Fact-Checking Ecosystems: An Exploratory Study on Practices and Policies in Indian and Global Contexts

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Abstract—In an era characterized by rapid information dissemination and the pervasive threat of misinformation, establishing a robust fact-checking ecosystem is essential for safeguarding democratic processes and societal integrity. This research proposal aims to explore the systemic integration of fact-checking processes and procedures as a proactive approach to counter information warfare at the state or national level. By investigating the roles of various stakeholders—including media organizations, technology companies, and governmental bodies—this study seeks to develop a comprehensive framework that enhances the efficacy of fact-checking initiatives. The findings will contribute to understanding how a cohesive ecosystem can mitigate the adverse effects of misinformation and strengthen public trust in information sources.

I. INTRODUCTION

The unchecked spread of misinformation and disinformation has become one of the most pressing threats to the global information ecosystem, undermining public trust, distorting democratic processes, and fueling social divisions. In today's media landscape, news and social media platforms serve as primary gateways to information, but their speed and reach have made them fertile ground for the rapid circulation of falsehoods. Viral rumors, manipulated images, deepfakes, and coordinated disinformation campaigns now routinely outpace traditional news verification, challenging the very foundations of credible journalism and informed citizenship. Against this backdrop, the proliferation of dedicated fact-checking departments and organizations has emerged as a critical line of defense. Fact-checkers play a pivotal role in scrutinizing claims, debunking viral hoaxes, and providing the public with evidence-based corrections. Their work is increasingly vital during high-stakes moments such as elections, conflicts, and natural disasters, when the risks posed by false information are amplified. Fact-checking has evolved from a niche journalistic practice into a global movement supported by newsrooms, tech companies, and philanthropic initiatives. Many news outlets now operate specialized verification teams, while collaborative efforts and cross-border networks help share resources, expertise, and real-time alerts. Policy frameworks and industry standards are also adapting to this new reality. International networks such as the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) and regional alliances have established codes of ethics, transparency requirements, and best practices to ensure the credibility and accountability of fact-checkers. Meanwhile, the integration of artificial intelligence and digital verification tools is enhancing the speed and accuracy of fact-checking operations, though challenges remain in scaling these technologies and addressing language biases. As mis- and dis-information tactics grow more sophisticated, the need for robust, well-resourced fact-checking departments—supported by forward-looking policies and cross-sector collaboration—has never been greater in safeguarding the integrity of the global information environment showcasing a need for improvement.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The digital media's exponential growth led to the quick dissemination of information on social media platforms which led to the emergence of a new

societal challenge – the spread of fake news. The implication of fake news is deeper and complex impacting public narratives, political processes, institutions, individuals and society as a whole. The Oxford Dictionary defines "fake" as something "not genuine; imitation or counterfeit," in alignment with (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213).

Fake news is "interpretation that fake news is news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers". The history of fake news can be traced to the 1835 when news of citing the "Moon hoax" was spread. Carson and Gibbons (2022) argue that fake news today encompasses broader issues of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. Distinguishing between these concepts, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) elaborate that misinformation involves false content shared without intent to harm, disinformation refers to s false content shared with malicious intent, and malinformation consists of true information deliberately intended to cause harm.

Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018), categorize fake news into six types: news satire, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, and propaganda. This categorization emphasizes the diverse intentions and methods used in creation and dissemination of fake news. Satire and parody through humor or social commentary spread fake news while fabrication and propaganda, deliberately chose to deceive and manipulate. Tandoc et al. (2018) put forth the role of audience in constructing the meaning of fake news. They argue that any article, even if factually baseless and intended to mislead, may not qualify as "fake news" unless the audience does not perceive it as real.

The effectiveness of fake news depends on its capability to deceive and be accepted as accurate information. So, when studying the impact of fake news, audience perception and susceptibility is of significance. Facing threat from fake news are democratic institutions as it distorts public perception and undermines the trust factor in journalism. Kang et al. (2011) argue that fake news exploits journalism's credibility by imitating its structure and omnipresence, thereby eroding public trust in legitimate news sources. Carson and Gibbons (2022) highlight how fake news thrives during periods of social and political upheaval, as individuals are more likely to believe and share information that aligns with their biases.

In such contexts, individuals are more likely to believe and share information that confirms their existing beliefs and biases, regardless of its accuracy. This echo chamber effect exacerbates the spread of fake news and makes it more difficult to combat. Combating Fake News- Media Information Literacy Media literacy education is an essential apparatus in countering fake news. Adjin-Tettey (2022) highlights that media and information literacy (MIL) levels of individuals can be a deciding factor in their ability to critically evaluate news sources and distinguish between real and fake content. Authenticating this understanding, Rapp and Salovich (2018) argue that individuals having prior knowledge about issues have enhanced evaluation skills to critically examine news and to filter out misinformation and disinformation.

Taking a step further Adjin-Tettey (2022) suggests that MIL need to be integrated into educational curricula at all levels. And for those without a formal education, she advocates leveraging trusted community gate keepers who create awareness and sensitize the public about fake news. Armeen & Niswanger, 2024 propose the use of implementation intentions- a deliberate plan to engage in desired behaviors. These choice-based intentions defer individuals from impulsive decisions to share or forward unverified information from unconfirmed sources. This self-regulation of fact checking the headlines, verifying the credibility of the sources and a decisive pause before clicking the button can stall many a fake news being forwarded.

Combating Fake News- Technological Interventions

Fake news rapidly disseminates through social media, Armeen and Niswanger (2024) propose technological interventions for social media platforms that can reduce the impact of fake news.

1. Prompts Implementation: Social Media Platforms can encourage users to fact-check before sharing, a prompt similar to Twitter's "Want to read this before retweeting?".

2. Educational Resources: Users can be educated with regulations on identifying misinformation and verifying news sources.

3. Integrating Fact-Checking: Integrating fact-checking instruments directly into platforms to allow users to verify claims before sharing.

4. Adjusting Algorithms: Authenticating content from credible sources while reducing the misleading information.

News Consumers- Recommendations

Armeen and Niswanger (2024) suggest strategies for the individual end user to curb the spread of fake news.

1. Skeptical about Headlines: Headlines, specifically those in all caps or with excessive punctuation, are mostly indicators of false content.
2. Check the URL: URL's of fake news sites are minimally changed to mimic legitimate news sources.
3. Scrutinize the Source: The source has to be investigated and its credibility verified before trusting its news.
4. Pause and Share: Take a moment to verify information before sharing it online.

The rapid expansion of fake news is a threat to information integrity, democracy and public trust. Countering fake news requires robust pro-active measures. Media literacy education equips individuals with the skills to discern credible and genuine information, a critical element in combating misinformation. Additionally, digital media platforms, to minimize the spread of false information must recognize and execute technological interventions like fact-checking tools and algorithmic adjustments. Finally, individual users must practice consuming critical news and take responsibility to report fake content. These multi – pronged initiatives are mandatory for today's society to work towards mitigating the ill-effects of fake news and advancing a better-informed public.

Fact checking as an Ecosystem:

Efforts to reduce misinformation cannot eliminate it entirely, making it crucial to counter its effects (Matthew H. Graham & Ethan V. Porter, 2025). Fake news detection and mitigation remain one of the most challenging problems to solve, due to factors like human, technical and economical- which preclude a generic technology-enabled solution from being formulated and deployed A. Gupta et al (2022). Misinformation and disinformation pose significant threats to the integrity of public discourse in the modern information ecosystem (Matthew Sumpter and Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia, 2021).

The rapid rise of new media and informational tools has introduced a transformative element to the media ecosystem, particularly in addressing the proliferation of misinformation (Slijepčević M et al, 2021).

Further, human and AI-generated multimedia content is adding immense complexity in detecting the spread of fake news A. Gupta et al (2022). The combating avenues of Data engineering helps in quantifying the prevalence of misinformation, its exposure levels, and identifying actors responsible for its dissemination that rely on source-level reliability ratings, often curated by fact-checkers or third-party organisations (Matthew Sumpter and Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia, 2021).

Social media platforms amplify everyday users' posts containing fact-checks, encouraging more people to share them within their networks, turning fact-checking into an identity, which may be more effective than aligning with existing social identities (Matthew H. Graham & Ethan V. Porter, 2025). Fact-checking organisations operate through shared institutional logics, structural norms, and value systems to establish legitimacy and authority within the public domain. Drawing on Scott's (2005) conceptualization of institutional myths, these entities adopt rule-like frameworks that reflect culturally embedded ideals like transparency, enabling them to position their work as a credible form of knowledge production (Michael Koliska & Jessica Roberts, 2024).

