CIVIC-TECHNOLOGY: LESSON LEARNED FROM COFACT, A FACT-CHECKING PLATFORM IN THAILAND

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Abstract

Civic technology enables people to find information; one of the civic technologies is an anti-fake news platform. This research on Cofact (Thailand) is one example of the fake news investigator community in Thailand. This study explores user experiences using Cofact (Thailand) for fact-checking and sustainable fake news detection. Data were collected in June 2021 and analysed in July 2021 on Thai who are living in Thailand. 670 respondents filled out an online survey. Respondents provided information on the demographic background and open-ended questions designed to capture the experience of using Cofact (Thailand) in this study. The study found that 97.16% of respondents had received news suspected to be fake news—255 from 670 people who have tried Cofact (Thailand). Cofact (Thailand)'s advantages are engagement build-up, easy and convenient search, specific tool for check facts, and has a chatbot to help answer questions. The weaknesses of the Cofact (Thailand) platforms are complex design and process- challenging to use, difficult to understand information, the information is incomplete and unclear, chatbot not answering questions, the internet signal is required to use. This study will be one steppingstone to a more interdisciplinary academic investigation into how civic technology can be an effective solution to solving social problems in the digital age.

Keywords: Civic technology, Disinformation, Fact-checking, Fake news, Misinformation,

1. Introduction

Spreading misinformation and disinformation online is a huge problem, causing damage to communities around the world. They often contain content related to political issues amid the dichotomy of political and social ideology. There is also the spread of disinformation about health that many people trust [1]. The German media organization DW Akademie brings together international work to combat fake news with safety and health in all dimensions of society. Many organizations worldwide have developed approaches to investigation, and DW Akademie argues that the network approach is good practice. Moreover, it can increase the public's trust in the standard of conduct in investigating fake news [2].

This agreement results from consultation between investigators worldwide and presents thoughtful principles of practice [3]. The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) is another example. An EU-funded project, EDMO aims to build and support the work of an independent multidisciplinary community that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of disinformation. It serves as a hub for fact-checkers where academics and other relevant stakeholders work together and link up with media organizations, media literacy specialists, and policymakers. The project started its activities on June 1, 2020 [4].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Fake news phenomenon and Civic-Tech

Fake news is not a new phenomenon because fake news was produced for political, drama, or satire – it has been around for centuries. However, the current fake news phenomenon largely depends on the internet and social media [5] Citizen technology developers play an increasingly important role in technology development, data collection, and infrastructure building. They design better platforms for public engagement in science, technology, public health, and the environment. Civic technology enables people's abilities to find information which is one of the ways to promote and maintain facts and information for the public interest. Thus, encouraging technology platforms to make data more transparent that a central solution to the problem of fake news under active democracy must remain [6]. One of the civic technologies is an anti-fake news platform.

2.2. The phenomenon of fake news in Thailand and Cofact (Thailand)

For Thailand, Phenomena of fake news in the past often contained health-related content. However, after many years of political conflict in Thailand, Fake news has evolved into political news or foreign news to slander opponents. Moreover, verifying the source of the news is difficult because the nature of sending news that is copying news and forwarding it through groups in Line application instead of sending a link to read it to the original website [7]. Therefore, an organization has been established in the public and private sectors and gathers the people's sector to investigate disinformation jointly. Cofact (Thailand) is one example of the fake news investigator community in Thailand, officially launched around April 2020. It is a platform that opens the digital media space to provide people with an open, secure, and creative central space to find truth together in an age of misunderstandings. Cofact (Thailand) uses civic technology with the volunteers editorial team to filter news. It also provides a space for everyone to come together

and discuss facts and opinions. More than the website Cofact.org, the Cofact Line chatbot also allows anyone to send the news to check in their database [8]. Moreover, Cofact (Thailand) has its team in almost every region of the country, such as Isan Cofact, Cofact deep south, and Northern Cofact, which help them build fact-checking communities in each local area.

3. Objective

To explore user experiences on using Cofact (Thailand) for fact-checking and sustainable fake news detection.

