Chang, 2023). MIL education is seen as a potent tool to address these challenges.

Young people's lack of critical engagement with news (Tamboer et al., 2022) underscores the importance of new literacies (a subset of MIL) in empowering individuals to navigate the abundance of information and make informed decisions as citizens in a democracy. The recent scholarly work extensively explores the topic of media literacy in youth, focusing mainly on specific subsets like college students and, more specifically, those studying in fields like media, communications, or journalism. However, these studies predominantly evaluate literacy levels, and more attention needs to be paid to the necessity of applying these skills in practical settings. Studies indicate a significant shortfall in this area, with few investigating how and when young people practically utilise their media literacy skills (Amat et al., 2022).

2.2. Overview of the Literature on Fact-Checking in MIL Education and Training

The increasingly evident spread of disinformation has created new opportunities, bringing journalism, fact-checking, and MIL closer together to counter foreign interference, disruptive platform models, and user-driven amplification (Frau-Meigs, 2022). The author also noticed that while journalists have a long

tradition of self-governance and a model that has privileged commercial enterprises, MIL practitioners often come from non-profit, civil society organisations, often being educators and activists that historically have been fighting a fight that nobody sees (Caprino & Martínez-Cerdá, 2016). Thus, both saw the recent development as an opportunity to foster their relationship and address their problems. New entities like fact-checking networks, data analytics firms, and news literacy associations have emerged alongside initiatives connecting journalism and MIL.

These developments impact these fields as participants provide feedback to developers, and journalists share their investigative methods (Frau-Meigs, 2022). More specifically, fact-checking organisations have been branching out into MIL initiatives, which include online courses and in-person training in schools (Çömlekçi, 2022; Kuś & Barczyszyn-Madziarz, 2020). Çömlekçi (2022) points out that these groups are enhancing their traditional roles by offering tools and methods to help people identify false information effectively. They strive to equip various demographics, such as teenagers, seniors, and professionals from different sectors, with skills to recognise and refute misinformation. According to the author, effective collaboration with educators is vital, as these organisations work closely with teaching centres and educational networks to spread MIL knowledge. However, they face challenges like internet accessibility, high data costs, and language diversity, which they attempt to mitigate through partnerships with media, training for local journalists, and multilingual programme offerings. Increased funding during the Covid-19 era has supported these efforts, particularly to counter health-related misinformation, with diverse funding sources helping to preserve their neutrality and independence. The political and cultural context also significantly impacts these initiatives. The author also suggests that varying political climates and cultural values can affect public trust and perceptions of bias in these organisations. These factors are crucial for tailoring effective MIL strategies, and understanding them can lead to more effective fact-checking operations.

In another strand of MIL research analysis in Poland, Kuś and Barczyszyn-Madziarz (2020) analyse how Polish fact-checking entities have adopted MIL initiatives to overcome challenges like limited resources and media presence. They describe two main educational strategies: an indirect approach through media-led fact-checking that promotes critical thinking and a direct approach by civil society groups that involves active teaching and workshop activities to enhance media literacy. Both strategies foster a critical mindset and improve public understanding of information authenticity.

While research indicates a growing participation of fact-checking organisations within the MIL ecosystem, more studies are still needed on these initiatives. Furthermore, many such efforts need recognition from audiences and other stakeholders. Similarly, other non-formal MIL educators, such as NGOs and non-profit organisations, struggle with recognising, scaling, and evaluating their efforts. As integral components of the broader MIL ecosystem, fact-checking organisations dedicated to promoting MIL face challenges in enhancing the impact of their activities (Mesquita, Pranaityte, & Castellini da Silva, 2023; Pranaityte et al., 2024).

3. Methodological Approach

This study employs a qualitative methodology, incorporating desk research, interviews, and observations of secondary data from seven prominent fact-checking organisations and two university-affiliated projects in Spain, Catalonia, Poland, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Argentina, and Brazil. The research began with snowball

sampling to identify high-profile fact-checking agencies involved in young people's MIL training, focusing on diverse geographical regions and varying levels of experience in MIL education.

The study investigates the opportunities and challenges fact-checking organisations face in implementing MIL strategies and their pathways. To contextualise the data, the research also includes an analysis of the political landscape, educational policies, and regulatory environments surrounding MIL education, incorporating policy analysis (Browne et al., 2019; Simons et al., 2009) and an examination of the host countries' political, social, and economic contexts. This analysis addresses the need for comparative research, emphasising the role of political landscapes in shaping MIL education approaches (Çömlekçi, 2022).

