



Digital Innovation in Journalism Studies Research-Creation Thesis Project

Hi, my name is Emily Follett-Campbell, and this website is a main component of my thesis project for my MA in **Digital Innovation in Journalism Studies** at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada.

As legacy newsrooms struggle and mis/disinformation spreads at an increasing rate, trust in media is declining. This thesis project demonstrates how a fact-checking dApp could be used to verify digital content. It questions whether providing a permanent record of who verified information and when, combined with a participatory process for proposing and challenging fact-checks, could help improve trust in news media.

This website demonstrates several ways fact-checks could be connected to blockchain transactions. For instance, by using the **WordProof** plugin to timestamp content to the EOS blockchain. I also created a sample fake news article. The accompanying fact-check could use the Schema type "claim review." Searchable blockchain transaction information from a MultiSig bitcoin transaction could be included in the structured data of the claim review, and claim review info in the blockchain transaction.

This is an example using a random blockchain transaction ID:

```
<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org/",
  "@type": "ClaimReview",
  "name": "Claim Review: Gentlemen, Ivermectin-Soaked Tampons Won't Cure Covid"

  },
  "reviewRating": {
    "@type": "ClaimReviewed",
    "ratingValue": 2,
    "worstRating": 1,
    "bestRating": 5,|
    "reviewAspect": "Claim: ivermectin cures COVID-19"
  },
  "identifier": {
    "URL": "https://blockstream.info/tx/345c5afafdb710d9cc148bed7be9c356226df90c4eff37c452cc2526541ad942"
    "contentReferenceTime": "2021-11-14 08:56:55"
  }
}
</script>
```

Image by: Emily Follett-Campbell

The project is being executed in three phases:

1. Interviews with experts with expertise relevant to blockchain, journalism, and/or public trust in news media.
2. A sample fake news article and a six-question **survey** open to the public.
3. A paper containing an analysis of the project and a literature review.

Please note that while every page of this site has a report button, only the sample fake news article that goes with the **survey** has a fact-check attached to it.

The Proposed Process

1. Every news story using checkmarker would have a Report button.
2. Every story would have some type of digital marker that would identify it as being part of checkmarker.
3. Anyone (including news audiences) may report an **issue**, but not all issues will be flagged for checking.
4. All issues that aren't flagged will be forwarded onto the content producer. This site uses Gravity forms, which can be exported as Excel or Google spreadsheets. Content producers would be able to use this audience feedback however they wish.
5. When a piece is flagged for checking, it remains flagged until resolved.
6. A piece may be flagged for multiple issues.
7. If a piece has unresolved issues for too long, its checkmarker digital marker is revoked and any claim reviews/fact-checks are archived.
8. Any content producer attempting to deliberately promote false information could be banned from the community through a vote.
9. When a piece is flagged for checking, a claim is created. Claims must be verifiable. For example: Claim: "Ivermectin cures covid-19." Once checked, a claim can be found to be: True, Mostly True, Mostly False, or False.
10. A reported issue is deemed important enough to fact-check by the checkmarker community, as well as by whether someone is willing to pay for the fact-check/claim review article to be written.
11. In some cases, checkmarker might flag questionable content, in which case the content producer would be obliged to resolve the issue(s) or give up their digital marker.

12. While checkmarker would employ editors and writers, some expert sources might verify technical information for free, and it would also act as a record that user-generated content (UGC) content (for instance, a photo shared of a disaster) has not been purchased. The idea is that this would be a participatory process supported by a collaborative, positive community. The reporting of issues wouldn't be meant to be punitive, but rather a collective effort to combat dis- and misinformation online.

13. The type of blockchain transaction used would be MultiSig. If a reported issue is approved for checking, checkmarker would flag it, a checker/checkers would check it, both the content producer and checkmarker member(s) would verify the check.

14. Checks would be expected to be performed within a three-day window.

15. Disputes would be resolved by voting. Potentially, the audience could be represented by impartial audit nodes with voting powers.

Digital Marker

A variety of different things could be used as a digital marker. Ideally it would be something that could both identify content as being part of checkmarker and an indicator of when changes were made on the blockchain.

Jeremy Clark explains blockchain timestamps and beacons

Jeremy Clark, Associate Professor, Concordia Institute for Information Systems Engineering
NSERC/Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton/Catallaxy Industrial Research Chair in Blockchain

Technologies

Community

Checkmarker would aim to build a community of news audiences, journalists, content producers (news outlets, magazines, etc.), editors, writers, experts, eye witnesses, and sources. While anyone could report an issue or suggest a fact-check, not every suggestion would be pursued.

For a claim to be flagged for checking, it would have to be important and verifiable. A primary objective would be that what should be considered important and verifiable would engage debate and discussion. The goal is to achieve consensus for a moment in time, with the expectation that claims would be constantly changing and building on one another to create a more accurate, richer, more diverse interpretation.

Benefits

A possible benefit of checkmarker would be to create a repository of expert sources and verified facts. For example, news outlets might not have the resources to verify whether a covid-19 dataset is biased or an expert with highly specialized medical knowledge might want to share their research. Being able to draw on contributors with highly specialized expertise could be useful.

From a source or checker's point of view, contributing could provide an opportunity for thought leadership marketing, good karma collection, or just a platform for news junkie enthusiasm. Novice editors could gain experience and technical editors could showcase their highly specialized knowledge.

Read more...



Read more about “**Blockchain and Trust in Journalism.**”

