# RUMOURS AND INFODEMICS: JOURNALIST'S SOCIAL MEDIA VERIFICATION PRACTICES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Chelin Indra Sushmita[1], Pawito[2], Andre Noevi Rahmanto[3]**
[123]Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Politik, Program Studi S2 Ilmu Komunikasi,
Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) Indonesia
*email:* *Chellyneindra@gmail.com*

**Abstract.** *The spread of rumors and infodemics on the Internet and social media during the Covid-19 pandemic which is unstoppable and usually believed to be the truth is more dangerous than the transmission of the Covid-19 outbreak because it has the potential to threaten safety, cause racism, and hatred of the community. It is the duty of journalists to doing fact-checking and corrects any rumors or infodemics. Fact-checking is one of the most important elements of professional journalism. Technological advances have made infodemics spread rapidly which has become a new challenge for professional journalists as information agents and spearheads of accurate reporting. This became the basis for mass media companies such as Kompas.com and Solopos.com to form journalism team checks to verify the facts and infodemics rumors that circulated widely on the Internet and social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. Fact-checking journalism is a new trend in digital journalism studies. This paper reviews the work practices of fact-checking journalists in verifying infodemics from social media content as the spearhead of accurate reporting as well as a manifestation of hypermedia organizations. A series of qualitative interviews were conducted with journalists at Solopos.com and Kompas.com who were in charge of the fact-check section. The results showed that journalists carried out a series of processes both manually and utilizing digital technology in verifying content and checking several facts to ensure rumors and infodemics on social media about Covid-19 that were spread on social media be compiled into news using journalistic principles. The work process of fact-checking journalists is often done collaboratively to form hypermedia organizations.*
*Keywords: rumors, infodemics, online journalism, fact-check, covid-19, journalism, journalists*

**Abstrak.** Persebaran rumor dan infodemik di Internet dan media sosial selama pandemi Covid-19 yang tidak terbendung dan sering kali diyakini sebagai kebenaran oleh masyarakat dinilai jauh lebih berbahaya daripada penularan wabah Covid-19, karena berpotensi mengancam keselamatan, menimbulkan rasisme, serta kebencian terhadap suatu golongan. Sudah menjadi tugas jurnalis dan untuk mengecek fakta dan meluruskan setiap rumor serta infodemik yang beredar di masyarakat. Pengecekan fakta adalah salah satu elemen penting dalam jurnalisme profesional. Kemajuan teknologi membuat infodemik tersebar dengan cepat yang kemudian menjadi tantangan baru bagi jurnalis profesional sebagai agen informasi dan ujung tombak pemberitaan yang akurat. Hal ini menjadi landasan bagi perusahaan media massa berskala nasional seperti Kompas.com maupun lokal, yaitu Solopos.com membentuk tim jurnalisme cek fakta untuk memverifikasi rumor serta infodemik yang beredar luas di internet dan media sosial. Jurnalisme cek fakta merupakan tren baru dalam perkembangan jurnalisme digital. Tulisan ini mengulas praktik kerja jurnalis pemeriksa fakta dalam memverifikasi infodemik dari konten media sosial sebagai ujung tombak pemberitaan yang akurat sekaligus sebagai manifestasi organisasi organisasi hipermedia. Serangkaian wawancara kualitatif dilakukan kepada jurnalis di Solopos.com dan Kompas.com yang bertugas sebagai jurnalis pemeriksa fakta. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan para jurnalis melakukan serangkaian proses verifikasi konten dan pengecekan fakta baik secara manual maupun memanfaatkan teknologi digital untuk mengkonfirmasi rumor serta infodemik tentang Covid-19 yang tersebar di media sosial untuk disusun dalam berita sesuai kaidah jurnalistik. Proses kerja jurnalis pemeriksa fakta ini sering kali dilakukan secara kolaboratif yang membentuk organisasi hipermedia.
**Kata kunci:** rumor, infodemik, jurnalisme online, cek fakta, covid-19, jurnalisme, jurnalis