To answer RQ1, desk research on publicly available secondary data was conducted to (a) contextualise the MIL environment, educational policies, and regulatory frameworks (e.g., media regulator policies and ministries of education) in the relevant countries and regions and (b) understand MIL ecosystems and their impact on organisations, focusing on their involvement in MIL education and training, particularly for youth. Additionally, informal and unstructured interviews with practitioners and stakeholders were used to understand organisations' motivations and goals in introducing MIL education, identify how these organisations perceive and integrate MIL, and explore the challenges and opportunities they face in advocating for and implementing MIL education.

The interview process combined unstructured interviews with numerous informal conversations with practitioners. While these interactions could be ethnographic, the characterisation may be too formal, given that one researcher had pre-existing access to many participants through informal fact-checking networks. According to Bernard (2012), informal interviews are unstructured, relying on the researcher's recall. These were supplemented with unstructured interviews to enhance the reliability of the information collected. Bernard (2012) describes unstructured interviews as flexible, occurring in a formal context without predefined questions, allowing a more natural dialogue. This approach enabled an inductive thematic analysis, identifying key themes such as youth, media literacy, motivation, audiences, context, MIL in education systems, networks, pedagogy, and funding. The transition from informal to more formal interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of these themes, ensuring the analysis captured the participants' nuanced perspectives. This approach also extended to engaging with individuals beyond the selected organisations, including entities like MediaWise and International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), which are integral to fact-checking networks (see Table 1).

To address RQ2, an exploratory content analysis was conducted to examine the target audiences, multimedia platforms, resources, collaborations, and educational methods the selected fact-checking organisations employed. This analysis involved reviewing the organisations' websites, materials, and other publicly available documents. Exploratory content analysis, an empirically driven method, emphasises inquiry and discovery over classification and normative argumentation. It is suitable for interpreting complex communication dynamics, especially in contexts where traditional scientific methods may be insufficient (Krippendorff, 1989).

This analysis is the first of its kind on these organisations. While their involvement in MIL was known, little information was available about the practical aspects of their offerings. The lack of previous academic research and comparative studies on fact-checking organisations' MIL education and training for youth

Table 1. Interviews.

Organisation	Country
IFCN	Global
MediaWise	US
Demagog	Poland
VERA Files	The Philippines
ANNIE	Hong Kong
Pravda	Poland
Verificat	Catalonia (Spain)
Maldita	Spain
University of the Philippines	The Philippines
Agência Lupa	Brazil
Chequeado	Argentina

made this analysis more exploratory, necessitating a flexible methodology. Additionally, challenges in accessing publicly available content and documents further complicate the research, as will be discussed in the following section.

4. Findings and Discussion

While examining the MIL initiatives that organisations offer young people, we recognised the need to analyse the broader operational contexts to assess MIL integration within fact-checking organisations. This includes assessing the organisations' motivations and missions, the educational and political environments in which they operate, funding, and other potential challenges. Understanding these factors highlights the barriers and facilitators to MIL integration within organisational models. To achieve this, we focused on key themes identified in the interviews and integrated them with findings from the exploratory content analysis.

4.1. Mission and Motivation for MIL Integration

According to an IFCN representative, fact-checking organisations have developed educational branches to enhance public engagement in critical thinking and analytical skills. This approach is crucial for empowering individuals to evaluate information effectively. The evolution from mere fact-checking to educational engagement recognises that combating misinformation involves more than just verifying texts; it requires training the public to adopt the thorough, sceptical approach of fact-checkers. To this end, several organisations within the network have established dedicated teams to conduct workshops on media literacy and fact-checking.

As our interviewees described, MIL is essential to fact-checking organisations' initiatives and actions. Fact-checkers see MIL as integral to these organisations' mission and operations. As organisations struggle with the wild spread of misinformation, more than information verification is required. Some entities, such as Agência Lupa in Brazil, Chequeado in Argentina, Demagog in Poland, and Verificat and Maldita in Spain, have successfully integrated MIL into their business models and organisational structures. Nevertheless, some organisations encounter challenges in fully incorporating MIL initiatives despite being invited to engage in

such efforts. This is evident in the cases of Pravda in Poland and VERA Files in the Philippines. Both organisations initiated their involvement in education upon invitation—Pravda during the Covid-19 pandemic and VERA Files before that. However, their progress remains gradual as they prioritise securing funding and expanding their operational capacities. Others, such as the two universities studied here, rely on collaboration to make their work accessible.