The concept of Fact-checking is operationalized through six interdependent stakeholder groups: editors (strategic oversight), external fact-checkers (monitoring/public claims), in-house checkers (internal content verification), investigators/researchers (long-term disinformation analysis), social media managers (content distribution/engagement), and advocators (policy reform/data accessibility initiatives) (Prerna Juneja and Tanushree Mitra ,2022). According to Duke Reporters' Lab and the International Fact-Checking Network, over 200 fact-checkers operate globally across six continents (Slijepčević M et al, 2021).

The organisations/groups collaboration spans internal stakeholders, external experts (e.g., academics, healthcare professionals), governments (data access), and tech platforms (e.g., Facebook's third-party partnerships) (Prerna Juneja and Tanushree Mitra ,2022). This interplay between internal institutionalization and external alignment demonstrates how fact-checkers navigate power dynamics, leveraging cultural myths and ethical rigor

to sustain their role as arbiters of truth in polarized societies (Michael Koliska & Jessica Roberts, 2024).

The Journalists, NGOs, Activists, and other stakeholders are working to restore public confidence in information and mitigate the impact of fake news on political processes, especially during elections (Slijepčević M et al, 2021). Critically, many political claims involve unambiguous factual distortions, such as misrepresenting news sources in campaign ads and some studies highlighted politicians frequently misuse attributions—citing opinion pieces as news reports or fabricating headlines—to mislead audiences (A. Amazeen, 2015).

The audiences view professional news media as more objective than fact-checking sites, possibly due to unfamiliarity with the latter's processes (Chang Sup Park, 2024). The best practices would be to follow the integration of fact-checking into news coverage while avoiding the spread of false claims (Michelle A. Amazeen, 2013). In line with modern journalistic norms, fact-checkers view their published debunked stories as an indication to change and update them according to their correction policies where such

approach underscores the importance of transparency and adaptability in maintaining the credibility of fact-checking efforts (Anoop Kumar, 2024).

Interestingly, there is no significant difference observed between traditional media and fact-checking sites regarding transparency, as both were seen to adequately explain their processes and engage audiences (Chang Sup Park, 2024). The epistemology of fact-checking reveals its institutional maturation, characterized by isomorphic practices where knowledge is produced (through evidence-based verification), presented (via transparent rating systems), and defended (using shared normative frameworks) (Michael Koliska & Jessica Roberts, 2024).

The mapping of such ecosystem reveals how visibility into these processes can enhance tool development and policy support—such as platforms connecting fact-checkers with domain experts, while balancing rapid response with structural improvements to data transparency and institutional trust (Prerna Juneja and Tanushree Mitra ,2022).

Pros Vs Cons: Amazeen Vs Joseph E. Uscinski

A. Amazeen (2015)	Joseph E. Uscinski (2015)
High consistency	Self-assumed unchecked authority
Methodological precision	Methodological flaws
Accountability	Conflating verifiable and non-verifiable claims
Integrity and contextual accuracy	Shapes narratives

Despite its advantages and disadvantages, the concept – Fact Checking – would be an empirical percolating phenomenon in the mediated world with audience and users largely relying on its presence. In his research, Chang Sup Park identified that, the respondents believe fact-checking sites excel in providing contextualized information, scrutinizing multiple perspectives, and placing controversial facts in the right context (Chang Sup Park, 2024). Beyond mere correction, fact-checkers actively cultivate public critical thinking by promoting scientific methodologies and media literacy, reflecting a broader mission to reshape informational ecosystems (Michael Koliska & Jessica Roberts, 2024).

At this juncture, it is imperative for fact-checking to thrive in the current media ecosystem underscoring

its evolution to remain as a multidimensional practice and being more reliant on cross-sector cooperation to mitigate misinformation's societal impact while advocating for sustainable informational integrity (Prerna Juneja and Tanushree Mitra ,2022). The fact-checking's process improves factual accuracy more than misinformation degrades it, though its ability to correct deeply entrenched false beliefs is limited (Nathan Walter et al, 2020).

While fact-checking remains an evolving phenomenon with substantial potential, it is more likely to get entangled in addressing issues like audience reach, financial sustainability, and the influence of media oligarchies on information dissemination in the near future (Slijepčević M et al, 2021).

Mis- and Dis-information in the age of Fact-checking The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation poses a significant threat to democratic processes and public trust, necessitating a deeper understanding of its dynamics and effective countermeasures. Primarily, the review of various literatures helped in unearthing multifaceted nature of disinformation, the erosion of trust in media, the exploitation of social media platforms, and technological interventions for fact-checking.

Research emphasizes the critical need to differentiate between misinformation (unintentional inaccuracies) and disinformation (deliberate falsehoods) to understand how audiences evaluate content credibility (Hameleers, Brosius & De Vreese, 2022). Aïmeur, Amri, and Brassard (2023) highlight the challenges in combating fake news, emphasizing the deceptiveness of fabricated content and the dynamic nature of online platforms that facilitate its rapid spread. The COVID-19 pandemic, as noted by Ng, Kloo, Clark, and Carley (2024), created a fertile ground for disinformation, underscoring the urgency of addressing public health-related falsehoods.

Hameleers, Brosius & De Vreese (2022) found that distrust in media correlates with perceptions of both misinformation and disinformation, leading to increased reliance on alternative sources and reduced engagement with traditional media. This erosion of trust has significant implications for the media's role in informing citizens. Smadja and Sonnac (2025) highlight the alarming exodus of scientists from platforms like Twitter/X, which leaves a vacuum for unchallenged disinformation, emphasizing the need for scientists to actively counter misinformation.

Muñoz, Díez, and Bellogín (2024) examined the structure and behavior of Twitter accounts, revealing that disinformation actors form denser, more coordinated networks than journalists, allowing for faster propagation of false information. This highlights the challenges of countering disinformation on social media platforms and suggests that interventions should focus on disrupting the efficiency of these networks. Ng et al. (2024) also found that bots and humans play different but crucial roles in disseminating disinformation on Telegram, emphasizing the need to study various social media platforms.

Kumar, Ahmed, and Sadanandam (2024) address the rising threat of deepfakes in elections, emphasizing the potential of manipulated media to distort public perception. They propose a multi-faceted approach involving platform accountability, community vigilance, and government regulation and underscore the efficacy of deepfake detection algorithms like DefakeHop++. Saeidnia et al. (2024) highlight the potential of AI in combating disinformation through techniques like natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning (ML). However, they also caution against algorithmic bias and emphasize the need for ethical considerations, human oversight, and longitudinal studies to ensure the responsible development and deployment of AI technologies.

Aim:
To study the fact, check initiatives globally and in India to combat misinformation.

Objectives:
1. To identify the individuals engaged in fact-checking globally and to ascertain the nature of activities undertaken by the fact-checking organisations and the participants involved.
2. To find out the arrangements in media houses to fact check news as also government departments.
3. To map out the government guidelines, if any on fact checking.
4. To elicit the opinions of fact checkers on fact checking and allied aspects

III. METHODOLOGY

The study has adopted the Qualitative approach that involved internet research, interviews with fact checkers and secondary sources

Data Presentation: The data has been presented objective wise.

The researcher consulted various websites, books, journals which revealed that there are quite a few organisations involved in fact-checking globally and in India.

OBJECTIVE I: To identify the individuals engaged in fact-checking globally and to ascertain the nature of activities undertaken by the fact-checking organisations and the participants involved.

A) Global Scenario:
The countries and their governments were very much involved in establishing a robust ecosystem to fight misinformation and disinformation in collaboration with public and private players.

1. International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) – Poynter Institute, USA - Established: 2015; Headquarters: St. Petersburg, Florida, USA; Website: https://www.poynter.org/ifcn

Overview: The IFCN is a global alliance of fact-checkers founded by the Poynter Institute to promote best practices in fact-checking journalism. It maintains a Code of Principles that members must follow, ensuring transparency, non-partisanship, and accuracy.

Key Functions: Accredits fact-checking organizations globally; Hosts the annual Global Fact-Checking Summit; Provides training, grants, and technical tools; Coordinates collaborative fact-checking efforts during elections and pandemics.