## INTRODUCTION

The spread of infodemics amid the Covid-19 pandemic can be said to be almost unstoppable, one of which is the speed of the internet and the massive use of social media (Cinelli et al., 2020). This occurs, because the public tends to consider the content of the message received as more important than the party who delivers the information (Casero-Ripollés, 2020). Like pathogens in epidemics, this misinformation (infodemic) spreads much faster and often creates increasingly complex problems during the Covid-19 pandemic. The crisis that occurs due to the spread of the infodemic in almost every country, including Indonesia. Infodemics that go popular among the public can be created by everyone, including the government and the narrative in the mass media. Not only at the national level, infodemics can also appear in the regional level, such as when Solo City residents claim to have found an anti-corona herbal medicine called *Contravid*. News about the herbal medicine made by residents of Punggawan Village, Banjarsari District, Solo City named Tri Dewa, which was claimed to have cured seven Covid-19 patients in Jakarta in April 2020, was published in several online mass media, including *Kompas.com* and *Solopos.com*. This herbal medicine is made from 20 types of *empon-empon* claimed to be truly effective in treating Covid-19 even though it has not been tested in the laboratory. Even that the Food and Drug Administration (BPOM) refuses Tri Dewa's request to test the herbal medicine (Chaniscara, 2020).

The information about this anti-corona herbal medicine also creates a commotion in the community; considering that at that time there was no drug or vaccine to cure patients infected with the corona virus until contracting with Covid-19. The anti-corona herbal concoction is also claimed to have been ordered by five foreign countries, such as the United States, Spain, and Italy, although the information regarding these herbs' future treatment has not been perceived. This shows that an infodemic can come from anywhere, either from vague sources or from the authorities that are spread out because of the mass media. So that the communication process during the Covid-19 outbreak, including those carried out by journalists through the mass media, should not be arbitrary, let alone cause infodemics or hoax. Infodemic circulation in the midst of a pandemic becomes very dangerous, because it can cause panic, fear, and worry (Malecki et al., 2020; Pramiyanti et al., 2020). The uncontrolled circulation of infodemics can also trigger hatred, suspicion, discrimination, and psychological health problems that can reduce physical health, or even cause death (WHO et al., 2020). WHO is well aware that the spread of infodemics cannot be avoided or even eliminated when an outbreak occurs. Besides, the distribution of infodemics can still be managed so as not to worsen the situation.

The General Director of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has called misleading information related to Covid-19; that is infodemic as something more dangerous than the Covid-19 pandemic (WHO, 2020b). Infodemic is a type of hoax that is dangerous when it is believed to be the truth. Yet, in journalists' life during the Covid-19 pandemic, they experience various dilemmas and challenges; one of which is related to infodemics. Infodemic is a condition for the development of information related to a phenomenon without considering the elements of truth of data and facts. Infodemics can also be understood as fake news that spreads rapidly in cyberspace, and it is actually confusing, because the truth cannot be justified (Department of Global Communications, 2020). WHO ever said that the massive spread of infodemics has made it difficult for people to distinguish and trust the information being received, and (sometimes) has

caused anxiety and panic. Infodemics even have a potency to threaten safety, lead to racism and hatred of a group due to misinformation (Krisdamarjati & Chrysna, 2020). The spread of infodemics that are difficult to contain can be an opening and trace for the hoax.

Based on the monitoring of the AIS Team of the Directorate General of Aptika, Ministry of Communication and Informatics, up to May 5, 2020, there were 1,401 hoaxes and disinformation contents about Covid-19 circulating in the community (Kominfo, 2020). In order to tackle the spread of hoaxes, the official website of *Kominfo.go.id* and the website of the Covid-19 Handling Acceleration Task Force on the *Covid19.go.id* routinely publish fact-checking reports to straighten out hoax, which are forms of infodemics that are widely circulating in the community. This shows that the spread of infodemics that fall into the hoax category in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic is a dangerous phenomenon and must be fought so as not to cause another crisis that makes things even more complicated. The advancement of digital technology is so fast that it can even spread infodemics quickly, it could even be faster than the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19. Infodemic can be interpreted as excessive information related to a problem, in this case Covid-19, which worries the public because it is difficult to distinguish between right and wrong.(WHO, 2020a). Infodemics usually circulate on social media and its accuracy cannot be ascertained by the general public. However, this misinformation is often trusted and used as a guide(Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020) people in need, no matter how high the level of education and literacy.

