

## Navigating Truth in the Digital Age: A Nuanced Comparison of US and India Based Fact-Checking Organisations

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### Abstract

The ubiquity of misinformation & disinformation poses substantial hitches to the integrity and dependability of news and public discourse in an era distinguished by the widespread impact of digital information. Given the spread of misinformation & disinformation and its potentially disastrous repercussions, such as destroying the social fabric of society, loss of lives and property, crushing democracy, and undermining authorised sources, reliable fact-checking practices have become essential. This research paper delves into the fact-checking practices in India and United States of America (USA), with a primary focus on comparing and contrasting the fact-checking scenario in these two countries. Both these countries are also the top two in terms of total number of fact-checking organisations per country, as listed in the Duke Reporter's Lab database (N=76 for US & N=26 for India).

This study uses secondary data analysis to examine fact-checking in two countries by systematically examining credible sources such as databases, academic studies, governmental documents, and organizational websites. The study's findings come out with a multifaceted understanding of fact-checking practices, which includes different trends and patterns of their growth and disparities, varying geographical distribution, prevailing diversity, Collaborations among them and methodological variations.

**Keywords:** Fact-checking, Misinformation, Disinformation, Digital & Websites

### 1. Introduction

Fact checkers, often known as the referees of democracy, are tasked with making sure that untrue statements do not proliferate in society's daily discourse (Amazeen, 2013). However, misinformation and disinformation are spreading rapidly. Significant events, like the 2016 U.S. Elections (Bovet & Makse 2019) the global pandemic COVID 19 (Akbar et al., 2020; Apuke & Omar 2020) and the 2019 Indian General elections (Reis, 2020) have all been heavily influenced by

the dissemination of information on social media and mainstream channels. In order to mitigate this issue fact checkers continuously strive to determine the authenticity behind unverified claims. Fact checking is typically defined as a process that aims to establish the truthfulness or accuracy of claims. The conclusions reached are always supported by evidence and logical reasoning (Vlachos & Riedel 2014).

The spread of news is a concern and according to the Duke Reporters Labs latest annual fact checking census in 2023 there are currently active fact checkers in over 100 countries speaking 69 different languages. In total there are around 417 fact checkers, with India and USA leading with a combined percentage of approximately 25.17%. These two countries also rank highest in terms of the number of organizations dedicated to fact checking other than that wide-ranging political contexts, diverse media landscapes, technology adoption, and language diversity in both the countries calls for an in-depth academic study.

Considering the significance, this study aims to compare and contrast the practices of fact checking in these countries. In today's age individuals frequently encounter claims accompanied by manipulated evidence (Shiundu,2018). This surge of misinformation has made fact checking more crucial than before (Funke, 2018). However, due to financial and technological constraints, fact checkers in developing nations do not have access to resources (Haque,2018). Therefore, this study aims to gain insights from a country like the USA that can contribute to the development and advancement of fact checking platforms, in India—a developing country.

### Objectives

- To examine how fact-checking operates in India and the United States of America.
- To compare and contrast fact-checking practices in both the countries.

## 2. Review of Literature

### Focus of studies in the American context

Doobs (2012), tracks the development of contemporary political fact-checking as a component of the continuous conflict between media outlets and political institutions over voter narratives, using the Washington Post as a case study. They suggest that the use of "Pinocchios" as fact-checking tools represents a return to the media's ability to question political statements, as opposed to the media's more passive role during the Iraq War. He believes that Reagan's administration marked the start of the movement, which was democratised by the Internet and acquired impetus in the 2004 election thanks to political bloggers. Initially antagonistic, politicians are increasingly accepting of fact-checkers as part of the media. His study proposes that fact-checking community is expanding, as seen by the popularity of The Washington Post's Fact Checker blog during election seasons. Journalists are better prepared to counter political

propaganda thanks to this movement, but reader cooperation is essential to its success. Expert networks, crowdsourcing, and audience integration are some of the future areas that will improve the effectiveness of fact-checking.

Amazeen (2013), levels both praise and criticism at the US news media's extensive use of fact-checking. Critics suggest it may be biased and that it hasn't completely eliminated false political contents. His study emphasises the difficulties in determining the efficacy of fact-checking, which were particularly noticeable during the 2012 campaign, by using social science and interview data. With the main objective of educating the public, fact-checking has an impact on journalists, political operators, and the general public. Although some individuals oppose it, studies suggest that fact-checking increases people's knowledge and may promote political accuracy. Furthermore, fact-checking has had a big influence on journalism. He also discusses critiques, including arguments against the use of rating scales in fact-checking and challenges in choosing which claims to verify while retaining impartiality.