Impact: IFCN certification is a gold standard for fact-checking credibility. Many major social media platforms (like Facebook and TikTok) partner with IFCN-verified organizations to combat misinformation.

2. Africa check - Established: 2012; Headquarters: Johannesburg, South Africa Website: https://africacheck.org

Overview: Africa Check is the continent's first independent fact-checking organization, working to promote accuracy in public debate and the media. It focuses on checking claims made by public figures, institutions, and media across Africa.

Key Functions: Publishes fact-check articles in English and French; Runs media literacy and training programs; Partners with media outlets for regular fact-checking columns; Operates offices in South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Senegal.

Impact: Africa Check has significantly improved public awareness of misinformation and holds political leaders accountable through its wide-reaching verification efforts.

3. Full Fact – United Kingdom - Established: 2010; Headquarters: London, UK; Website: https://fullfact.org.

Overview: Full Fact is an independent UK charity that fact-checks claims made by politicians, media, and social media users. It emphasizes transparency in methodology and data sources.

Key Functions: Real-time fact-checking during parliamentary debates and elections; Development of automated fact-checking tools; Advocacy for better standards in public information; Publishes accessible explainers and data analysis.

Impact: Full Fact has influenced policy conversations in the UK and contributed to international fact-checking standards through its technical innovations.

4. BOOM FactCheck – India - Established: 2016; Headquarters: Mumbai, India; Website: https://www.boomlive.in

Overview: BOOM is one of India's leading independent fact-checking websites, primarily focusing on viral misinformation, fake news, and hoaxes spread through social media and messaging platforms.

Key Functions: Multilingual fact-checking in English, Hindi, Bengali, and other regional languages; Collaborates with Facebook and WhatsApp for misinformation monitoring; Investigative reports on coordinated misinformation campaigns; Offers media literacy and misinformation awareness resources.

Impact: BOOM has become a trusted source for debunking false claims during elections, communal tensions, and public health crises.

5. FactCheck.org – USA - Established: 2003; Headquarters: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA; Website: https://www.factcheck.org

Overview: FactCheck.org is a non-partisan, non-profit project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. It focuses on verifying factual claims in U.S. politics and public discourse.

Key Functions: In-depth fact-checking of statements by politicians and advocacy groups; Weekly video series called *FactCheck Mailbag* addressing reader queries; Collaborates with mainstream media for election fact-checking; Offers a *SciCheck* section to address health and science misinformation.

Impact: With its strong academic affiliation, FactCheck.org is highly regarded for its thoroughness and accuracy, especially during U.S. elections and national policy debates.

6. PolitiFact – USA - Established: 2007; Headquarters: St. Petersburg, Florida, USA; Website: https://www.politifact.com

Overview: PolitiFact, a project of the Poynter Institute, is known for its "Truth-O-Meter," which rates the accuracy of political statements from "True" to "Pants on Fire."

Key Functions: Daily fact-checks of politicians and public figures; Focused coverage of U.S. national and state-level politics; Publishes special reports during

elections and major events.; Works with news partners for regional fact-checking.

Impact: PolitiFact has won the Pulitzer Prize and is a major player in shaping fact-checking journalism in the U.S. with its accessible and engaging formats.

7. AFP Fact Check – France/Global - Established: 2018 (Fact-checking arm); Headquarters: Paris, France (with global bureaus); Website: https://factcheck.afp.com

Overview: A service of Agence France-Presse (AFP), this global initiative fact-checks viral misinformation across multiple regions and languages, particularly on social media.

Key Functions: Multilingual fact-checking (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, etc.); Regional hubs in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East; Collaboration with Meta (Facebook) to flag misinformation; Extensive coverage of fake news during elections, pandemics, and crises.

Impact: AFP's global presence allows it to tackle misinformation in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts, making it a major force in international fact-checking.

8. Maldita.es – Spain - Established: 2018; Headquarters: Madrid, Spain; Website: https://maldita.es

Overview: Maldita.es is a non-profit Spanish platform that uses community engagement to identify and debunk false information. It includes several verticals like *Maldita Ciencia* and *Maldito Dato*.

Key Functions: Community-sourced fact-checking via WhatsApp and social networks; Focus on science, data, immigration, and politics; Offers educational resources and workshops on media literacy; Publishes content in Spanish, expanding reach in Latin America.

Impact: Maldita.es is a leader in participatory fact-checking and is part of the IFCN. It has built a strong community of readers actively contributing to fighting misinformation.

B) India:

Indian organizations involved in fact-checking, play a vital role in verifying information, combating misinformation, and promoting media literacy across the country:

1. BOOM - FactCheck - Established: 2016; Headquarters: Mumbai, Maharashtra; Website: https://www.boomlive.in; IFCN Certified: Yes

Overview: BOOM was one of the first Indian fact-checking platforms to receive IFCN certification. It focuses on identifying and debunking misinformation, especially on social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter. It operates in multiple Indian languages and is known for its prompt and thorough investigations.

Key Functions: Fact-checks viral images, videos, and news reports; Multilingual reporting (English, Hindi, Bengali, and others); Partnered with Meta (Facebook) and WhatsApp to flag false content; Offers media literacy programs and investigative reports.

Impact: BOOM has been instrumental in combating fake news, particularly during elections, riots, and the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a trusted source for fact-checking in India's diverse linguistic and cultural environment.

2. Alt News - Established: 2017; Headquarters: Ahmedabad, Gujarat; Website: https://www.altnews.in; IFCN Certified: Yes

Overview: Alt News is a non-profit organization founded by journalist Pratik Sinha. It has gained prominence for its rigorous debunking of misinformation, hate speech, and communal propaganda. Alt News emphasizes evidence-based, data-driven analysis.

Key Functions: Focuses on political, communal, and misleading claims; Publishes in English and Hindi; Offers transparency in methodology and sourcing; Runs *Alt News Science* for health and science-related misinformation.

Impact: Alt News has exposed numerous fake narratives and has influenced public discourse by holding public figures and media accountable for misinformation.

3. Factly - Established: 2015; Headquarters: Hyderabad, Telangana; Website: https://factly.in; IFCN Certified: Yes

Overview: Factly is a data journalism and fact-checking portal that focuses on civic issues, government data, and misinformation. It provides clear, informative content aimed at empowering citizens with accurate and verifiable information.

Key Functions: Fact-checks news stories, viral claims, and social media content; Translates fact-checks into multiple regional languages; Provides policy explainers and public data analysis; Conducts digital literacy campaigns.

Impact: Factly has contributed to improving transparency in governance and enhancing public awareness through fact-based reporting, especially in southern India.

4. Newschecker - Established: 2019; Headquarters: New Delhi; Website: https://www.newschecker.in IFCN Certified: Yes

Overview: Newschecker is an independent media organization that debunks misinformation across India in several languages, focusing on health, politics, and viral social media content.

Key Functions: Fact-checks in English, Hindi, Malayalam, Punjabi, Urdu, and others; Targets health misinformation, especially during COVID-19; Partners with Meta to help reduce the spread of fake news; Offers digital literacy resources for schools and communities.

Impact: Newschecker has become a reliable platform for regional-language users and plays a vital role in bridging the digital literacy gap in semi-urban and rural India.

5. The Logical Indian – Fact Check Section - Established: 2014 (Fact-checking division active since 2018); Headquarters: Bengaluru, Karnataka Website: https://thelogicalindian.com/fact-check

Overview: The Logical Indian is a digital media platform known for its socially conscious journalism. Its fact-checking section investigates misleading content, viral hoaxes, and communal propaganda.

Key Functions: Investigates misinformation across social media platforms; Publishes in English and Hindi; Covers fake videos, political claims, and communal rumors; Provides visual explainers and social media awareness content.

Impact: The Logical Indian reaches a large youth audience and contributes to a more informed digital community through shareable, verified content.

6. Vishvas News (by Dainik Jagran Group) - Established: 2018; Headquarters: Noida, Uttar Pradesh; Website: https://www.vishvasnews.com; IFCN Certified: Yes.

Overview: Run by the Jagran New Media group, Vishvas News focuses on fact-checking viral content, especially in Hindi and other Indian languages. It is part of a major media conglomerate but operates its fact-checking wing independently.

Key Functions: Verifies misinformation on WhatsApp, Facebook, and news media.; Offers fact-checking in Hindi, Punjabi, Marathi, Telugu, and others; Partners with Meta for third-party fact-checking; Conducts media literacy campaigns in regional communities.