4. Research methodology

Data were collected in June 2021 and analysed in July 2021 on Thai who are living in Thailand. Six hundred seventy respondents filled out an online survey. The participants were female (56.42%), male (39.40%), and LGBTQ and did not want to be identified equally (2.09%). Most of the respondents lived in the central region (55.97%), followed by the northern region (21.79%), the north-eastern region (9.40%), the southern region (8.51%), and the eastern region (4.33%). In addition, most of the respondents received a bachelor's degree (50.90%), followed by a master's degree (26.42%) and secondary education (8.66%), doctorate (7.16%) vocational certificate (2.99). %), vocational (2.10%), elementary school (1.34%), elementary school (0.45%), respectively. Respondents provided information on the demographic background and open-ended questions designed to capture the experience of using Cofact (Thailand) in this study. We analyse the answers to the following questions. "What are the advantages of Cofact (Thailand)?" and "What are the weaknesses of Cofact (Thailand) that need improvement?". We compiled answers to both questions for each participant and use Nvivo12 for thematic analysis processes to identify key qualitative issues.

5. Results

The study found that 97.16% of respondents had received news that was suspected to be fake news, only 1.19 percent had never received it, and 1.64 percent were unsure. 61.94% or 415 of 670 respondents had never used the Cofact (Thailand) platform to detect fake news, and 38.11% or 255 from 670 respondents used the Cofact (Thailand) platform and the following information was shared about their experience with the said platform:

5.1. Straightness of Cofact (Thailand)

From the experience of users of Cofact (Thailand), it was found that this platform has four strengths: engagement build-up with clear references, easy and convenient search, it is a tool that can specifically check facts, and has a chatbot to help answer questions as shown in Fig. 1 and will be explained in the following:

Fig. 1. Advantages of Cofact (Thailand).

5.1.1. Engagement build-up

Cofact (Thailand) allows users to ask questions by posting information or news suspected of being fake news. Moreover, after that, other users will come to check. Furthermore, the platform also allows users to see the criticism from the perspective of others. Users can also use keywords to search for information:

 i. I check the news, and others can also send me doubts. Other users will help to find information to support or oppose. It is sourced and scientific information.

 ii. It is a place to collect and search for fake news references. It is part of stopping the spread of fake news or misunderstandings from becoming more widely believed.

5.1.2. An easy and convenient search

The platform has keyword functionality to find the subject user want to investigate quickly, conveniently, and has more readable content:

• It is easy to use, can check. The information is highly accurate, convenient, and fast. Users can type the words to verify the truth with short words and summarize each story and with a link to read in detail.

5.1.3. It is a tool that can specifically check facts

Cofact (Thailand) is the primary source for fact-finding or finding fake news in Thailand:

• It is a convenient tool for finding facts. Cofact (Thailand), a good channel for fact-checking that is not many in Thai society, helps to check the truth of the news. Cofact (Thailand)is easy to access and valuable.

5.1.4. There is a chatbot to help answer questions

Cofact Line Chatbot is another advantage of this fake news monitoring platform of Thailand. It is convenient, and there is an immediate response, and it is an excellent tool to explain facts to others.

- Chatbot works fast and efficiently. The users can ask questions just by sending text or pictures. Chatbot displays information with reasons so users can clarify the information or pass it on to others.

5.2. Weaknesses of the Cofact (Thailand) platform

From the experience of users of Cofact (Thailand), it was found that this platform has five weak: complex design and process- challenging to use, difficult to understand information, the information is incomplete and unclear, chatbot not answering questions, the internet signal is required to use as shown in Fig. 2 and will be explained in the following:
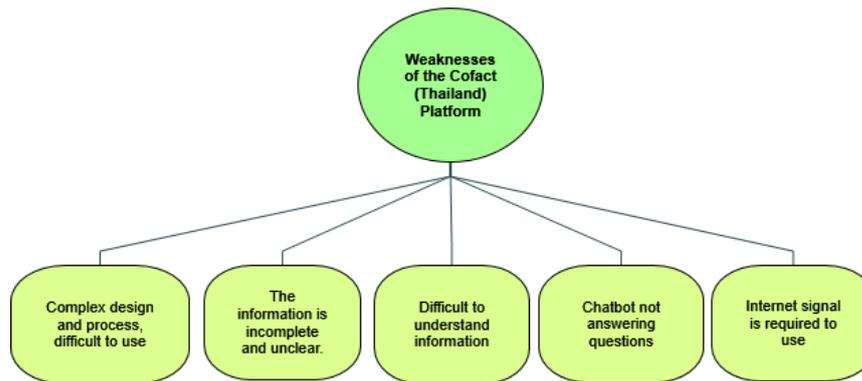