Agência Lupa in Brazil exemplifies how an organisation can successfully integrate MIL into its business model and structure—over 40% of revenue stems from media literacy activities (Lupa, 2015). This success is attributed to multiple factors, including the organisation's active involvement on national and international fronts, strengthening its standing in the field. Additionally, Agência Lupa benefits from the growing acknowledgement of MIL's significance within governmental initiatives and its incorporation into national education curricula. Notable developments include the introduction of a media literacy framework and the establishment of a dedicated media literacy office within the Secretariat of Social Communication, a federal cabinet-level ministry. These advancements reflect a significant shift towards embracing MIL in public education and policy in the country (Mesquita, Pranaityte, & Castellini da Silva, 2023).

Another organisation that emphasises the importance of integrating MIL education as its second pillar is Demagog. Recognising the surge of misleading and false information circulating, particularly since the term "fake news" became prominent in 2016–2017, Demagog realised that merely providing reliable information through their fact-checking website was insufficient. Given the overwhelming volume of information on social media, they decided to engage in MIL to empower their audience with the necessary skills to verify information independently.

4.2. Collaboration and Network Building

Chequeado emphasises the importance of collaborative efforts that extend beyond individual institutions, involving a network that includes journalists, educational bodies, and scholars across Latin America. Notably, Chequeado has spearheaded one of the region's most innovative educational initiatives, collaborating with 40 educational institutions to advance MIL and mis- and disinformation training in journalism schools. This initiative exemplifies Chequeado's long-standing commitment to partnership, a cornerstone of its operations since its inception 15 years ago, peaking with the establishment of LatamChequea and solidifying Chequeado's collaborative mission (Garcia et al., in press).

Collaboration and network building are emerging trends in the field, as exemplified by Maldita's partnership with institutions in Catalonia to work on a project with primary school teachers. This initiative aims to better understand the needs of younger students, particularly given that, by the age of 10, many children in Spain have smartphones and use social media. The goal is to develop appropriate educational materials for primary students, recognising that starting these initiatives in secondary school may be too late.

On another approach to collaboration, in Hong Kong, our interviewee described how the political landscape in Hong Kong shifted; it became increasingly challenging to continue using the university's name. Additionally, many potential funders were reluctant to support projects associated with a public university in China. To address these challenges, the interviewee registered an independent NGO, which now manages many of the projects previously conducted through the university, albeit still in close collaboration with it.

The NGO functions independently, while the interviewee holds a full-time position at the university, where the flagship programme, a fact-checking media outlet, remains part of the journalism school. This arrangement allows the projects to continue operating within the university framework while mitigating legal and political concerns, thus ensuring ongoing collaboration and support for the initiatives. These types of collaborations were also spotted in other studies, which highlight partnerships as the primary forms of continuing work and pursuing their goals under authoritarian regimes (Mesquita, 2023).

According to MediaWise, ongoing efforts to strengthen partnerships between fact-checking organisations and media literacy educators. These groups are forming a non-formal network to enhance their impact through mutual support and shared strategies. Networks aim to consolidate a community of practice that could significantly advance media literacy. These developments were particularly emphasised during the first-ever media literacy track at the Global Fact Conference in 2022, reflecting a recognised need within the community for a more cohesive and structured approach to media literacy initiatives. This effort underscores the growing acknowledgement of the importance of collaborative efforts in strengthening the fight against misinformation.

4.3. Educational Approaches and Pedagogical Strategies

A point of concern that gets momentum within the structures of the educational verticals is the pedagogical approaches to training and educational materials and the overall educational and political contexts surrounding these organisations. We have noticed that organisations with more structured verticals tend to have more mixed teams, with teachers and pedagogists, while others rely more on the experiences of practitioners, fact-checkers, and journalists. Maldita, for instance, has a diverse team composed of professionals from various backgrounds, including teachers with secondary school experience and journalists. Chequeado also has teachers among its professionals, and Demagog counts on a large team of around 20 trainers from diverse backgrounds. On the other hand, VERA Files rely mostly on experienced fact-checkers from within the organisation, ensuring they bring practical knowledge and credibility to the training sessions.