Impact: Vishvas News has played a critical role in reaching Hindi-speaking audiences with fact-checked information, particularly during elections and crises.

7. PIB Fact Check (Press Information Bureau – Government of India) - Established: 2019; Headquarters: New Delhi; Website: https://pib.gov.in/factcheck.aspx; Twitter: @PIBFactCheck.

Overview: PIB Fact Check is the official fact-checking arm of the Government of India, focused on verifying misinformation related to government policies, schemes, and announcements.

Key Functions: Debunks fake news about government departments and programs; Primarily active on social media (Twitter, WhatsApp, etc.); Publishes in English and Hindi; Issues clarification notices and official responses.

Impact: While limited to government-related information, PIB Fact Check plays an important role in preventing public confusion caused by misinterpreted or fake government news.

Objective 2: To find out the arrangements in media houses to fact check news as also government departments.

1. Alexios Mantzarlis – Greece/USA

Affiliation: Founding Director, International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), Poynter Institute Profile: Alexios Mantzarlis is one of the leading figures in the international fact-checking community. He was the founding director of the IFCN and played a crucial role in drafting the IFCN Code of Principles, which has become a global standard.

Contributions: Coordinated the first Global Fact conferences; Led the push for ethical standards in fact-checking; Worked with Google News and YouTube on misinformation.

2. Glenn Kessler – USA

Affiliation: The Washington Post Position: Editor and Lead Writer, *The Fact Checker* Profile: Glenn Kessler runs the Washington Post's *Fact Checker* column and is known for the "Pinocchio" rating system used to grade falsehoods by public figures.

Contributions: Covered multiple U.S. administrations; Influential during U.S. elections and

congressional sessions; Author of *Donald Trump and His Assault on Truth*.

3. Cristina Tardáguila – Brazil

Affiliation: Former Associate Director, IFCN; Founder, Agência Lupa

Profile: Cristina founded Agência Lupa, Brazil's first fact-checking agency, and served as a prominent voice in Latin America's fight against misinformation. She later joined IFCN, helping expand global verification efforts.

Contributions: Pioneered fact-checking in Portuguese; Advocated for women in fact-checking; Participated in collaborative projects like *#CoronaVirusFacts Alliance*.

4. Bill Adair – USA

Affiliation: Founder of PolitiFact; Professor, Duke University

Profile:

Bill Adair created PolitiFact, one of the most influential fact-checking websites globally. Under his leadership, PolitiFact won the Pulitzer Prize in 2009.

Contributions: Developed the "Truth-O-Meter" rating system; Conducts research on digital journalism and misinformation; Leads the Duke Reporters' Lab on automated fact-checking.

5. Claire Wardle – UK/USA

Affiliation: Co-Founder, First Draft News

Profile: Claire Wardle is an expert on misinformation, verification, and media literacy. She co-founded First Draft, which focuses on verification tools and training for journalists and newsrooms.

Contributions: Advised WHO and UN on infodemic response; Researches visual misinformation and deepfakes; Trains journalists worldwide on verification techniques.

Indian Fact-Checkers

1. Pratik Sinha – India

Affiliation: Co-Founder, Alt News

Profile: Pratik Sinha is one of the most recognized faces in India's fact-checking movement. A former software engineer turned journalist, he co-founded Alt News to tackle political propaganda and hate speech.

Contributions: Known for exposing communal and political fake news; Promotes transparency and evidence-based journalism; Frequently invited to global fact-checking conferences.

2. Jency Jacob – India

Affiliation: Managing Editor, BOOM FactCheck

Profile: Jency Jacob leads one of India's most active fact-checking teams at BOOM Live. He has over two decades of experience in mainstream journalism.

Contributions: Oversees multilingual fact-checking operations; Has worked with international partners like Facebook and Google; Promotes digital literacy and training across India.

3. Yusuf Omar – South Africa/India

Affiliation: Co-Founder, Hashtag Our Stories; Former CNN Mobile Editor

Profile: Though not a traditional fact-checker, Yusuf is known for innovative storytelling and using mobile journalism to counter misinformation, especially among youth.

Contributions: Pioneered mobile fact-checking formats; Promotes user-generated, community-driven fact-checking; Active in India and Africa through youth engagement.

4. Rakesh Dubbudu – India

Affiliation: Founder, Factly

Profile: Rakesh Dubbudu is a data transparency activist and founder of Factly, a platform that combines public data with misinformation debunking.

Contributions: Advocates Right to Information (RTI) and open data; Provides fact-checking in regional Indian languages; Offers public policy explainers for civic education.

5. Pankaj Jain – India

Affiliation: Founder, SMHoaxSlayer

Profile: Pankaj Jain began SMHoaxSlayer as a personal initiative to debunk viral hoaxes. It is now one of the most followed fact-checking pages in India.

Contributions: Focuses on WhatsApp and social media misinformation; Operates as a one-man army, highly active on Twitter and Facebook; Provides instant and accessible debunks for viral content.

Objective 3: To map out the government guidelines, if any on fact checking.

Organisational Initiatives

Google has launched multiple initiatives globally to combat misinformation and support fact-checking, especially through its platforms like Google Search, YouTube, and Google News. These initiatives are part of Google's broader strategy to promote reliable information and fight the spread of fake news online.

1. Fact Check Tools & Features
- Google Search and Google News display "Fact Check" labels for articles that contain verified information.
- These labels highlight disputed claims and show the fact-checking source, the claim, and a conclusion (e.g., true, false, misleading).
- It helps users quickly assess the credibility of content.

Fact Check Explorer
- Website: https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer
- A public tool by Google News Initiative (GNI) to help journalists, researchers, and the public search for fact checks.
- Users can enter keywords to find fact-checked claims from credible fact-checking organizations.

2. Google News Initiative (GNI) Overview:
Launched in 2018, the Google News Initiative is Google's major global effort to strengthen quality journalism and counter misinformation.

Support for Fact-Checking:
- Funding and training for fact-checking organizations.
- Partnerships with IFCN and other verification networks.
- Provides grants and tools to local fact-checkers, especially in underserved regions like Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.

Key Projects:
- Verification Training Network: Training over 100,000 journalists in more than 40 countries on digital verification techniques.
- GNI India Training Network (with DataLEADS): Trained over 35,000 journalists, fact-checkers, and media educators in India.
- APAC Fact-Checking Incubator: Aimed at growing new fact-checking initiatives in Asia-Pacific.

3. YouTube Misinformation Policies
- Google-owned YouTube flags and removes harmful misinformation (e.g., health or election misinformation).
- Fact-check panels appear below videos on trending misinformation topics.

- Partners with verified fact-checkers to review and reduce the spread of fake content.

4. Fact-Checking Fund & Grants
- Google provides financial grants to support fact-checking organizations.
- Example: In 2020, Google launched a $6.5 million COVID-19 fact-checking fund to support over 100 fact-checking projects worldwide.
- In 2022, GNI launched the Global Fact Check Fund ($13.2 million in partnership with IFCN) to support verified fact-checkers worldwide for the next three years.

5. Tools for Fact-Checkers
Google offers a suite of tools via the GNI Training Center:
- Google Reverse Image Search – to trace the origin of photos.
- InVID & YouTube DataViewer – for video verification.
- Google Earth & Maps – for geo-verification.
- Advanced Search Operators – to filter information.

Impact:
- Strengthened the global fact-checking ecosystem.
- Promoted media literacy through workshops and training.
- Supported over 100+ fact-checking organizations in 60+ countries.
- Helped in election integrity, pandemic response, and tackling misinformation during conflicts.

Objective 3: To find out the arrangements in media houses to fact check news as also government departments and seek opinions on fact check trainers on the training inputs.

IV. GLOBAL GOVERNMENT FRAMEWORKS ON FACT-CHECKING

1. European Union (EU) Framework: *EU Code of Practice on Disinformation*
- Introduced in 2018, revised in 2022.
- A self-regulatory framework involving platforms like Google, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok.
- Encourages collaboration with fact-checkers and transparent reporting of disinformation efforts.
- Supports EDMO (European Digital Media Observatory), which brings together academic

researchers, fact-checkers, and media literacy experts.

2. Germany

Framework: *Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG)*

- Enacted in 2017 to combat hate speech and fake news on social networks.
- Requires platforms to remove harmful or illegal content within 24 hours.
- Supports civil society and independent fact-checking initiatives, though the law has sparked debates on censorship.