Journalists can help to convey fact-based and science-based information that contains truth, educate, and raise public optimism to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic. Basically, the journalists play an important role in conveying information to the public in the midst of crisis situations due to natural and non-natural disasters (Houston et al., 2019; Prajarto, 2008). Besides, the journalists can play a role in educating the public by delivering accurate information and rectifying infodemics by verifying rumors related to Covid-19 on social media. David Heymann, a professor of epidemiology and infectious diseases at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, ever said that mass media has a key role in providing accurate, fact-based information to the general public which can also be disseminated through social media (Zarocostas, 2020). The era of abundance of information in the current digital age shows the tendency of people to access, obtain, and share any information through social media. Therefore, the fact-checking process related to various information that has been widely circulated and has become a public concern during the Covid-19 pandemic has become a basis that should be upheld and applied by professional journalists in carrying out their reporting, writing, and publishing tasks through the mass media where they work.

Factuality and verification of information are at the core of journalism that is committed to the truth so that whatever is conveyed to the public who access the information has been verified with high journalism standards (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). The verification process is carried out by finding as much data as possible through legitimate sources to be written as news. There are two essential elements in the process of verifying information sources, namely the media content and the media resources themselves. In other words, the results of fact-checking depend very much on the source and ability of a fact-checking journalist from a credible mass media. Now, fact-checking is not only a digital journalism activity, as several digital applications facilitate this activity. Fact-checking journalism is developing into a new genre in digital journalism. Fact-

checking journalism activities are often carried out outside the usual journalism habits, specifically by collaborating between one media company and various other mass media. This collaborative work was facilitated by the Cekfakta.com platform and mass media organizations such as AMSI, which was later attributed to as a manifestation of hypermedia organizations, such as those carried out by *Kompas.com* and *Solopos.com*.

Kompas.com and Solopos.com supporting the movement against hoaxes by fact-checking news. This fact-check report was increasingly published during the Covid-19 pandemic with a lot of confusing information facing hoax that circulating on the internet. Hoax or fake news became one of the challenges for the work of journalists who are agents of the cutting edge information and reporting accurate and reliable in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, several mass media companies such as *Kompas.com* and *Solopos.com* formed fact-checking teams to ward off the hoax. *Kompas.com* is one of the national mass media partners for the Cekfakta.com site which was initiated by Masyarakat Antifitnah Indonesia (MAFINDO), which created a collaborative fact-checking project. The collaboration project which was released on May 5 2018 was also supported by some other journalist organizations such as Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI), Asosiasi Media Siber Indonesia (AMSI), and Google News Institute (Herman, 2018). The collaborative project is motivated to verify the facts and misinformation rampant hoax alarming because they influence public opinion and threaten democracy. 22 cyber media in Indonesia have become partner media for *Cekfakta.com*, including *Kompas.com*. Meanwhile, *Solopos.com*, which is a member of AMSI and a subsidiary of Bisnis Indonesia, which owns the Bisnis.com news portal, is also active in publishing fact-check reports.

*Kompas.com* has consistently published fact-check reports, including those related to infodemics during the Covid-19 pandemic. Likewise, *Solopos.com* as a regional news portal with a fairly wide reach in Central Java which is registered as a member of AMSI is also quite active in publishing fact-check reports as an effort to ward off hoaxes, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on the observations of researchers, fact-checking reports from *Kompas.com* and *Solopos.com* received a positive response and were used as a reference by the public to find out the truth of information or claims related to Covid-19 on the Internet and social media whose truth was unknown or even called a hoax. Moreover, Solo city is the first region in Indonesia that establishes the status of extraordinary events due to the Covid-19 pandemic which converts all social order and leads to the more uncontrolled spread of information.

Based on the background, this study described the practice of journalists of *Kompas.com* and *Solopos.com* in verifying and checking facts on infodemic content and rumors related to Covid-19 on social media. This is because the basic principle of journalism is upholding the principle of verifying facts and the truth of information before it is submitted to the public.