In the Philippines, MIL is a compulsory academic subject in secondary schools. However, when the subject was made mandatory, it became evident that many teachers needed to be adequately prepared to teach it. With no formal structure in place for teacher training, the government initially turned to journalism schools, nonprofit organisations, and media research institutes to provide the necessary training. This led to organisations and media professionals, including journalists, transitioning to education and becoming responsible for equipping teachers with MIL skills despite not being directly employed by the government or public schools.

The University of the Philippines interviewee highlighted that while incorporating MIL into the national curriculum offers valuable guidelines, the courses often need updating, focusing too much on ancient history and neglecting contemporary issues. Additionally, because MIL is not required for teacher certification, educators often rely on self-directed learning and workshops to improve their MIL teaching abilities. This gap has allowed organisations like VERA Files to step in and provide non-formal MIL training. At the University of the Philippines, journalism students engage with MIL through initiatives led by seasoned journalists, who use social media platforms, particularly YouTube, to connect with and educate younger audiences.

In Hong Kong, recent political and legal changes, particularly the replacement of the liberal studies curriculum with citizenship and social development following the 2019 political movement and the National Security Law in 2020, have significantly restricted MIL education in formal settings (Yam, 2020). Despite these challenges, the organisation ANNIE has advanced fact-checking education by collaborating with the University of Hong Kong. ANNIE provides students with hands-on training in a newsroom environment, guided by experienced journalists from major media outlets like Agence France-Presse (AFP), Radio Television Hong Kong, and the *South China Morning Post*. The programme operates with 13 to 20 student reporters working in shifts, complementing their academic schedules. Additionally, ANNIE offers a specialised fact-checking course, initially part of a journalism class, which has evolved into a comprehensive training programme for future fact-checkers and students from diverse disciplines. This dual approach underscores ANNIE's commitment to developing critical media literacy skills among students, preparing them to navigate and contribute to the contemporary media landscape.

In contrast, the US has seen significant engagement in MIL education at the school level, supported by local laws. However, as noted by MediaWise, a media literacy branch of IFCN, these local initiatives, while innovative, need more uniformity and scalability for widespread application. This is confirmed by the *US Media Literacy Policy Report 2023*, which highlights that media literacy education laws vary significantly across the country. While some states have passed comprehensive laws mandating media literacy instruction across K-12 curricula, others have more limited requirements or integrated media literacy into subjects like civics or social studies (McNeill & Duff, 2023).

Several challenges emerge as we examine the range of educational materials, resources, and courses provided by fact-checking organisations. One notable issue is the limited availability of these materials for open access. Furthermore, specific organisations, including Pravda and Agência Lupa, are reticent about disclosing details concerning their course content and pedagogical strategies. This lack of transparency may be intricately linked to their business models. Organisations that derive revenue from educational offerings are more inclined to withhold information about their resources and methodologies.

It is crucial to underscore the dual approach of fact-checking organisations in addressing disinformation. These entities directly engage young individuals and connect with influential intermediaries, such as educators and trainers. By developing comprehensive educational resources—including curricula, lesson plans, and ready-to-use presentations enriched with practical examples—these organisations aim to foster a collaborative learning environment. These resources are tailored for students, journalists, and educators specialising in journalism and communications, as is the case of Maldita and Verificat.

These educational initiatives strategically target parents, which is vital in extending their reach to the younger generation. To facilitate this, organisations provide various guides designed to stimulate family discussions and heighten awareness about disinformation and online safety. This corroborates the idea that the media and its changes influence family dynamics and are appropriated by them (Ponte et al., 2019).

4.4. Innovative Educational Tools

These initiatives' notable features are integrating multimedia tools like images, infographics, videos, and audio content, which enhance the learning experience. A particularly innovative strategy employed is

gamification, with escape room games being the most prevalent. In these games, participants assume the role of journalists working against the clock to debunk disinformation by verifying facts and sources. This format promotes critical thinking and fosters independent and engaging learning. The design of these games encourages participants to engage critically with real-world issues through an entertaining framework.

Moreover, using platforms such as TikTok and YouTube to disseminate video content on disinformation and fact-checking illustrates the strategic adaptation to contemporary media consumption habits (Newman et al., 2023). Often, these videos feature young people, further aligning the content with the interests and lifestyles of the target audience.