3. France:

Framework: *Law Against the Manipulation of Information (2018)*

- Applies during election periods.
- Allows courts to order the removal of fake news content.
- Encourages partnerships with independent fact-checkers and promotes media literacy.

4. Brazil

Initiative: *Programa de Enfrentamento à Desinformação (Program to Confront Disinformação)*

- Run by Brazil's Superior Electoral Court (TSE).
- Works with fact-checking agencies, platforms, and universities.
- Focuses on disinformation related to elections.
- Promotes public awareness and digital education.

1. Australia:

Regulator: *Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)*

- Oversees Digital Industry Code of Practice on Misinformation and Disinformation (2021).
- Encourages collaboration with fact-checkers.
- Promotes transparency from digital platforms about their anti-misinformation efforts.

Indian: Government Framework on Fact-Checking

India has been active in addressing misinformation, especially through digital platforms and legal tools. However, the government's role in fact-checking has sparked significant legal and public debate.

1. PIB Fact Check Unit (Press Information Bureau) - Established: 2019 under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting; Role: Verify government-related news and flag misinformation; Platform: Operates through a Twitter handle and website; Criticism: Concerns about government controlling the narrative, especially when fact-checking political or dissenting content.

2. IT Rules, 2021 (Amended in 2023) – The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules were updated in April 2023. The amendment empowers the PIB Fact Check Unit to identify and flag "fake or false" information related to the Central Government.

Impact:

Digital platforms must take down or label flagged content; Strong criticism from media bodies (e.g., Editors Guild of India), civil society, and tech platforms; Legal challenges raised on grounds of press freedom and lack of transparency.

3. Cybercrime Reporting Portal:

- Managed by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Allows users to report fake news, morphed content, and misinformation.
- Focuses more on legal action than fact-checking, but complements broader efforts.

4. Media Literacy Initiatives

- The government supports digital literacy campaigns, including Digital India and Information Literacy programs via NCERT and UGC.
- Collaboration with Google India and DataLEADS through the GNI India Training Network to train journalists and educators.

Challenges and Concerns

- Independence: Government-led fact-checking, especially in politically sensitive contexts, may raise concerns of bias or censorship.
- Regulation vs. Free Speech: Balancing the removal of false information with constitutional rights to expression remains contentious.
- Need for Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration: Most successful global frameworks involve independent fact-checkers, academia, platforms, and civil society.

Objective 4: To elicit the opinions of fact checkers on fact checking and allied aspects

Fact-Checking in the Digital Age: Perspectives from the Field

This sub section summarises the views of noted fact checkers on diverse aspects of fact checking. The data has been organized thematically

In an era dominated by fast-paced digital communication, fact-checking has evolved from a niche journalistic function to a critical civic skill. Experts from the Indian fact-checking and journalism ecosystem emphasize that the task of verifying information in today's media landscape demands more than curiosity—it requires a potent mix of technical, editorial, and ethical competencies.

Demand-Supply Gap in Fact-Checking in India:

The demand for fact-checking in India has surged exponentially in recent years, driven by the unchecked spread of misinformation and disinformation across digital platforms and regional languages. However, this demand starkly outpaces the current supply of credible and accessible fact-checking resources, leading to a widening gap that threatens the information ecosystem.

Misinformation floods platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, and other regional content-sharing networks at a scale and speed that traditional fact-checking organizations struggle to match. With over 800 million internet users and more than 500 million WhatsApp users alone, India presents a fertile ground for the viral spread of misleading content. Respondent D and Respondent F highlight the sheer volume of false information and the limited reach and awareness of existing fact-checking entities. This mismatch means that although there is a growing appetite for verified, factual content, the infrastructure to deliver it remains inadequate.

Respondent A and Respondent B emphasize that the number of professional fact-checkers is insufficient to meet this growing demand. Many organizations operate with limited financial and human resources, which curtails their capacity to scale operations, especially in the face of rapidly growing regional language content. Moreover, public awareness about available fact-checking services remains low, further restricting access to accurate information.

Respondent E provides a comprehensive overview of the underlying causes for this imbalance. Key drivers include political polarization, linguistic diversity, low levels of media literacy, and frequent triggering events—such as the COVID-19 pandemic, national elections, and conflicts like the Indo-Pak war—that create fertile ground for disinformation campaigns. Both major political parties in India have been implicated in orchestrating misinformation to serve partisan agendas. Additionally, social media influencers, often motivated by personal or financial gain, amplify false content to massive audiences.

A critical concern is the targeting of unsuspecting internet users who often play key roles in family and community decisions—ranging from voting preferences to product purchases. These users are especially vulnerable to emotionally charged or manipulated content. Misinformation patterns also differ across regions, reflecting cultural, linguistic, and political differences between Hindi-speaking and non-Hindi-speaking populations, as well as between northern and southern states.

According to Respondent C, the fact-checking ecosystem in India is still in a nascent stage, comprising fewer than 30 active fact-checking organizations. These groups face severe limitations due to inadequate funding and institutional support. During key events like elections or public health crises, the gap between misinformation and fact-checking becomes even more pronounced.

In conclusion, while the demand for fact-checking in India is immense and growing, the supply is constrained by limited resources, a shortage of skilled personnel, and insufficient public outreach. Bridging this gap requires systemic interventions, including the training of more fact-checkers, sustainable funding models, institutional support, and widespread media literacy campaigns to empower citizens to discern facts from falsehoods.

Essential Skills and Qualities of a Fact-Checker in India:

In the context of India's complex and multilingual digital landscape, fact-checkers play a vital role in combating misinformation. Given the sophistication of disinformation campaigns and the rapid spread of viral content across diverse platforms, today's fact-checkers must possess a robust combination of technical skills, investigative instincts, cultural awareness, and ethical integrity. The insights from leading voices in the field reveal a comprehensive set of competencies essential for effective fact-checking.

Core Competencies and Technical Skills:

Modern fact-checking requires advanced digital literacy and technological proficiency. According to Respondent D and Respondent C, fact-checkers should be adept at using Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) tools, conducting metadata analysis, and identifying the manipulation of multimedia content. They must stay current with emerging technologies

used both for spreading misinformation and for verifying it. Fact-checkers are also expected to be proficient with smartphones and digital verification tools, as noted by Respondent F. They must be comfortable navigating social media trends and possess the agility to identify when content is gaining momentum online.

Investigative and Analytical Abilities:

Strong investigative instincts, critical thinking, and a skeptical mindset are central to a fact-checker's toolkit. As emphasized by Respondent A and Respondent B, fact-checkers need journalistic curiosity and persistence to trace sources, uncover the truth, and assess the credibility of content. They should also have the editorial judgment to evaluate which claims warrant verification and how best to communicate findings. In a media ecosystem where AI-generated misinformation is increasingly realistic, Respondent E points out that fact-checkers must be especially vigilant, patient, and creative, often working within technological and ground-level limitations to debunk falsehoods.

Language Skills and Cultural Sensitivity

Given India's linguistic diversity, multilingual proficiency is critical. Effective fact-checkers must navigate and verify content across different regional languages—such as Telugu and Hindi—while understanding the cultural and social nuances that influence misinformation trends. This is particularly important in regions where local language content is prevalent and fact-checking resources are scarce.

Ethical Integrity and Communication Skills

Fact-checkers must operate with a strong sense of ethics, objectivity, and a commitment to truth. Respondent C and Respondent E stress the importance of unbiased inquiry, openness to "learn and unlearn," and the ability to communicate findings clearly and responsibly to diverse audiences.

Moreover, effective fact-checking also involves collaboration—both with local communities for context and subject experts for accuracy. This ensures that verification processes are both inclusive and contextually relevant, especially when dealing with sensitive or localized misinformation.

Professional Expectations and Challenges

In the current media market, as Respondent E observes, fact-checkers are expected to be highly active, responsive, and creative. Recruiters seek individuals who can rapidly identify potential viral

content and respond with timely verification. The increasing use of AI-generated disinformation—in text, images, and video—has created new challenges that demand continuous upskilling and adaptability.

In sum, an effective fact-checker in India must embody a multifaceted skill set: technological agility, investigative rigor, ethical responsibility, linguistic versatility, and cultural sensitivity. As misinformation evolves, so too must the capabilities of those tasked with countering it. Institutional support, professional development, and collaborative networks are vital to equipping fact-checkers with the tools they need to protect the integrity of public discourse.