**METHODOLOGY**

Most research on journalism is based on qualitative interviews or text analysis (Broersma & Graham, 2013). The primary data in this study were obtained through a qualitative interview method on six journalists in charge of fact checking in online newspapers *Kompas.com* and *Solopos.com*. The data obtained were then analyzed by using thematic analysis based on a pre-determined theme. Thematic analysis is a way of analyzing data to identify patterns or find certain themes through the data that have been collected (Braun & Clarke, 2012). There were several steps that we proceeded in carrying out thematic analysis, namely

understanding the data, compiling the code, and looking for themes from the primary data obtained from the interview. In addition, we also relied on multiple sources of information obtained through observation and document analysis in the form of text and audio-visual.

This study was a qualitative research to describe certain phenomena in detail. Qualitative research aims to describe the details of phenomena to build understanding and help researchers draw conclusions (Creswell, 2016). The purpose of this study was to describe how journalists at *Solopos.com* and *Kompas.com* worked to straighten out the infodemics that were spread on social media through news in the mass media as well as through a rigorous fact-checking process according to the principles of the Journalistic's Code of Ethics.

This study was conducted in the period of August to September 2020. The journalists at *Solopos.com* were chosen, because they represented local-based online mass media who were quite active in checking facts related to infodemics and rumors during the Covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, *Kompas.com* is one of the national-scale online newspapers that is quite active in broadcasting fact-check news related to infodemics in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, locally, nationally, and to the international scene.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
### Information Gathering

The process of gathering information by journalists in the digital era is facilitated by the presence of internet technology and social media (Safori, 2018). In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the information on the internet and social media is almost unlimited. All information in the form of issues, rumors, and hoaxes can be found easily on the internet, especially social media that enable journalists to gather initial information as news material (Pathak, 2018), especially in regard to the Covid-19

issue. The journalists who were the informants in this study said that the process of gathering information related to rumors and infodemics during the Covid-19 pandemic was carried out by monitoring Google Trends, trending topics on Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, and keywords that readers were looking for in each mass media through Google Analytics. It is not uncommon for them to take advantage of the warm conversation in instant messaging application groups, such as Whatsapp and Telegram. The issues that were mostly discussed by people on social media during the pandemic were health tips to prevent the transmission of Covid-19, Covid-19 drugs, and comments on statements of public figures in the issue of the Covid-19.

*"As a journalist, sometimes I monitor people's conversations on social media. It becomes important to find out what issues are being discussed a lot. I usually monitor issues around Covid-19 through Google Trends, Google Analytics, trending topics on Twitter and Instagram. This information can become material for fact-check coverage, because not all issues or rumors or claims that are publicly discussed on social media can be justified".* **(Y1, a journalist at Kompas.com)**

In the digital era, social media has become an important tool for professional journalistic work at both the institutional and individual levels (Ferrucci, 2018). Social media can also be used to search, collect, transfer, and check any information (Gloviczki & Gloviczki, 2015), especially in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Social media can also rely on building online collaboration for fact-checking through a new crowd-sourcing method for preparing journalistic reports. Social media contains the latest issues that are currently trending discussions among the public and can be used by journalists as material for in-depth coverage of the coverage issue (Lindén, 2017). At the level of social institution,

social media influences journalism by forcing journalists to write and report news about certain topics that become a concern to the public (JRN, 2018). In other words, online journalists cannot avoid the topic as long as they want to get public attention. Yet, the journalists should understand that not all contents on social media can be justified.

Therefore, journalists should uphold the principle of verification as one of the footholds in the journalistic's Code of Ethics (Winarto, 2017). It cannot be denied that the use of social media as a source of information among journalists is something commonly done in the digital era marked by the development of the internet (Paulussen & Harder, 2014). Actually, finding the truth about something is the main task of journalists to serve the public interest for accurate and qualified information (Siregar, 2006). Yet practically, the journalists often find it difficult to collect, use, and validate content on social media as a newsworthy source of information. Along with the use of social media as a source of information, analyzing the conversation patterns of netizens on social media is a vital action for journalists who are quite exhausting (Pradhan & Kumari, 2018). In addition to ensuring the accuracy of the information, the journalists must also trace the content creator. In this condition, the journalists face the challenge of filtering and finding the truth of information obtained from social media (Backholm et al., 2017).