The thematic focus of these initiatives predominantly revolves around disinformation, but there has been a noticeable expansion to include digital security and, more recently, the implications of artificial intelligence. Collaborations are not limited to large organisations like Google; they also include local entities such as councils, libraries, and foundations, which help extend the educational reach to a broader audience, as in Maldita.

Notably, specific organisations prioritise news literacy, which encompasses understanding news production, content, and impact, and developing the requisite skills to apply this knowledge instead of focusing more on MIL (Yeoman & Morris, 2023). This trend is particularly prevalent among entities closely associated with journalism studies, including the universities examined in our analysis. Moreover, organisations like Demagog and Agência Lupa, which have extensive and varied involvement in MIL education and ecosystems, also demonstrate this emphasis. This approach underscores the subtle variations in educational strategies designed to address disinformation.

4.5. Challenges and the Path to Sustainability

According to scholarly research (Çömlekçi, 2022), numerous challenges hinder those needing help implementing MIL fully. These challenges include financial constraints and adverse political conditions, which complicate the effectiveness of MIL verticals and teams within organisational frameworks. One of our interviewees in Poland emphasised that, although there are initiatives and support from ministries and the public broadcasting authority, especially regarding internet safety and digitalisation, obtaining financial support from these entities often proves difficult due to the political alignment expected from organisations. Nevertheless, Demagog and other NGOs and entities have advocated for MIL education at Poland's national and policy levels, and they have received financial support from the US Embassy in Poland to carry out many of their initiatives, such as the Fact-Checking Academy, which focuses on students and teachers.

In contrast, Spain, for example, may experience a lack of coordination between the various authorities involved in the MIL ecosystem (Pranaityte et al., 2024). However, they are more confident in obtaining financial support from government and public grants and funding schemes, such as those designed by the EU to support research and the development of diverse initiatives like the European Media and Information Fund, Erasmus Plus, Creative Europe, etc.

Another factor that has led fact-checking organisations to MIL, as Kuś and Barczyszyn-Madziarz (2020) noted, is the example of Polish fact-checking organisations which have embraced MIL initiatives to address challenges

such as limited resources and media visibility. Similarly, Çömlekçi (2022) suggests that developing educational divisions and launching MIL projects can enhance an organisation's public image and funding by promoting their educational efforts as serving the public good. In regions with less developed media systems or countries where authoritarian and non-democratic regimes populate, as we could analyse from our online observations and conversations with organisations, such as in the Philippines, MIL initiatives might not present the same effects. Our interviewee from VERA Files explains that although MIL is included in the senior high school curriculum under the K-12 education system, teachers are not adequately prepared to teach these classes. This lack of preparation has heightened public interest in MIL training, presenting an opportunity for the organisation. VERA Files has specialised its offerings to address this demand, targeting university students, educators, and overseas Filipino workers.

However, sustainability remains a paramount concern, and amidst this, the dependency on big tech platforms for funding, such as Meta and Google, raises additional concerns. This reliance illustrates a growing trend where fact-checking organisations are compelled to engage with these platforms to sustain their operations, as many have become dependent on revenue from platforms like the Google News Initiative and Meta to maintain their initiatives (see Lelo, 2022; Mesquita, de-Lima-Santos, & Muthmainnah, 2023). This complex scenario underscores the need for a deeper analysis of the evolving relationships between MIL initiatives in fact-checking organisations, financial sustainability, and public reputation in diverse geopolitical contexts. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many organisations began participating more actively in MIL, often spurred by invitations from schools and other entities, such as Pravda in Poland. This period also highlighted the dual nature of sustainability challenges.

Similarly, Verificat highlights the continuous challenge of securing financial support in Spain and plans to rely more on public financial support for the following year. Similarly, Maldita also relies on partnerships with local authorities and aims to expand its initiatives through collaborations with supranational entities such as the European Commission and Parliament. These collaborations include delivering training and participating in campaigns, enhancing their visibility and impact within the MIL ecosystem.

Therefore, understanding the interplay between context, political climate, educational systems, and policies is crucial. These factors directly affect the ability of fact-checking organisations to implement MIL effectively on the ground. Our findings suggest that navigating these constraints, alongside leveraging existing opportunities, is vital for advancing MIL initiatives within these organisations.