Fact-Checking Training Requirements in India

With the exponential rise of misinformation across digital platforms, equipping aspiring journalists, media students, and professionals with fact-checking skills has become an essential part of media literacy. Experts across the field emphasize that fact-checking is not merely a technical task but a multi-dimensional skill set that blends investigative instincts, technological fluency, ethical reasoning, and critical awareness.

Core Technical Skills

A robust fact-checking curriculum must prioritize digital verification techniques. According to Respondent D and Respondent B, this includes:

- Reverse image and video searches
- Metadata analysis
- Detection of manipulated or AI-generated content
- Understanding of government data sources and their integrity

Tool-based training is vital. Respondent F and Respondent C stress the need for practical proficiency with platforms such as:

- Google Reverse Image Search
- InVID for video analysis
- Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) tools

This hands-on training enables students to verify viral content quickly and accurately.

Understanding Misinformation Workflows

Beyond technical verification, trainees must understand the ecosystem of misinformation. Respondent A and Respondent B propose that training modules should include:

- How misinformation is created and spread

- Evaluation of source credibility
- Psychology of misinformation and cognitive biases
- Legal and ethical implications of fact-checking
- Ethical corrections and publishing standards

Case studies, simulations, and real-world examples help learners comprehend the social and emotional mechanisms that drive misinformation.

Journalistic Integrity and Critical Awareness

Respondent E emphasizes a crucial philosophical insight:

"A fact-checker is not necessarily a journalist, but every journalist must be a fact-checker."

This perspective underscores the need for critical skepticism and source scrutiny. Journalists must be trained to question all forms of information—understanding that images, videos, and documents can be:

- Misleadingly framed
- Digitally altered
- Stripped of context

To that end, journalists should gain basic familiarity with the tools used to manipulate content (e.g., photo/video editing, PDF editing, metadata tampering). This reverse understanding sharpens their suspicion and enhances their ability to detect misinformation.

Logic, Ethics, and Debunking Practices

As Respondent C highlights, fact-checking education must go beyond tools and include:

- Logical reasoning
- Bias recognition and mitigation
- Ethical frameworks for public communication
- Procedures for tracing the origin of content
- Responsible and transparent debunking techniques

Students must be taught how to handle sensitive or high-impact content, especially when false claims involve political, communal, or health-related issues.

Pedagogical Approach

To ensure deep learning, interactive and applied methodologies are recommended:

- Workshops that replicate real-time fact-checking environments
- Simulations and role-play involving misinformation response
- Collaborative projects with peer review of verification strategies

- Mentorship with practicing fact-checkers and journalists

These strategies help bridge theoretical knowledge with practical newsroom or civic contexts.

Fact-checking training in India must be multidimensional—combining technical skill, ethical reasoning, and journalistic rigor. As misinformation becomes increasingly sophisticated and AI-assisted, media professionals need to be equally equipped to combat it. By integrating hands-on tools, cognitive frameworks, and cultural sensitivity, training programs can cultivate a new generation of credible and critical media practitioners.

Ideal Mode of Delivery for Fact-Checking Training

The rapidly evolving landscape of misinformation, combined with the diverse backgrounds of potential fact-checkers—ranging from students to working professionals—calls for a flexible yet rigorous training format. Expert recommendations highlight the need for a blended, adaptable model that can cater to different learning needs while ensuring hands-on experience and continuous skill development.

Blended Learning as the Preferred Model

A consensus among experts suggests that a blended approach—which combines online instruction with in-person workshops—is most effective:

- Respondent B recommends teaching core concepts online to offer flexibility and accessibility, while conducting hands-on workshops and real-world simulations in person to enable collaborative learning and practical exposure.
- Respondent A proposes a full-time format for students, complemented by short-term or online formats for working professionals.

Modular and Flexible Formats

Several experts advocate for modular, part-time, or hybrid formats, particularly for professionals:

- Respondent F suggests part-time or hybrid workshops for students, and online/weekend modules for professionals, allowing participants to balance training with other commitments.
- Respondent C supports ongoing modular online training, arguing that it allows learners to stay current with evolving tools and threats, especially important given the dynamic nature of misinformation.

Structured and Intensive Options

For deeper engagement, Respondent D recommends a 40-hour structured course, preferably in-person, to ensure active participation, interaction, and immediate feedback.

- This format is ideal for those pursuing full-time academic training in journalism or media studies.
- In-person sessions also enhance peer-to-peer learning, teamwork, and mentor support.

Self-Initiated and Hands-On Learning

Respondent E adds that self-directed learning is a valuable entry point. Many free and paid online resources are available for motivated individuals to begin fact-checking independently. However, he emphasizes that group training sessions, especially those that offer hands-on exposure, should be conducted in either full-time or part-time formats, based on participant needs.

An effective fact-checking training program in India should adopt a flexible, blended model, combining:

- Online modules for theory, tools, and foundational knowledge
- In-person or live virtual workshops for hands-on practice, case studies, and collaboration
- Modular/part-time schedules to accommodate students and professionals
- Self-paced resources to encourage lifelong learning and skill updates

This approach ensures accessibility, practicality, and sustainability in building a resilient fact-checking ecosystem in India.

Ideal Mode of Fact-Checking Training in India

Blended, Flexible, and Context-Driven Approaches

The ideal mode of fact-checking training in India should be blended, flexible, and tailored to suit different learner profiles such as students, working professionals, and self-motivated individuals. Experts agree that a one-size-fits-all format is inadequate given the diversity of participants and the dynamic nature of misinformation.

Blended Model Preferred

Several experts advocate for a blended approach, combining online theory with in-person, hands-on engagement:

- Respondent A recommends a full-time format for students to build foundational skills, while short-term or online options can suit busy professionals.

- Respondent B supports this model, emphasizing that online modules can deliver core concepts efficiently, while in-person workshops enable real-time verification practice and collaboration.
- Respondent F suggests part-time or hybrid workshops for students and weekend/online modules for professionals, catering to varying schedules and commitments.

Structured and Immersive Options

For those seeking more intensive engagement:

- Respondent D proposes a 40-hour structured course, preferably in-person, to ensure sustained interaction, focused learning, and deeper participant involvement.

Self-Learning and Resource-Based Entry

- Respondent E highlights the importance of self-initiated learning, especially in the early stages. Numerous online courses and resources are available for those with interest. However, for group settings, he supports hands-on training in either full-time or part-time modes, depending on the learner's availability and institutional setup.

Modular and Ongoing Learning

Given the constantly evolving nature of misinformation tools and tactics:

- Respondent C stresses the need for modular, part-time, or continuous online training, enabling learners to stay updated with new verification techniques, platforms, and threats. This format particularly suits working professionals and journalists who require periodic skill refreshers.

To build an effective and sustainable fact-checking ecosystem in India, training programs should:

- Blend online and offline formats
- Adapt to full-time, part-time, and modular needs
- Support self-paced and self-motivated learners
- Ensure practical exposure and community engagement

Such a diversified and flexible approach ensures that students, professionals, and citizen fact-checkers alike can participate meaningfully in combating misinformation.

Fact-Checking Units in Media Organizations

There is near-unanimous agreement among experts that media organizations must establish their own fact-checking units. In an age of rampant misinformation—especially during high-stakes moments like elections, public health crises, or

geopolitical conflicts—fact-checking is no longer optional but a core component of responsible journalism.

Enhancing Credibility and Trust

- Respondent A underscores that internal fact-checking is essential for maintaining public trust and organizational accountability.
- Respondent F calls such units mandatory to preserve the credibility of the media, even if they begin with small dedicated teams.

Strengthening Journalism Standards

- Respondent C argues that fact-checking should be institutionalized within newsrooms, becoming an integral part of the news production process. He emphasizes the need for investment in training and resources to ensure consistent and accurate verification.
- Respondent D highlights the importance of fact-checking units, particularly during breaking news coverage, to empower audiences with accurate information and prevent the viral spread of misinformation.

Ensuring Independence and Objectivity

- Respondent B insists that these units should operate independently of editorial teams to maintain unbiased verification. According to her, only dedicated, autonomous teams can ensure transparency and public confidence in the news.

Bridging Regional Gaps

- Respondent E acknowledges that while many national and regional media organizations have begun integrating fact-checking units, there is still a significant gap in the Telugu-speaking states, where media houses have yet to prioritize this need. He stresses that these regions must catch up to ensure uniform standards of factual accuracy.