Fig. 2. Weaknesses of the Cofact (Thailand) platform.

5.2.1. Complex design and process, difficult to use

The platform is a complex, time-consuming process, such as requiring a subscription to verify the facts in the platform—it which may not work well for those who are not very tech-savvy, especially the elderly.

i. For those who cannot use it, it will not feel easy. Because at first, it seemed to be unable to use. Although it is not very difficult, I want it to be easier for the elderly to understand.

ii. The disadvantage is that to read and to show your participation takes a long time. Especially, elderly users may be difficult to access.

iii. User interface design or menus are difficult to understand, not user-friendly.

5.2.2. Difficult to understand information

The information contained in the platform is difficult to understand. Because there is much information, and the data organize design takes a long time to read and use academic language.

i. If there is a table comparing which data is false and which is confirmed by using the symbol (such as tick for truth and cross for fake) to separate the data, it will show the diversity of false and true data. Alternatively, interesting infographics about what is true, and fake are good choices. The image can help make it easier to remember and make it easier to understand.

ii.   The language is too academic, caused in interpretation and possibly further confusion.

5.2.3. The information is incomplete and unclear

The information on the platform is not complete because some news happens too quickly, and the platform tool cannot catch the situation since there is not enough information.

- News in the platform is not updated as some news could not be found. Moreover, the search took a long time to get an answer. The answers are ambiguous, unclear, and often refer to opinions for further information.

If the Cofact (Thailand) tool can respond faster with a clearer answer, it will make people want to use it more.

5.2.4. Chatbot not answering questions

The Cofact Line chatbot does not answer all questions because the database does not have enough information. Also, users are not used to chatting with chatbots.

- If it is an autoreply chatbot, sometimes you will get a different answer to the question. I find it difficult to use words to ask because when the question is too long, the chatbot does not understand the question.

5.2.5. Internet signal is required to use

People in rural areas who do not have access to the internet or do not have the funds to purchase Internet services will not use this platform.

- If there is no internet in any area, it may not access the fake news checking, which may cause fake news and high spread of fake news. Therefore, there should be an offline system.

5.3. Strengths, limitations, and future directions

The study has several strengths. Firstly, it is the first study of Thai people's experiences using civic technology in the field of collective scrutiny, it is a rich user experience dataset. Secondly, this research drives social issues by combining computer technology and social science knowledge, and journalism. However, the study also has some limitations. For example, it is a study of the user experience of civic technology in detecting fake news on a single platform; results may vary with other types of fake news monitoring platforms.

Moreover, users who have a positive experience with Cofact (Thailand) may be more motivated to respond to our survey. In addition, this study did not analyse the relationship of personality or user perceptions to the use of the platform in scrutiny. Future studies can examine these questions. It may be more beneficial to compare personality traits or individual differences.

6. Conclusion

This study examines the user experience of a civic technology platform for exploration in Thailand, namely Cofact (Thailand). It has been found that users are interested in using the platform because of their experience of receiving fake news. However, the interface limitations of the platform, complex information, and lack of access to the internet is still a significant obstacle for civic technology users in

Thailand. Future studies are needed to determine how civic technology platforms should develop to benefit social support, and these results may help tackle fake news, which is a global problem. The researchers hope that our study will be one steppingstone to a more interdisciplinary academic investigation into how civic technology can be an effective solution to solving social problems in the digital age.

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