5. Conclusion

This study has embarked on a journey to explore the integration of MIL education and training within fact-checking organisations. Our findings indicate a significant transformation in these organisations, transitioning from primarily debunking misinformation to actively fostering MIL education, with a particular focus on youth. We examined organisations actively involved in the MIL ecosystem, engaging in formal and non-formal networks such as the Media Literacy Network initiative sponsored by Poynter and MediaWise. This exploration also extends to entities noted in the few academic studies and reports analysing this trend. We contextualised the MIL environment, educational systems, and political landscapes to understand their possible impacts and influences on the organisations' commitment to MIL initiatives, particularly for young audiences.

In direct response to RQ1, our research examines the growing integration of fact-checking within MIL education and training. Our study yields the following conclusions based on the analysed experiences. First, fact-checking organisations engage in MIL education and training because, according to practitioners, merely providing verified information is insufficient to combat the pervasive spread of mis- and disinformation in society. Second, as suggested by previous studies, many organisations view MIL education and training development as an additional or complementary revenue stream within their business models. And, third, while many organisations investigated in this study have successfully developed educational branches focused on MIL, sustainability remains a significant challenge. This is particularly evident in organisations that, due to limited resources, cannot establish dedicated verticals but instead rely on teams, groups, or individuals to address MIL. The challenge is further exacerbated for those operating in politically unstable contexts.

Regarding RQ2, our research highlights the diverse educational approaches fact-checking organisations use in their MIL initiatives. Organisations with structured educational frameworks, like Maldita and Chequeado, incorporate professional educators, while others, such as VERA Files, rely on experienced fact-checkers, focusing on practical, real-world knowledge. Challenges include outdated and non-standardised MIL curricula, particularly in regions like the Philippines, where formal education systems fall short.

Innovative strategies, including multimedia tools and gamification, enhance engagement and learning. Platforms like TikTok and YouTube are leveraged to reach younger audiences, aligning with contemporary media habits. While disinformation remains the primary focus, there is a growing emphasis on digital security and the implications of artificial intelligence.

Collaborations with local entities further extend the reach of these educational efforts. Some organisations prioritise news literacy over broader MIL, reflecting variations in educational strategies. Overall, our findings underscore the adaptability and innovation within fact-checking organisations as they work to enhance public literacy and combat misinformation.

Our analysis reveals that these organisations face diverse challenges that vary significantly across regional media, educational, and political contexts. For instance, while Spain and Catalonia are witnessing a growing integration of MIL into their educational systems, Poland faces political obstacles that necessitate external support. In Brazil, MIL programmes have notably influenced legislative and educational reforms. These regional variations underscore the complex landscape in which these organisations operate.

As our interviewees have helped us understand, many factors have contributed to integrating MIL education and training branches within their operations. These factors include the provision of grants and funds from various institutions and the growing public interest in MIL. However, the primary driver is the organisations' understanding that providing the public with verified information alone is insufficient; they must also equip the public with the tools to combat mis- and disinformation.

Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis marked an inflexion point for many organisations. Public entities increasingly invited them to support the general population in navigating the "infodemic" (Moussa et al., 2022). Our research also discovered that the teams in these branches are diverse, with no clear pattern emerging. Many organisations have reported the need to professionalise their teams of educators and trainers by including pedagogists and teachers. However, this is not a reality for organisations with limited funding.

All organisations involved in this study identified financial considerations as a primary concern. Some have incorporated educational verticals within their business models as a revenue stream. However, others still need more numbers and scalability, but all, to our knowledge, rely heavily on external support, including government assistance, platform partnerships, donations, and various funding grants. This dependence on external funding affects their capacity to deliver training and limits our ability to conduct a thorough micro-analysis of their resources, training courses, and target demographics. Consequently, our desk research could only document a limited scope of their activities, highlighting the need for future studies to employ more comprehensive analytical methods and observational techniques to gain deeper insights.

Similarly, our capacity to analyse the materials, approaches, and subjects that fact-checking organisations employ in their MIL education and training initiatives for youth was also limited. Although these organisations are deeply invested in MIL as part of their mission to safeguard socially-oriented journalism and combat misinformation, our access to detailed assessments of their materials and pedagogical approaches was constrained. This limitation can be attributed to the strategic inclusion of MIL educational verticals in their business models, which may deter them from disclosing proprietary methodologies. However, there is an apparent willingness among these organisations to share experiences and collaborate through established non-formal networks, peer-to-peer exchanges, and broader engagements with local authorities and other stakeholders in the MIL ecosystem.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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