Media organizations must take proactive steps to set up internal fact-checking units. These teams should be:

- Well-trained, well-resourced, and independent
- Integrated into newsroom workflows
- Tailored to regional and linguistic contexts
- Mandated not only for credibility but also as a journalistic duty

By institutionalizing fact-checking, media houses can reinforce their role as guardians of truth in a misinformation-saturated world.

The Case for In-House Fact-Checking Units in Media Organizations

As the spread of misinformation becomes increasingly sophisticated and rapid—especially during breaking news events—the need for in-house fact-checking units within media organizations has never been more urgent. Across the spectrum of media professionals and verification experts, there is near-unanimous agreement: fact-checking must be institutionalized as a core function of journalism.

Respondent D strongly supports the creation of such units, emphasizing their role in empowering audiences with accurate information. He sees these teams as critical safeguards against the kind of misinformation that often goes viral in the heat of unfolding events. By verifying claims in real time, media houses can act swiftly to stop false narratives before they gain traction.

Respondent F takes this further, asserting that fact-checking is no longer optional—it is mandatory for any media outlet serious about maintaining credibility. Even small teams, he argues, can make a meaningful impact, especially when equipped with the right tools and workflows.

For Respondent A, the rationale is both ethical and strategic. Fact-checking units enhance a media organization's accountability and public trust, providing a transparent process that audiences can rely on. Without such checks, newsrooms risk undermining their own reputations by inadvertently becoming conduits for misinformation.

Respondent E points to a regional imbalance in fact-checking practices. While national and some regional media outlets have set up dedicated verification desks, he observes a worrying neglect in the Telugu media landscape, where such units are rare or non-existent. This absence, he warns, leaves local audiences particularly vulnerable to unchecked falsehoods.

Respondent B underscores the importance of editorial independence in fact-checking. To be effective and credible, she insists, fact-checking units must operate autonomously—separate from editorial influences or newsroom biases. Only then can their work be seen as neutral and trustworthy. She adds that regular updates, training, and the use of robust digital tools are essential to keep pace with evolving misinformation tactics.

Respondent C echoes this call for structural investment. He views internal fact-checking units as a pillar of responsible journalism, urging media houses to treat verification not as an afterthought, but as an integral component of news production. According to him, this includes allocating dedicated resources, establishing standard operating procedures, and providing continuous training to keep journalists and researchers up to date.

In sum, the establishment of fact-checking units within media organizations is no longer a luxury—it is a necessity. These teams serve as both the first and last line of defense in the fight against misinformation. By embedding verification into newsroom culture, media houses not only uphold journalistic integrity but also foster a more informed and resilient public.

Rapidly changing media landscape.

Respondent C's approach is rooted in hands-on experience. His workshops focus on practical verification workflows, including the detection of digitally manipulated visuals, tracing viral claims to their origins, and collaborative case study analysis. He encourages fact-checkers to learn from each other's field experiences, fostering a culture of shared knowledge.

In tandem with training, journalists also rely on a wide arsenal of digital forensic tools to verify visual content. For instance, Respondent D frequently uses tools like Google Lens, InVID, ExifTool, and Deepware Scanner for a combination of metadata analysis, deepfake detection, and reverse search capabilities.

Respondent F and Respondent E both emphasize the importance of reverse image search engines—from Google and TinEye to Yandex, DuckDuckGo, and Berify—each chosen based on the geographical and linguistic origin of the content in question. Naresh points out that no single tool suffices for all cases; tool selection must be strategic and content-sensitive.

Respondent B prefers a blend of InVID, FotoForensics, and Google Reverse Image Search to verify images and videos. These tools enable journalists to extract metadata, assess visual integrity, and trace digital content back to its original source—key steps in debunking visual misinformation.

Respondent C's toolkit is similarly comprehensive, with ExifTool and TinEye complementing InVID in conducting deep forensic analysis. He stresses that each tool brings a distinct advantage—whether it's reading embedded metadata, reverse-searching obscure frames, or detecting image manipulation.

Together, these insights highlight a robust and evolving ecosystem of training and tools that can significantly enhance the media's capacity to counter misinformation. A well-trained journalist, equipped with the right tools and a critical mindset, becomes not just a reporter of facts but a defender of truth in an increasingly manipulated digital world.

Open-Source Intelligence Tools in Digital Investigations

Open-source intelligence (OSINT) tools have become indispensable assets in the toolkit of modern investigative journalists and fact-checkers. These tools allow for the tracing of digital footprints, the uncovering of hidden metadata, and the correlation of fragmented information to piece together the truth behind a story. Journalists across India are actively adopting and customizing OSINT tools to suit the ever-evolving challenges of misinformation and digital deception.

Respondent D highlights the foundational utility of the Wayback Machine and Google Reverse Image Search. The Wayback Machine is particularly useful for retrieving deleted or modified web content, allowing journalists to verify past claims or check for digital cover-ups. Meanwhile, Google's image search helps track the origin and distribution of visual content, often debunking recycled or misrepresented photos that resurface during breaking news.

Respondent F uses a suite of tools that cater to social media investigations. Tools like TweetDeck and Twitter Advanced Search help filter through the noise of real-time social feeds to identify original sources, timelines, and coordinated activities around a viral post or hashtag. He also relies on WHOIS lookup services, which provide domain registration information crucial for identifying the creators or controllers of websites spreading misinformation.

Respondent E brings attention to a broader, more creative use of OSINT tools. For geo-temporal verification, he points to MarineTraffic.com, which tracks ship locations—a valuable resource in maritime or cross-border investigative reporting. He also utilizes SunCalc.org and SunEarthTools.com to analyze shadows and lighting in videos, helping to estimate the time and orientation at which footage

was captured. These advanced techniques can be especially helpful in debunking staged videos or verifying timestamps on disputed visual content.

Respondent B favors a combination of Maltego, TweetDeck, and the Wayback Machine. Maltego, a powerful link analysis tool, helps journalists map digital connections between people, domains, and content—often revealing networks of influence or disinformation actors. These tools enable her team to trace how information is seeded and spread, while also offering historical insight into how narratives evolve over time.

Respondent C, known for deep investigative work, uses a versatile range of tools, including WHOIS lookups, Google Advanced Search, and OSINT Combine. These tools allow him to uncover the infrastructure behind misleading websites, dig into the content history of a webpage, and verify social media identities. OSINT Combine, in particular, enables advanced data correlation from multiple sources, strengthening the credibility and depth of verification.

While some experts didn't specify their tool preferences, it's evident that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to OSINT. The choice of tools often depends on the nature of the content being investigated—whether it's verifying a viral image, tracking the spread of a false claim on social media, or analyzing the metadata of a suspicious video.

In essence, OSINT tools empower journalists to transform publicly available data into actionable investigative leads. These tools serve not only to uncover hidden truths but also to uphold journalistic integrity by grounding stories in verifiable, transparent evidence. As misinformation tactics grow more sophisticated, the creative and strategic use of OSINT will remain a cornerstone of digital investigative journalism.

Balancing Ethics and Insight in Social Listening

As the use of social listening tools becomes increasingly prevalent in journalism and digital verification, ethical considerations remain central to responsible practice. These tools—designed to monitor, analyze, and interpret public discourse across social media and digital platforms—offer valuable insights. However, they also come with potential ethical pitfalls, particularly concerning individual privacy and consent.

Across the board, experts unanimously stress the importance of avoiding intrusion into personal lives and maintaining a clear boundary between public interest and private data. For fact-checkers and digital journalists, ethical integrity isn't just a guideline—it's the foundation of trust and credibility.

Respondent D, Respondent F, and Respondent A reflect a shared commitment to ethical clarity. They emphasize that social listening must never cross into the realm of private data mining. Public posts may be analyzed, but anything involving personal identifiers, sensitive images, or private conversations is strictly off-limits. Personal details, when unavoidable, are blurred or anonymized to prevent any form of doxing, defamation, or harassment.

Respondent E voices a firm stance on the ethics of digital surveillance. "Peeping into anyone's life is unethical," he asserts, underscoring the principle that consent and context matter. While he acknowledges that some data available online may be considered public domain, he draws a line at using illegal or deceptive tools to access non-public content. For Naresh, ethical journalism means respecting both the letter and the spirit of digital boundaries.

Respondent B reiterates that ethical compliance is non-negotiable in her newsroom. Only publicly accessible information is used, and even then, she ensures that any personally sensitive content is anonymized. "Privacy is always respected," she notes, affirming that transparency and accountability are the pillars upon which their digital monitoring practices rest.

