

## AFP: News agency or a cog in TikTok?

**SUD would like to thank management for having made the effort to respond to our tract and petition to the Higher Council concerning the contract with TikTok, in which we laid out our concerns about the work not meeting AFP's editorial standards. Even if management didn't respond directly to many of our arguments, its October 2 communiqué was quite revealing.**

First of all, **management recognized that our work for TikTok is part of its content moderation system and not journalism.** This is crucially important as it aligns with our view that verifications we do for TikTok are not journalism, in contrast with the fact-checking, which is a form of journalism where AFP journalists respect strict editorial guidelines, such as the fact-checks we do on our own site <https://factcheck.afp.com/>.

Management also acknowledged that it shares a good number of our editorial and ethical concerns, including how the TikTok operation is structured. But in the end, management doesn't seem overly bothered by this work which we do exclusively for TikTok and which, in its words, functions "*as a cog in the broader moderation system*" of TikTok. And we do this from the newsroom, even when management recognizes that its hopes "*to influence processes from within*" TikTok have achieved results that "*are still insufficient*". If that is the case after several years, why continue?

### A very limited independence

Management also asserted: "*We work entirely independently, just as we do with any other stories, without relying solely on content sent by moderators*" from TikTok. This dodges the point that we are, according to our sources, contractually obliged to verify all the videos sent to us by TikTok, and this is what happens in practice. There is no editorial independence there, unlike our work with Meta (Facebook) where we retain the power to choose which posts to fact-check. Management referenced a recent report by the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN), which concluded that "*editorial independence is not included in the core process of the workflow*" for TikTok fact-checkers.

If our verification work for TikTok isn't journalism, why isn't it done by an agency subsidiary? This is already the case for corporate work, which is done by Factstory, thus isolating the newsroom from possible attempts to influence coverage by our big corporate clients. Shifting the TikTok contract to a subsidiary is the option SUD favors but management is opposed, and its reasons are telling. First, management considers it necessary for the verification work to be done in the newsroom as it says the work requires journalistic skills. This argument doesn't hold water as our Factstory subsidiary does journalistic work and employs journalists with press cards to do it.

## Buying the AFP label

Another explanation: TikTok requires media that serve its content moderators, like AFP, are members in organizations such as the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). As management pointed out, the platform must demonstrate to the European authorities its seriousness in the fight against disinformation, which it fulfills by engaging "*independent fact-checkers who adhere to shared standards and norms*". But our verifications for TikTok don't meet those *shared standards and norms* which require *transparency to readers* about how fact-checkers arrive at their conclusions. That transparency that doesn't exist for the verifications AFP does for TikTok which are not published. It does for AFP Fact Check which has IFCN certification. In other words: our moderation for TikTok doesn't meet the standards for journalism, but TikTok requires (and pays) for the "AFP label" and lets everyone think it's quality journalism.

## A model for France?

Finally, management said it is open to discussing this subject with the trade unions. This is commendable and no doubt necessary. But SUD is already worried about the day, which could arrive soon, when we're asked to do these TikTok verifications on a large scale in France as the European Commission is putting pressure on social networks to step up their fight against disinformation. For SUD, it is out of the question that journalists are forced to carry out tasks that are incompatible with their professional status.

French lawmakers in 1957 charged AFP with a mission: furnishing a *complete and objective information service* that provides the public with *exact, impartial and trustworthy information*. SUD petitioned the Higher Council in the hope it will make recommendations to preserve this mission. SUD's petition doesn't call for AFP to drop TikTok, Facebook or Instagram; or to renounce reaching out to younger audiences; or to "*sit out this battle*" against misinformation. We simply want AFP to remain a news agency serving the public and not a "*cog*" in social networking platforms.

Paris, October 16, 2024

**SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)**