"*Filtering and gathering information that deserves to be further explored and published as a fact-check report is a challenge for me as a journalist. In one day, there is a lot of confusing information that we can collect, so that we have to sort carefully which issues are most urgent to be reported* ". **(Y2, a journalist at Solopos.com)**

The previous fact is in line with the results of Backholm's study (2017) which shows that journalists experience a number of challenges in filtering the enormous amount of content on social media to be reported (Backholm et al., 2017). On the one hand, social media is a source of *up-to-date* information that has an abundance of data, although not all data can be trusted simply. Particularly in the midst of an emergency situation, the rate of information on social media is actually getting faster. Combating hoaxes and correcting unknown rumors are not new things to the journalistic work undertaken by journalists in credible mass media, such as *Solopos.com* and *Kompas.com*. Along with the ease of accessing information and the ease of producing content, hoaxes and various confusing information are increasingly being encountered, especially in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic which often triggers unrest.

The use of social media as an initial source in news writing by mainstream media journalists shows a shift in work patterns of journalism (Dörr & Hollnbuchner, 2017). Scientific data on the number of journalists using social media is hard to find. However, the majority of journalists in the digital age use Twitter and Facebook for professional purposes (Hermida, 2013; Oriella PR Network, 2013). Currently, it is almost impossible for journalists not to get any news in a day, because they can use social media as an initial source of information. Since 2010 until the present time, Facebook and Twitter have become the social media mostly being used by journalists as initial sources of information (Pradhan & Kumari, 2018). Even today, the mass media and journalists perceive Twitter as another social media to map public conversations in cyberspace.

As response, Hermida (2010) mentions social media as an ambient environment where journalists can monitor the flow of news and information while detecting emerging conversational trends (Hermida, 2010). Yet presently, a number of researchers have wondered about the extent of social media's influence on journalistic products. The question is

whether social media have a potency to change the professionalism of journalists' work or not (Paulussen & Harder, 2014). It is reasonable that in the last five years, a lot of news has been published in the mainstream mass media, and the news is obtained from social media.

"*Not all contents on social media can be used as a source of information. There is a truth verification process that must be done by journalists. This verification process is usually quite time consuming because it requires a long process. Including finding out the root of the information and ensure who spread it is not an instant job* ". **(Y6, a journalist at *Solopos.com*)**

**Fact-Checking**

Basically, the working principle of a journalist is based on the truth by prioritizing fact verification in reporting or searching for information, writing and publishing news, especially in the midst of a crisis situation, such as the Covid-19 pandemic (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). Because news is a material used by people to study and think about the world outside themselves, the information presented by journalists through mass media should be reliable and proven to be true. However, the truth can always be revised as in the practice of journalism. Truth, at the journalistic level, is not philosophical truth, but truth in the functional level which is formed through a long process (Harsono, 2012). Journalists should pay attention to every detail of fact and search for the truth beyond the fact. If it is related to the infodemics during the Covid-19 pandemic, journalists must be highly diligent in checking the facts and careful in writing them to be the news that will be broadcasted through mass media.

It is the duty of journalists to check facts regarding the correctness of information to educate and rectify misunderstandings among the public. Meanwhile, the journalists' efforts to ward off infodemics are divided into two processes, namely fact-finding and publishing fact-check reports. The *Solopos.com* editorial team has a fact-check team consisting of six journalists, editorial team, reporters and editors who have different tasks. Meanwhile, the fact-checking team members at *Kompas.com* editorial staff are fronted by two journalists and several other journalists who also help to straighten out the distribution of misinformation or disinformation consisting of editorial team, editors, and content creators. The fact-checking team in the two online mass media is formed to straighten out the misinformation and disinformation circulating along with the development of the internet and social media, including things happen during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the infodemics during the Covid-19 pandemic are considered highly dangerous; they could even be far more dangerous than the outbreak.