Similarly, Respondent C emphasizes a principled, public-interest-first approach. His team avoids intrusive data collection and follows strict ethical protocols in all investigations. The primary goal, he explains, is not surveillance but verification in the service of truth and public good. Even when analyzing viral narratives or identifying the origins of misinformation, his fact-checking operations are carefully designed to protect individual privacy.

Ultimately, ethical social listening is about more than just compliance—it's about cultivating trust with the audience and upholding journalistic values in an age of digital surveillance. These professionals demonstrate that transparency, restraint, and respect for individual dignity can—and must—coexist with the powerful capabilities of social listening tools.

Crafting Credible Fact-Check Reports: Elements That Ensure Clarity and Impact

In an era where misinformation spreads rapidly and often virally, the effectiveness of fact-checking lies not just in uncovering the truth but in how clearly and convincingly it is communicated. For seasoned fact-checkers, a well-structured report is not just a tool of correction—it's an instrument of public education and digital literacy.

Across the board, experts agree that the foundation of any impactful fact-check report begins with a clear articulation of the original claim. Respondent D, Respondent F, and Respondent B emphasize that the claim must be presented in its original form and full context—whether it's a viral video, a manipulated image, or a misleading text. Establishing what was said or shown allows readers to understand why the claim warranted scrutiny in the first place.

From there, the verification process is laid out in a step-by-step format, designed to be transparent, logical, and replicable. Respondent E outlines his approach: "I start with a brief about the claim, describe how the media set is being used to spread it, detail how I conducted the verification, list the tools used, and conclude with the result." This ordered approach reflects a commitment to methodical debunking and user-friendly structure.

Respondent F reinforces the importance of this framework, highlighting the inclusion of facts, evidence, and source attribution as essential. By showing readers how a claim was verified, journalists not only disprove falsehoods but also model critical thinking processes.

Visual clarity plays a key role in reader comprehension. Respondent A and Respondent B advocate for the use of visual aids—screenshots, highlighted comparisons, charts, and media snippets—to support the narrative. These visuals not only bolster credibility but also make complex verifications more accessible to general audiences.

Respondent C notes the value of presenting supporting data and a concise conclusion. His reports distill the outcome into a clear verdict, such as "false," "misleading," or "partly true," offering readers a definitive takeaway. This clear labeling, combined with transparent sourcing and hyperlinks, enables the audience to trust and independently verify the findings.

Above all, clarity, evidence, transparency, and replicability are the hallmarks of impactful fact-checking. Whether it's through simple language, visual documentation, or methodical reporting, these experts ensure that every report not only debunks a falsehood but also builds digital resilience among readers.

Translating Truth: Adapting Technical Findings for Diverse Audiences

Fact-checking and digital investigations often involve intricate verification methods, data-driven analyses, and advanced tools. However, the true power of this work lies in the ability to effectively communicate findings to diverse audiences—from the everyday news reader to high-level decision-makers. For seasoned fact-checkers, tailoring the message is not just about simplification—it's about strategic storytelling that respects both the audience's capacity and their informational needs.

Respondent D highlights the importance of simplifying language and using videos or visual formats to engage the general public, while reserving more technical explanations and structured data for executives or institutional stakeholders. "The goal is clarity," he explains, "and that means meeting people where they are."

Respondent F echoes this approach. For wider audiences, he opts for visuals that quickly convey the essence of a fact-check—images, timelines, comparisons—whereas executives receive deeper contextual data, backed by documentation that aids strategic decisions. This dual-layered approach ensures that every stakeholder, regardless of expertise, walks away with a clear understanding.

Respondent A emphasizes modulating tone and depth depending on audience expertise. A flexible communicator, she adapts the complexity of information based on whether the recipients are digital natives, news consumers, or media strategists. Her goal is to preserve accuracy while avoiding unnecessary technical overload.

Respondent E takes a democratic approach to explanation: "I prefer simple terminology, whether my reader is an expert executive or a layperson." When needed, he patiently breaks down tools, mechanisms, and procedures, ensuring that no reader is left behind. His philosophy is rooted in

accessibility—every article should empower readers to understand and evaluate the facts independently.

Respondent B shares a similar philosophy. For the general public, she uses infographics and plain language to simplify complex misinformation narratives. But for technical or executive audiences, she includes detailed analyses and data visualizations, offering richer insight without oversimplifying the issue.

Respondent C expertly switches communication modes based on audience profile. With the public, he uses analogies and real-life examples, reducing jargon and emphasizing relevance. For specialized readers or institutional partners, he shares comprehensive technical documentation, tool references, and methodological notes to ensure full transparency and precision.

Together, these practitioners demonstrate that effective fact-checking is not only about finding the truth but also about making it understandable and actionable. Whether explaining manipulated metadata to a policymaker or debunking a viral video for a social media user, their work ensures that the truth travels—and lands—with impact.

Bolstering the Ecosystem of Fact-Checking

As misinformation continues to evolve in sophistication and scale, the experts emphasize that the fight against it must go beyond isolated newsroom efforts. It requires a multi-pronged strategy involving education, collaboration, policy reform, and public engagement.

Respondent D advocates for public awareness campaigns that empower citizens to critically engage with the content they consume. "We must move from passive consumption to active questioning," he insists, underscoring the importance of making media literacy a household norm.

Respondent F adds that collaboration with tech platforms and regional media is vital. He suggests integrating fact-checking modules into journalism education, ensuring that future journalists enter the field equipped with verification skills and ethical grounding. "This isn't an optional skill set anymore—it's foundational," he asserts.

Respondent A calls for a de-politicization of facts and a collective effort to rebuild public trust in media. In her view, fostering transparency and neutrality is essential for any meaningful impact. She believes that trust can only be earned by consistently

upholding journalistic integrity across all verification efforts.

Respondent E reflects on the emotional satisfaction of debunking a false claim, but also cautions that fact-checking has its limits. "Sometimes, we can't establish a claim as false even when we strongly suspect it," he admits. He advises fact-checkers to remain grounded in journalistic discipline—always trace the original source, avoid quoting secondary posts blindly, and recognize when it's time to let go of a claim that lacks verifiable evidence.

Respondent B envisions a long-term cultural shift where fact-checking becomes a habit embedded in early education. She emphasizes the need for synergy among media, tech platforms, and civil society organizations to amplify impact. "Critical thinking must be taught as early as possible," she says, "because misinformation starts where curiosity ends."

Respondent C urges for greater transparency from social media companies and the development of robust legal frameworks to regulate digital misinformation. He also highlights the importance of community outreach, emphasizing that public participation is crucial in building collective resilience against disinformation.

Together, these insights point toward a broader vision: fact-checking is no longer the responsibility of a few watchdogs; it must become a shared civic responsibility, supported by institutions, empowered by education, and sustained by collaboration. Only then can the information ecosystem hope to stay resilient in the face of evolving misinformation threats.

Findings and Conclusion:

Findings: The study identified a rapidly expanding network of fact-checking institutions worldwide, with over 200 organisations operating across continents and India emerging as a major hub for both independent and collaborative initiatives. Globally and in India, individuals involved in fact-checking include journalists, researchers, social media managers, and external experts, all engaged in activities ranging from real-time verification to long-term disinformation analysis. Media houses increasingly integrate dedicated fact-checking desks, while government departments, particularly in India, have established official units such as the Press Information Bureau Fact Check. Training for fact-

checkers is evolving, with trainers emphasizing digital literacy, verification tools, and ethical standards. Policy mapping reveals that global guidelines are shaped by networks like the IFCN, promoting transparency and accountability, while India's ecosystem is influenced by both international standards and emerging government guidelines, though the latter remain fragmented and sometimes controversial.

Conclusion: The research underscores that a robust fact-checking ecosystem is essential for countering misinformation in both global and Indian contexts. While institutional diversity and collaborative frameworks have strengthened verification efforts, challenges remain in standardizing practices, ensuring transparency, and bridging gaps between independent and government-led initiatives. The proliferation of fact-checking units in media and official sectors reflects growing recognition of their necessity, yet policy frameworks—especially in India—require further clarity and harmonization with international norms. Continuous investment in training, technology, and cross-sector collaboration will be vital for sustaining public trust and effectively mitigating the evolving threats of misinformation and disinformation in an increasingly complex media environment.

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