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Update from the Global News Management team regarding AFP's partnership with TikTok

The letter sent by SUD to the *Conseil Supérieur* (AFP's Supervisory Board) on 30 September raises several points regarding the work the Agency has done with TikTok. While we are not responding to all the points raised at this stage, we believe it's important to revisit the beginning of our partnership with the social media platform, where we currently stand, and our ongoing considerations.

Our contractual relationship with TikTok began in 2020 when the platform was seeking reliable partners for its new fact-checking programme, amidst widespread misinformation surrounding COVID-19. At that time, our teams were frequently questioned about why AFP was absent from TikTok. Misinformation on the app was already rampant (as highlighted in this report from [Newsguard](#)), therefore we decided to engage with an imperfect programme rather than remain on the sidelines.

Refusing to do so would have been a mistake, given that the fast-growing, dynamic app reaches an audience vastly different from that of Twitter or Facebook — significantly younger, with the vast majority of its users in France aged 13 to 24 in 2024, according to [Statista](#). TikTok now has 1.2 billion active users, attracting a significant audience that rarely consumes information through traditional media. The sharp decline in public trust in the media, exacerbated by information bubbles, compels us to act directly where misinformation thrives. The stakes are high, and AFP cannot afford to sit out this battle.

However, from the outset, we raised concerns about the structure of TikTok's fact-checking programme. It requires journalistic expertise, yet operates within the app's back office, functioning as a cog in the broader moderation system.

TikTok's fact-checking programme, which is the same for all media partners, integrates verification into the moderation process. Moderators send videos to journalists for fact-checking and then retrieve them post-verification to determine the appropriate level of moderation to be applied. Journalists have no visibility over the impact of their work, nor does the public have transparency regarding the role of fact-checkers in the process. This lack of transparency has been consistently highlighted in our regular discussions with TikTok, right from the start. Earlier this year, these concerns were also mentioned in the latest [report](#) from the European Fact-Checking Standards Network ([EFCSN](#)), of which AFP is a co-founder and active member.

We have always believed, as with all our relationships with digital platforms, that engaging in regular dialogue with TikTok would enable us to influence processes from within. We have dedicated considerable effort to making improvements, which are also acknowledged in the EFCSN report, although we recognise that these changes are still insufficient. We independently flag false and misleading content (rather than solely relying on information suggested by moderators), and TikTok has shown a keen interest in these reports. Additionally, we are advocating for the implementation of labels to provide more context on moderated content for users of the app, instead of merely reducing visibility without adequate explanation. This ongoing editorial dialogue is a long-term endeavour, characterised by small victories and, inevitably, some frustrations along the way.

We have published fact-checks based mainly on harmful content circulating on TikTok (see examples [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) in French, or [here](#) and [here](#) in English). We work entirely independently, just as we do with any other stories, without relying solely on content sent by moderators. We consider these articles important for the public interest. Moreover, the additional monitoring we can carry out on this complex platform through our back-office access is valuable for the Agency's broader work.

Taking part in this programme has allowed us to demonstrate our expertise to TikTok's teams, enabling us to finally achieve our primary goal: gaining visible on the app with journalistic content, media literacy, and efforts to combat misinformation. While this


doesn't fully resolve the programme's shortcomings, it gives us significant visibility, as evidenced by these three videos ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), which have garnered over 2 million views.

A subsidiary model has been suggested as a solution to these issues with TikTok's fact-checking programme. We explored this option over a year ago but ultimately rejected it for two reasons:

- While fact-checking takes place in the app's back office, it requires journalistic skills and proper training.
- TikTok, like other signatories of the [Code of Practice on Disinformation](#) — which is soon to become a Code of Conduct under the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) — is required to work with independent fact-checkers who adhere to shared standards and norms. Membership in organisations such as the International Fact-Checking Network ([IFCN](#)) is a prerequisite for participating in TikTok's fact-checking programme, and a subsidiary would not meet these requirements.

Finally, this fact-checking programme has allowed us to hire digital investigation journalists in various regions worldwide, whose work goes far beyond this programme. These journalists are a valuable asset in our broader mission to combat misinformation in the public interest.

The Global News Management team is available to unions for further discussions on this matter.

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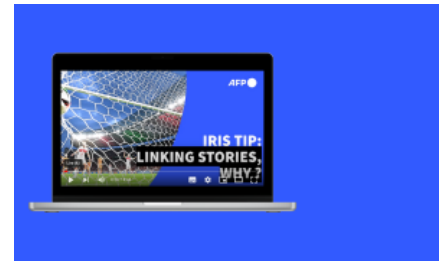
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