

Fact-checking as Process and Product: How Kenyan & Senegalese Media Professionals Combat Misinformation

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Abstract

- The spread of mis- and disinformation around the world has led to the emergence of professional responses embedded both within and adjacent to traditional journalistic practice.
- The rise of fact-checking organizations and initiatives is one example of these responses.
- Drawing on 32 interviews, this paper describes fact-checking along two dimensions, internal-external and process-product, and offers an emerging typology of this growing professional practice.

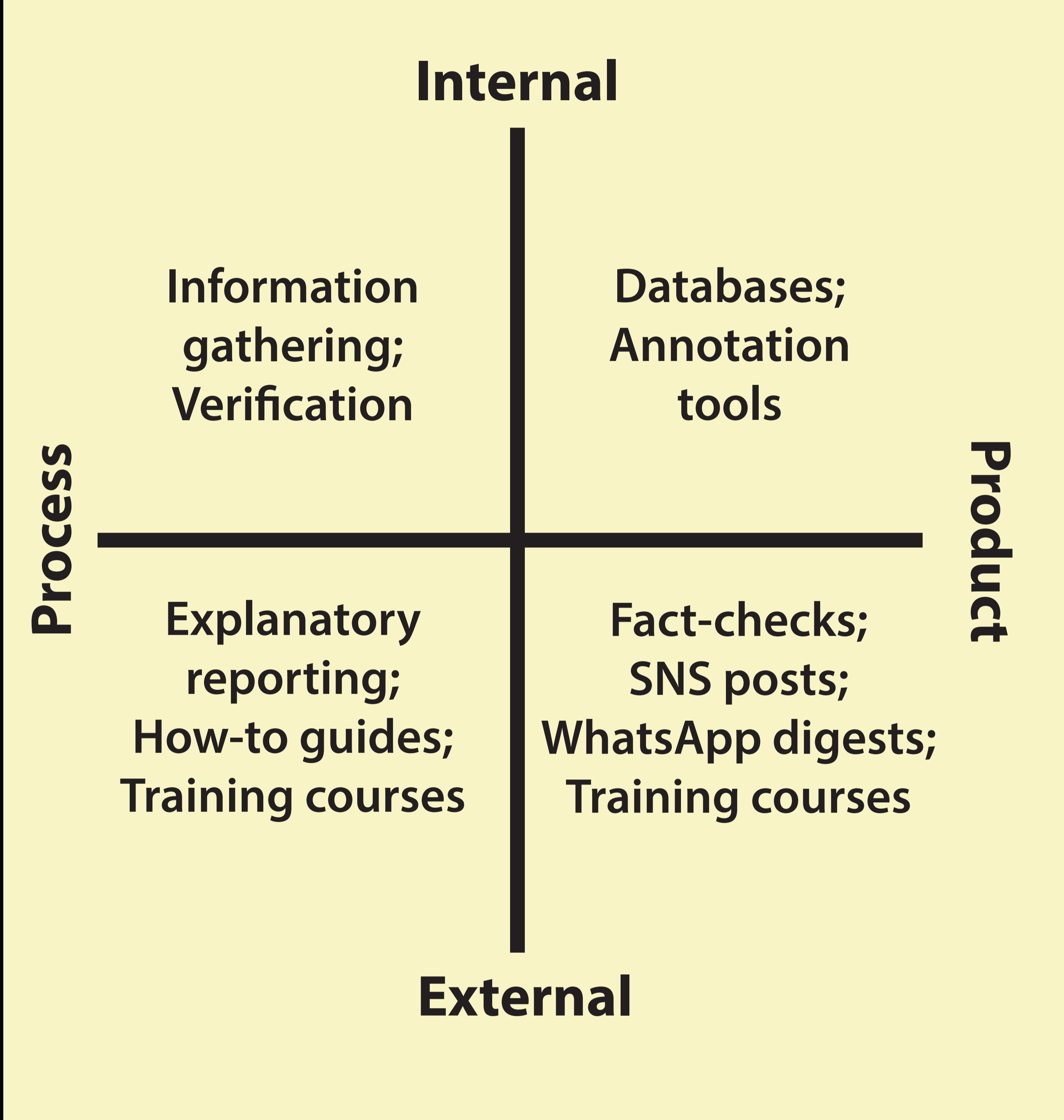
Background

- Research has found that fact-checking is viewed as both a process and a product that is both within and outside the bounds of journalism and newswork and that fact-checking can be leveraged to address false information from circulating, particularly online.
- Fact-checking can be viewed as internal or external to organizations. Internal fact-checking is embedded in journalistic practice, while external is a response to information that has been published.
- Understanding both the “process” and “product” duality and the “internal” versus “external” nature of fact-checking is critical to understanding professional practices and products intended to combat the spread of mis- and disinformation globally.

Methods

- We draw on 32 interviews conducted between March & June 2021 with current and former journalists and fact-checkers in Kenya (N = 16) and Senegal (N = 16).
- We explored a) views around fact-checking as a practice and as a response to misinformation, b) experiences with internal and external fact-checking, and c) guiding professional and ethical principles.
- Participants often take on multiple roles and responsibilities related to fact-checking and cross the internal - external and process - product lines in their work.

A Typology of Fact-Checking



What do professionals says?

“ The other aspect that we play and that we intend to pursue is to ensure that as many journalists as possible, or at least that more journalists, are introduced to fact-checking techniques. This is the work we are doing, and we encourage all those who work in the field of press freedom to step into this.

Fact-checking editor in Senegal

“ We find that we do better when we put our work in formats that move a bit faster. So social media videos, short videos on social media gets good viewership. When we share them on social media, they get really well received... The reports do well, but we find that there are certain formats that do a bit better getting information out.

Kenyan fact-checker

Key takeaways

- #1: Internal fact-checking processes are supported by various tools (or products) and external products rely on not only sharing facts or correcting misinformation, but also articulate processes and products to both showcase how professionals do their work and to encourage audiences to do the same.
- #2: Some external outcomes, like trainings and workshops, are situated at the intersection of internal-external and process-product lines, as fact-checkers work to export their approach to other professionals and audiences.

- #3: Internally, fact-checkers and journalists use free and widely available tools like Google reverse image search and Google Maps, as well as more advanced tools (e.g., video verification software).
- #4: Practitioners also follow clear steps in their fact-checking processes. These steps are determined by their organization and later packaged as external process-products.
- #5: The two countries we focus on, which are understudied in journalism research, are good examples of the emergence of journalistic practices connected to the spread of mis- and disinformation.