"*Misinformation and disinformation or what is later referred to as an infodemic is dangerous, because it is potentially misleading. In a health crisis situation, invalid information can be very dangerous; for example the consumption of certain drugs without medical referrals. So, in my opinion, tracing the facts related to this becomes something the journalists must do to help cope with a pandemic by educating the public*". **(Y3, a journalist at *Kompas.com*)**

Furthermore, the fact-finding process related to infodemics begins with monitoring the developing issues accompanied by the circulation of information on social media. Practically, responding hoaxes every day has its own challenges, because it is widely circulated on Whatsapp groups, social media, and various other digital platforms. Misinformation and disinformation often spread in the form of text, images, and audio visuals. The process of ensuring this information is a lengthy and challenging process. After obtaining newsworthy

information, the journalists usually verify in the traditional way, namely through *face-to-face* interviews, telephone, or email with sources deemed competent (Backholm et al., 2017). This obstacle is one of the causes of the spread of infodemics in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"*So far, what has been done is verifying viral information on social media, or on Whatsapp groups. Whether it is a matter of health information and others about Covid-19. The work process is not much different from the usual journalistic work. Confirming to the authorities, or conduct literature studies if it is related to health, and interview those who are competent. If there is misinformation/disinformation related to photos/videos, digital searches are also carried out*". **(Y5, a journalist at Kompas.com)**

There are a number of digital tools used in the fact-checking process; from Google Reverse Image to check the authenticity of images and the Fake News Debunker application to analyze video content. Fact-checking can also be done using Google Earth feature to ascertain the location of an image or video on social media. Meanwhile, the way to check the authenticity of social media accounts used to spread infodemics can be done by using the *twopcharts.com* application, *Intelligence X*, to *Followerwonk*. All these hoax debunking processes have a series of challenges, because they require carefulness, especially in paying attention to low-resolution images and videos that circulate on social media.

Journalists' efforts to break the chain of infodemic distribution in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic are not easy to implement. Source has become an integral part of the news production process. The journalists tend to rely on official sources such as the government in writing news (Backholm et al., 2017). However, during a pandemic, it is possible that the statements from the authorities may develop into a misleading infodemic. In addition, the development of social media is extraordinary and has made the flow of information flow unstoppable. The progress of the internet and social media is a challenge for journalists to collect information and carry out verification, because the characteristics of social media support an easy access, connectivity and anonymity (Al-Rawi, 2019). This thing has made information on social media, especially related to Covid-19 that tends to be difficult to verify.

In regard to this, the fact-checking process becomes more complicated if the information on the internet and social media is already trusted by the public as long as it comes from the official speech or statement of public figures. For example, the claim of an anti-corona necklace made of eucalyptus was conveyed by the Ministry of Agriculture Syahrul Yasin Limpo and a statement about the Solo's Covid-19 black zone reported by the Chairperson of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Covid-19 Handling in the Solo City, Ahyani has also claimed the efficacy of anti-corona virus eucalyptus necklaces conveyed by Syahrul Yasin Limpo that the necklace has generated a polemic (Andany, 2020). This information has made *Kompas.com* fact-check team actively investigate the truth of the information, starting from looking for scientific journals as well as interviewing health experts who are capable to explain the properties of eucalyptus which is claimed to be effective in warding off the corona virus. Even that the journalists have carefully studied a number of literature which discuss the benefits of eucalyptus. Based on the interviews with some experts and literature studies, there is no scientific evidence related to the claims made by Syahrul Yasin Limpo, and that the Ministry of Agriculture has officially explained that the necklace was not anti-virus, but a health accessory (Nursastri, 2020).

Likewise, Ahyani's statement regarding the status of Solo City as a black

zone area has caused controversy. At that time, as Chair of the Covid-19 Handling Task Force in the City of Solo, Ahyani stated that Solo was included in the Covid-19 black zone which shows the high transmission of Covid-19 in the area (Isnanto, 2020). This news has become a headline in several online news sites, both on a local or national scale. In this case, misinformation was also spread due to some of the authorities who were not careful enough to lead to misunderstanding. This statement has even made the Governor of Central Java, Ganjar Pranowo inflamed, because he was considered excessive (Saputra, 2020). To straighten out this information, the *Solopos.com* fact-checking team conducted a re-interview with Ahyani to the Mayor of Solo to confirm the meaning of his statement. The fact-check team also conducted a literature study on Covid-19 zoning in Indonesia. Based on the results of the fact-check, it is known that Ahyani's statement was conveyed to make the public more aware of the dangers of the Covid-19, because there is actually no 'black' title in the Covid-19 zoning in Indonesia context (Ricky, 2020; Sushmita, 2020).

