

# **GOOGLE, FACEBOOK AND TWITTER COULD DO MORE TO SURFACE FACT-CHECKS ABOUT CORONAVIRUS**

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<https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2020/google-facebook-and-twitter-could-do-more-to-surface-fact-checks-about-coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR2sMXprHOSsrEnfinGvVhrsZO5-zUfNuV9MNoRefO5KtrzEzIGVz0TSXg>

**Between Jan. 22 and Feb. 5, 41 fact-checking organizations around the world have published 211 fact-checks about the 2019 coronavirus using ClaimReview, the infrastructure built by Schema.org to help fact-checks be surfaced by Google and used by social media platforms like Facebook.**

Among those 211 fact-checks, published in 15 languages across the globe, 199 alerted audiences about content considered false, partially false, mostly false and/or inaccurate. Only 12 were about true claims, photos and videos spread on the internet.

This week the International Fact-Checking Network took a deep dive into the ClaimReview database provided by the Duke Reporters' Lab and extracted these numbers. They show that the collaborative project launched Jan. 24 with the hashtags #CoronaVirusFacts and #DatosCoronaVirus, with the support of almost 90 fact-checkers, is very much needed.

But the data also sheds light on another topic: Google can find more than 200 fact checks in 15 different languages — all coming from authoritative sources — but it has failed to provide those fact-checks effectively and consistently among the top results of Google searches.

This week, the IFCN asked fact-checkers in the collaborative project to search “coronavirus” (in their own language) using Google in a private browser. After that, they printed the first 10 results and shared them with the organization.

On Feb. 4, fact-checkers from the Netherlands, India, Sri Lanka, France, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina sent screenshots — and none of them showed fact-checks about the lethal virus in the top 10 search results. That includes the ones they published and the ones other platforms in their countries had produced.

**See the [raw data from the Duke Reporters' Lab](#)**

**See the [images collected by fact-checkers](#)**

According to this set of images, Google appears to have opted to show the latest news — created by reputable media outlets — in the top results, followed by links to official sources like the World Health Organization. Undoubtedly, these are important sources of information, but fact-checkers the world over expressed dismay that their fact checks weren't registering higher in Google's rankings, especially considering the tsunami of hoaxes around the coronavirus, respecting no boundaries or time zones.

In response to questions about the search results that fact-checkers got, Google sent a list of what's been done to fight misinformation about the coronavirus. It emphasized that the company is "committed to providing timely and helpful information to people around the world" and said that it even issued a \$250,000 direct grant to the Chinese Red Cross. Yesterday, Google also launched an **SOS Alert**, in partnership with the **World Health Organization**.

"This way, when people search for information related to coronavirus on Google Search, they'll find the SOS Alert at the top of the results page. This alert will provide direct access to news, safety tips, information and resources from the WHO website, and the latest updates from WHO on Twitter," Google press relations representatives wrote in an email to the IFCN.

Regarding the fact-checking universe, Google said that "when available, we show **fact-check labels in Google Search and News** to signpost where claims have been verified by independent fact-checkers."

In recent weeks, members of the IFCN network have contacted Google to suggest a few other ideas. The content has been kept off the record.

### **What is Facebook doing?**

In **June 2018**, Facebook said it would "start working with our fact-checking partners to use **Schema.org**'s Claim Review (...). This will make it easier for fact-checkers to share ratings with Facebook and help us respond faster, especially in times of crisis."

During the coronavirus outbreak, however, the lack of data coming from the company is still an issue. When the IFCN asked them the number of hoaxes related to the coronavirus that has been debunked in the platform through the Third Party Fact-Checking Program, Facebook said that it couldn't share this information "on behalf of the partners" and suggested a one-to-one contact.

This week the IFCN learned that Facebook has taken different steps in different regions to fight coronavirus hoaxes.

"Facebook Taiwan contacted me and asked me for advice on what kinds of misinformation my team was seeing, how they are spreading, and if I could share some fact-checks as examples. The person was preparing for a meeting and said that my advice would also be forwarded to Facebook in Singapore," said Summer Chen, the editor in chief of Taiwan Fact-Check Center.

In India, Facebook built a WhatsApp channel with all fact-checking partners and a WHO representative.

"This is how the workflow is supposed to be: If we have to fact-check something related to the WHO or if the fact check requires some guidance from a medical expert, we add our queries to this WhatsApp channel," said Uzair Rizvi, a fact-checker from AFP India.

When the IFCN interviewed him, the channel had been active for 24 hours, one query had been posted (about Arsenic 30 being a viable cure to coronavirus) and no answer had been given so far.

In a **blog post** published Jan. 30, Facebook said that they are “working to limit the spread of misinformation and harmful content about the virus and connecting people to helpful information.”

The company reminded the readers about the partnership it launched with fact-checkers and also announced it would start to remove content with false claims or conspiracy theories that were considered dangerous by leading global health organizations and local health authorities. That would include posts, videos and images “that could cause harm to people who believe them.”

### **How about Twitter?**

For a few days now, those who search for coronavirus on Twitter find a link to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention with the message “Know the facts.” The handle @CDCGov is also offered as an easy way for users to stay informed — at least in English. But fact-checkers have shared ideas with the IFCN and want more support from the platform.

Yesterday, the Slack channel used by the fact-checking community to keep track of all that is being done during the alliance floated a few ideas that the IFCN should take to Twitter to strengthen the fight against disinformation there. One of them, for example, was creating and promoting Moments with fact-checked content internationally.

Read this article in Spanish at **Univision**.

### **Read the reports published by the #CoronaVirusFacts collaboration project**

Report #1 (published Jan. 28): **Coronavirus: Fact-checkers from 30 countries are fighting 3 waves of misinformation**

Report #2 (published Jan. 30): **Photos and videos allegedly showing the coronavirus are now challenging fact-checkers**

Report #3 (published Jan. 28): Panic and fear might be limiting human reasoning and fueling hoaxes about coronavirus

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*\*Coronavirus collaboration: The collaborative project, coordinated by the International Fact-Checking Network, was launched Jan. 24 and will be active for as long as the lethal disease spreads worldwide. Fact-checkers are using a shared Google Sheet and a Slack channel to share content and communicate in different time zones. Follow #CoronaVirusFacts and #DatosCoronaVirus on social media for the latest updates.*

