



Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Phone call follow up

1 message

Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: nbrown@poynter.org

Mon, Nov 25, 2019 at 3:14 PM

Dear Mr. Neil Brown,

Following up on my attempt to contact you via phone a few minutes ago:

After getting stonewalled by the International Fact-Checking Network regarding an issue of accountability, I tried Poynter's auto response promised a reply to inquiry within a business day. That was nearly a week ago, and the auto response was the only reply I received.

So I today I phoned directly. I was referred back to the same IFCN staff who have ignored my attempts to effect accountability. When I mentioned that to Poynter's phone representative, she referred me to you.

I will relate the problem in a nutshell, and I am well prepared to provide an in-depth explanation of this fundamental problem with IFCN oversight.

The IFCN has dealt this year publicly with two complaints about Facebook's implementation of its fact-checking policy. One of the IFCN investigations, involving Science Feedback, was clearly botched.* Assuming the other investigation was handled properly (which is not a given) the percentage is not good.

In addition, I have sent a good number of complaints through the IFCN regarding PolitiFact. The complaints involve clear errors that PolitiFact, for reasons it does not describe, has declined to correct. The IFCN, after initially failing ("technical error") to equip the appropriate outside assessor (Michael Wagner) with the complaints, eventually ruled that no action was necessary.

Dissatisfied with the transparency of the IFCN's decision, I inquired directly to Prof. Wagner, who shared with me the email he sent to the IFCN justifying his decision. The justification was centered on one complaint (a problem in itself), but making matters infinitely worse, Wagner based his ruling on a falsehood.**

It cannot be appropriate for a fact-checking organization to implement policy based on falsehoods.

Since taking over as director of the IFCN, Mr. Orsek has politely replied to most of my contact attempts. But after initially welcoming a meeting to discuss the issue, Orsek and the IFCN stopped replying to my outreach attempts.

I'll repeat the point I made in one of my most recent messages to the IFCN: **If I am wrong on the substance of the complaint Wagner dismissed then please publicly humiliate me and destroy my credibility.** Instead, the IFCN has turtled.

The complaint Wagner waved off was perfectly valid. I believe I have proved it beyond any reasonable doubt. I expect either a thorough refutation of my argument or else appropriate corrective action from the IFCN.

These two cases point to an ineffectual accountability mechanism at the IFCN.

Ignoring the problem without providing an absolutely transparent justification for ignoring the problem cannot be an option for an organization of integrity.

Thanks for your attention to this matter. Of course I am fully prepared to answer any and all questions related to the problems I'm pointing out.

*The outside assessor overlooked multiple problems with the Science Feedback fact check, including a manipulated quotation--omission of a key word without the use of an ellipsis.

3/11/2020

Gmail - Phone call follow up

**Wagner incorrectly believed the Kenneth Thorpe estimate for the cost of Sen. Sanders' M4A proposal was an estimate of total medical costs under M4A and not an estimate of added federal costs. Wagner's misperception led him to incorrectly believe PolitiFact reported the issue appropriately.

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Sincerely,

Bryan W. White
editor
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