

# Combating political disinformation in Thailand by Kulachada Chaipipat, Consultant to Cofact Thailand

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# The context in which disinformation thrives in Asia Pacific region

- Democracy is in peril; the professional journalism as a pillar of democracy was suffering both from authoritarian suppression and economic pressure
- The news consumption shifted to social media platforms, particularly during the pandemic presenting more challenge to the media to produce quality journalism and survive; more news drama, parochial reporting that diluted the importance of facts and truth
- Deepening social divide drove audience to specific channels of communication that peddle information already aligned to their beliefs; closed groups and encrypted messages
- Evolving technology scales up disinformation both speed and access; platforms flooded with both good and bad actors; disinformation generated lucrative business as lies are juicier than the truth

## Context in Thailand

- The protracted political polarization has deepened the social divide further
- The weaponization of internet and social media platforms, notably Twitter, has escalated to disseminate disinformation, hate speech and incite violence employed by both the state and its non-state allies and their political opponents against one driving the society further into the echo chamber crisis.
- Thailand's 2019 general elections, the first in seven years since the military take-over the elected government in 2014, has failed to restore the country on a path of the national reconciliation

# Context in Thailand

- The elected regime in powers headed by the 2014 coup leader Gen Prayuth Chan O-cha and its conservative allies manipulated its parliamentary majority, use special powers under Section 44 of the Constitution to impose laws and regulations to restore peace and order, and influence the independent check and balance system to suppress political opponents and critics who insisted the reform of establishments and the constitutional amendment
- The ordinary citizens are being held hostage to bouts of political tussles among key political opponents
- The rise of youth-led anti-government street protests across the nation amid the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 to challenge the conservative establishment and their explicit and bold demand for the monarchical reform as fundamental to the country's future and democracy have caused the public unease, triggered the unprecedented. inter generational conflicts, particularly between the baby boomers and the younger generation

# Problems and challenge in combating political disinformation in Thailand

- Lack of consensus to fight political disinformation, partly due to the media polarization and self-censorship, and its failure to rationalize public debate on sensitive/pertinent problems confronting the society for fear of political backlash
- Social ignorance of history, particularly the struggle of democracy and authoritarian suppression
- State-sponsored disinformation plus state-operated fact checkers
- Digital literacy campaigns can not catch up with the scale of disinformation
- Capacity of fact checkers, limited due to lack of manpower and funding and fact checking skills needed to be enhanced

## Why does Cofact Thailand matter in the light of this political conundrum and toxic information ecosystem?

- To provide impartial civic space for fact-based, sensible and constructive political dialogue that could allow the voice of concerned citizens, other than those of political influencers to be heard
- To help enlarge the above-mentioned space in order to build a political consensus and alternative policy recommendations to break the current political impasse.

# About Cofact Thailand

- Cofact is a collaborative (crowd-sourced) fact checking platform modelled after Cofact Taiwan (factual, fast and fun)
- To seeks common truth via civic engagement in verifying online information and debunking false claims.
- More information and facts from crowd sourcing to each fact checking information will weigh on the true or false scale to determine whether the fact checked matter is true or false, or partially true or false.

# About Cofact Thailand

- Founded in 2020 at the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic, its first mission is to counter disinformation about Covid-19-related situations; government's response, alternative treatment, vaccine diplomacy, its efficacy and side effects. Other issues include health and alternative medicines.
- Recently, it involved into other issues about traffic, weather and with increasing inquiries about the political issues/memes/statement of facts and even opinions.
- The network operated under a small core team working on daily basis to verify news feeds and social media contents for information verification (Is it true?). It produced fact-checked report about a dozen daily.



## Next step

Strategic approaches and timely response to areas of problems relevant to the public interest and pressing problems

Health literacy

Political disinformation

Cyber crime

Link to the  
presentation  
of Cofact  
Thailand's  
two-year  
works

[https://www.canva.com/design/DAFG27zH\\_YY/4Botk5UdijO4dXvrZsYYOQ/edit?utm\\_content=DAFG27zH\\_YY&utm\\_campaign=designshere&utm\\_medium=link2&utm\\_source=sharebutton](https://www.canva.com/design/DAFG27zH_YY/4Botk5UdijO4dXvrZsYYOQ/edit?utm_content=DAFG27zH_YY&utm_campaign=designshere&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton)

Thank you