"*This fact-check is conducted to find out the truth of claims submitted by officials. In this case, journalists play their role as watchdogs. It is expected that those in authority will not arbitrarily issue statements in a crisis situation that triggers panic and confusion in the minds of the public*". **(Y4, a journalist at Solopos.com)**

**The Issuance of Fact-Check Reports**

The work process of journalists in Indonesia during the Covid-19 pandemic refers to the Press Council Regulation Number 5/Regulation-DP-IV/2008 concerning the Professional Protection Standards for Journalists (Press Council Regulation, 2008). This regulation is the basis for journalists to carry out their reporting duties in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic with all the risks that threaten their safety. The Press Council appeals to journalists to continue to carry out their sacred duties during the Covid-19 pandemic. The journalists are required to continue to present accurate current news to the public about the development of Covid-19 in Indonesia by obeying a series of appeals issued by the Press Council, starting from referring to the principles of journalistic code of ethics (KEJ), accurate reporting in a balanced manner with no bad intentions, and carried out proportionally (Press Council, 2020). Thus, the truth of the news conveyed to the public can be accounted, because it is written through a long filtering and verification process.

"*In writing any news, the principles of cover both side and verification are very important. Especially if the initial source of this news was viral content on social media. It is impossible for the news to be published if the verification process is not complete*". **(Y1, a journalist at Kompas.com)**

In the above regulations, the mass media must pay attention to the aspects of the broad public interest before broadcasting news of the Covid-19. The newsroom of the mass media should not cause public panic as much as possible with the news broadcast. Furthermore, the mass media should not contain patient identities, photos, and addresses, because they are the victims whose privacy must be respected. Finally, the mass media and health authorities can collaborate to deliver information that provides certainty, because most of the rumors and infodemics during the Covid-19 pandemic are in the scope of health. Besides, the mass media as a press institution should not produce news for sensation and potentially disturbing the public.

Various infodemics have emerged since the first case of Covid-19 in Indonesia on March 2, 2020 up to the present time. Every day, there are dozens

of hoax debunking reports or fact-checks uploaded by online newspapers and official government websites to straighten out various hoaxes or information that is not yet clear, but has already spread on social media and consumed by the public. This vague information can be deliberately created and disseminated to mislead the public. Ironically, this variety of information can also spread not only on social media, but also in news aggregators that make the public confused about whether the information is true or false (Barua et al., 2020). Almost everyone in the world (including the journalists), assess the abundance of information with unclear source (infodemic) in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic as a serious problem (Suciu, 2020). Moreover, the internet is flooded with a variety of information that is not necessarily true and it can even be false information or hoax.

The journalists who are part of the *Solopos.com* and *Kompas.com* fact-checking team state that the spread of rumors, misinformation, and disinformation (infodemics) in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic is very dangerous for society. During the pandemic, the public has received a lot of information which sometimes caused confusion. In this study, the journalists say that the most widely circulated infodemic is information which relates to health, where it can be highly dangerous as long as cross-check is not implemented; moreover the information is conveyed by public figures, such as artists, influencers, and officials. Therefore, the spread of infodemic has become uncontrolled, because almost everyone has experienced a panic due to the crisis situation during the pandemic.
"*The task of all journalists is to check facts. It is an exception for this infodemic, the writing of the headline must be clear, so as not to cause misunderstanding. It means that when we write the title, we also have to think about the effect when the news is delivered to the readers*". (**Y6, a journalist at *Solopos.com***)

