



Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Re: Verification procedures and treatment of formal complaints

14 messages

Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Fri, Jul 26, 2019 at 3:22 PM

To: International Fact-Checking Network <factchecknet@poynter.org>, Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>, Baybars Orsek <borsek@poynter.org>

Dear Baybars Orsek and the International Fact-Checking Network,

I have it from Michael Wagner, the external assessor for PolitiFact the past two years, that he received no complaints associated with PolitiFact's 2019 re-verification. Given the number of formal complaints I have lodged, this points to either a failure to follow procedure or else a lack of transparency regarding procedure.

In a forthcoming article I will write about my experiences with the IFCN verification procedure and would welcome a formal statement from the IFCN regarding its actions concerning the complaints submitted to the IFCN, including those pertaining to the Poynter-owned entity PolitiFact.

Thanks.

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Sincerely,

Bryan W. White
editor
zebrafactcheck.com

Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>

Fri, Jul 26, 2019 at 9:39 PM

To: Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Dear Bryan,

Thank you for reminding me that I had a response owed do you.

I was also notified by Michael Wagner that you have reached him and confirming with him that we should have shared the complaints with him.

The reason in lack of sharing the complaints with him is due to a technical error. We have been experiencing a strong spam problem in the complaints page and working on upgrading the system. You can also consult to the [story](#) we have published earlier on the audit & review process we are conducting on the Code of Principles. We aim to share the upgraded code of principles before the end of this year along with the technological advancements.

Thanks for your interest.

Baybars

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[Baybars Örsek](#)

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Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Sat, Jul 27, 2019 at 3:50 PM

To: Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>

Dear Baybars,

Thanks.

Is there any plan to revisit external assessments for which complaints were not given to the assessor?

Cheers.

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Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>

Mon, Jul 29, 2019 at 1:38 PM

Dear Baybars,

It strikes me that my list of follow up questions was too short.

What assessments were affected by the technical problem?

Is there any plan to revisit external assessments for which complaints were not given to the assessor?

Cheers.

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Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>
To: Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Mon, Jul 29, 2019 at 1:46 PM

Hi Bryan,

We will contact the assessor of Politifact and share the complaints and check with him if he thinks the assessment needs to be reconsidered by the board. If that would be the case, we will open new voting and review the application.

Regarding other applications that might possibly have affected by the technical problem (halted notifications in June and July), due to the increased number of applications and the Global Fact in late June, we did only have two renewing organizations assessed (Maldito and Science Feedback) and after you raised up the technical problem we have checked and confirmed that neither of those two has received an official complaint during their year of signatory status.

Thanks for your questions.

Best-

Baybars

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Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>

Mon, Jul 29, 2019 at 2:51 PM

Dear Baybars,

Thanks for the prompt reply. Have a great week.

Cheers.

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Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>
To: Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Mon, Jul 29, 2019 at 3:01 PM

Thank you, you too!

I hope to share with you the status with Politifact next week. This week is a nightmare with deadlines!

Best-

Baybars

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Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>

Thu, Aug 15, 2019 at 2:27 PM

So, how are those deadlines going?



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Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>
To: Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Tue, Aug 20, 2019 at 12:37 PM

Hi Bryan,

Thanks for checking in!

The assessor of Politifact has been notified today with all the complaints and asked to share his take on whether the application needs to resent to board's review.

Best-

Baybars

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Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>

Tue, Aug 20, 2019 at 1:12 PM

Dear Baybars,

Thanks for the update.

I would call your attention to [something Michael Wagner wrote in his 2019 assessment of PolitiFact](#):

I also recommend that PolitiFact consider informing readers about the number and nature of the corrections requests they receive.

If that's good for PolitiFact, why not the IFCN?

I made a similar suggestion to Alexios Mantzarlis when he was director of the IFCN, though admittedly as a compromise from what I see as the more desirable policy of making the complaints themselves directly available to the public.

The current system's lack of transparency is galling, though simultaneously amusing in the context of the IFCN's call to fact checkers to join the IFCN: "[Commit to Transparency](#)." At minimum, the public should have direct access to the number and kind of complaints lodged against IFCN signatories.

Cheers.

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Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>
To: Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Tue, Aug 20, 2019 at 1:14 PM

Hi Bryan,

That's a good point and we will be definitely considering this during our review & audit process of the code of principles.

We hope to share the updated code of principles first with our verified signatories for ratification along with new procedures pertaining to the implementation of the code, therefore your recommendation is highly appreciated.

Best-

Baybars

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Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>

Mon, Sep 23, 2019 at 12:31 PM

Dear Baybars Orsek,

| I hope to share with you the status with Politifact next week.

Time flies! That was from July 29, 2019. The 2019 assessment for PolitiFact contains a number of half-truths that would mislead the public about PolitiFact's compliance with its own corrections policy. The IFCN this year has publicly announced accusations that verified signatories have failed to live up to the Code of Principles. We know that PolitiFact has been accused of this quite a few times, but the IFCN has somehow resisted the temptation to make any public announcement. Indeed, not even the IFCN's faux pas in failing to forward complaints to the outside assessor who reviewed PolitiFact resulted in an announcement from the IFCN.

A public announcement is due. If that isn't in the cards then please at least fulfill the commitment to update me on this situation.

Cheers.

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Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>
To: Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Mon, Sep 23, 2019 at 12:43 PM

Hi Bryan,

The assessor of Politifact's last application has informed the IFCN on August 22 that there was no need to change the assessment's recommendation to the board, therefore no action has been taken against Politifact.

The previous public investigations (Alt News and Science Feedback) has been opened after the assessors acknowledged the need, but in this case we have made sure the assessor receives the complaints and put them in record for their new application.

Thanks a lot

Baybars

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Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>

Mon, Sep 23, 2019 at 2:26 PM

Dear Baybars Orsek,

Will the public receive any explanation at all regarding the content of the allegations against PolitiFact or a transparent explanation as to why the assessor decided there was no need to change the recommendation in the assessment?

We've had a situation where the assessor apparently agreed an organization needed review after a complaint, then the assessor investigated and the IFCN decided (based on the investigation?) there was no need to take any action (AltNews). In both cases the assessor did an investigation of the allegations and apparently concluded no action was needed. [What is the principled difference in the treatment of these two cases?](#)

I offered the IFCN incontrovertible evidence PolitiFact does not "scrupulously" (IFCN's term) follow its corrections policy. At the same time, I have no way of knowing (apart from interrogating the assessor) what complaints the assessor received.

IFCN protestations to the contrary, I do not see this as a completely transparent process. Nor do I see how anyone else would judge it as transparent.

Please comment.

Cheers.

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