Furthermore, the news written based on the results of fact-checking and broadcast through *Solopos.com* and *Kompas.com* is always accompanied by affirmative diction, such as fact-checking, hoaxes, and clarification in the title section to attract the attention of readers. The selection of the title and writing of the news narrative is adjusted to the style of the respective mass media. The journalists also often create titles with a *click bait* formula to broadcast fact-check results as a trigger or inducement to the public. On the other hand, the headlines are sometimes made in-length to place the search results related to circulating infodemics. The fact-check news is expected to be able to educate and rectify public misunderstandings regarding something that is considered true, but actually wrong.
"*We always put traced facts in the title, such as hoaxes, false information, false claims, or clarifications. Writing this title is very important, so that people as readers immediately know whether this information is true or not by reading the title*". (**Y3, a journalist *Kompas.com***)

Fact-checking reports that were published by *Kompas.com* can be shared on the Cekfakta.com website. The content can be quoted by other mass media including Solopos.com following the applicable provisions in the CyberMedia Guidelines, which mentions the news sources quoted. This kind of process shows that fact-checking journalism is the result of collaborative hypermedia organizations. Publishing a fact-check report is not an easy task, because there is a lot of process that must be done beforehand. Fact verification must be done by journalists in publishing news related to Covid-19, because the problem in this pandemic is not only the spread of disease outbreaks, but also the circulation of rumors and misinformation that abound on the internet. In this case, World Health Organization (WHO) says that journalists and media workers play an important role in saving people's lives in a fight against

Coronavirus Infodemic (Muqsith, 2020). In a welcoming video on World Press Freedom Day 2020, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated that the press was an antidote for the misinformation pandemic that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. The press can help to counteract and straighten out infodemics through verified, scientific, and fact-based news and analysis (Krisdamarjati & Chrysna, 2020). It is true that it is the duty of journalists to overcome the abundance of unverified information by checking the truth. It means that the journalists must ensure that the news being broadcasted through the mass media is based on truth; not opinion, and it is based on scientific judgment; not speculation.

Walter Lippmann, a well-known journalist in New York, United States in 1919 ever said that a journalist must master any science. Meanwhile, Andreas Harsono argues that journalism is a carpentry skill, so that the journalists should study various disciplines which will later be useful for them in carrying out their tasks. In daily work practices, the journalists should emphasize objectivity in carrying out verification. Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel explain that the concrete method of verification begins with the skeptical editing of the manuscript written independently by the journalists, checking for accuracy, and avoiding personal assumptions (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). Verification is sufficiently important in journalism, because it affects readers' trust. Journalists must be honest about what they know through the news presented in the mass media.

Furthermore, professional journalists should broadcast factual and verified information, particularly in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, because the mass media is the spearhead of news coverage to educate and raise public optimism. The results of a study from the Reuters Institute found that 60% of respondents in six countries in the world admitted that journalism-based mass media helped them to understand the situation during the Covid-19 pandemic, because the information conveyed was much more accurate than on social media (Pollack et al., 2020). Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel explain that journalism exists to build citizenship. Journalism exists to fulfill citizens' rights and support the democratic process (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). Although the face of journalism has changed due to technological advances, but principally the goal of journalism remains the same, that is to provide any information, so that they can live and organize themselves. Thus, the publication of a fact-check report must be absolutely clear to justify rumors and misinformation that the public already believes.

## CONCLUSION

The spread of rumors and infodemics or misinformation and disinformation on the internet during the Covid-19 pandemic is a new challenge for journalists' work. The journalists still carry out fact-checking to fulfill their sacred duty in the midst of pandemic; that is to serve readers by presenting qualified and verified information, because the main principle in journalism is to verify facts found in the field and package them into accurate, comprehensive, and enlightening news. Besides, the journalists in the division of fact-checking at *Solopos.com* and *Kompas.com* have carried out a series of verification processes to confirm or justify rumors, misinformation, and disinformation (infodemics) during the Covid-19 pandemic through digital technology, expert interviews, and literature studies. The fact-check report is published as an effort to educate the public regarding the dangers of the Covid-19 outbreak and as a watchdog for statements and policies taken by the government in dealing with the outbreak. The fact-check results are published in the formatting style of the online newspaper *Solopos.com* and *Kompas.com*. The content is also often

re-uploaded on the *Cekfakta.com* site which can be quoted by other mass media. This process shows that fact-checking journalism is the result of collaborative hypermedia organizations.

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