Vlachos & Reidel (2014), presents the task of fact-checking, which is the evaluation of a claim's veracity. Typically, journalists personally complete this work to confirm the statements stated by prominent personalities. In their sense ordinary people also need to evaluate the veracity of the growing number of statements they are exposed to. Therefore, a wide range of society members are expected to benefit from the development of fact-checking systems. We should begin by outlining the job and creating a publicly accessible dataset utilising internet claims that have been verified by journalists. Next, we talk about the task's baseline techniques and the issues that need to be resolved. Lastly, we talk about the relationship between fact checking and common natural language processing jobs as well as how it might lead to more study.

Graves (2016), states that by holding public leaders responsible, fact-checking organisations like PolitiFact, FactCheck.org, and the Washington Post's Fact Checker have upended the political landscape throughout the last ten years. Lucas Graves' book "Deciding What's True" offers an insider's perspective of these avant-garde newsrooms, describing their practices, principles, and difficulties during political discussions. A personality-driven history of the fact-checking movement is also provided by Graves, who emphasises the movement's development from the blogosphere and its revolutionary influence on journalism ethics and

practice. This piece highlights how important fact-checking is to contemporary journalism.

Mantzaris (2017), informs that PolitiFact has had a major impact on political fact-checking during the last ten years, changing methods outside of Washington, D.C. PolitiFact's innovative "Truth-O-Meter" and organised content approach, which were first implemented in 2007 with Bill Adair's assistance, have become industry standards. Though lawmakers initially opposed the effort, it served as the impetus for a number of worldwide fact-checking projects. The accomplishments of PolitiFact—such as a Pulitzer Prize and other collaborations—showcase the effectiveness of organised, approachable fact-checking. Many multinational initiatives have adopted similar methods to increase political accountability, despite criticism that its scoring scales are gimmicky. Future developments in the discipline could entail increased international cooperation as well as the incorporation of novel forms and technology.

Mena (2018), investigated American journalists' perspectives on fact-checking, with a focus on political neutrality, principles, and purpose. While most journalists surveyed agreed that there should be a clear demarcation between fact-checking and activism and emphasised non-partisanship, there were differences in their use of the term "lie" for false claims, and a significant number of respondents believed that Republicans were more likely than Democrats to make false claims, though many remained neutral.

Yousuf (2023), examined four main American news media outlets—The Associated Press, CNN, The New York Times, and The Washington Post—published fact-check stories (N = 1,530) in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Finding out (1) which subjects are more prevalent, (2) what or whose claims are being verified, and (3) which information sources are being reviewed to make conclusions regarding claims were the three main goals of this inquiry. He analysed the stories using a variety of automated machine learning and text analysis methods. The results demonstrate that traditional news companies, which primarily cover important policy issues and the US government, mostly rely on regular sources for their fact-checking.

#### **Focus of studies in the Indian context**

Haque et.al. (2018), studies that social media and the internet are becoming more and more common, mis/dis-information are spreading in emerging nations just as quickly as they are in

wealthy ones. Disseminating false information, however, is more challenging in poorer nations due to a lack of resources and essential technology. This study clearly sheds light on the difficulties faced by different fact-checking efforts in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal, three South Asian nations. Six fact-checking efforts' top editors were interviewed in-depth. Lack of resources, outdated technologies, and political pressure were among the issues noted. An examination of these programmes' Facebook pages reveals rising user interaction with their postings.

Badrinathan et al. (2020), mentions that mis/disinformation on the internet presents serious problems, particularly in emerging nations like India where it proliferates through encrypted apps like WhatsApp. Users are encouraged by platforms to refute mis/disinformation; however, the success of this tactic varies depending on a number of variables. In this study, 5,104 Indian social media users participated in an experimental evaluation of the effects of various correction messages on the persistence of seven popular rumours. The findings indicate that while corrections can be useful, their effects on different rumours differ. Remarkably, the efficacy of corrections is not greatly affected by their source or level of complexity. Simple, unsourced corrections work just as well as thorough ones from reliable sources, indicating that simply expressing scepticism can help cut down on false information.

Zaman (2021), suggests that misinformation grew during the COVID-19 outbreak in India, mostly due to a rise in the use of social media. Six themes are identified by this study, which examines 228 disinformation items from February 1 to April 11, 2020: political, religious, criminal, entertainment, and miscellaneous. While religious misinformation may be divided into deadly religiopolitical content that promotes community isolation and less destructive spiritual content, both types of misinformation have a significant negative influence on healthcare. Whereas Hindu disinformation vehemently attacks Muslim minority, Islamic misinformation frequently defends Islam. The report draws attention to the problems with India's communication infrastructure, digital illiteracy, inadequate counter-misinformation efforts, and a politicised atmosphere. In order to overcome the limits of data sources and gain a deeper understanding of

the origins, effects, and contents of COVID-19 misinformation in India, more study is required.

Kumar (2022), explains how fact-checking fights false information by encouraging reason and well-informed decision-making and it must contend with mistrust over intent, strategies, and capabilities. He further describes that establishing transparency in news creation is essential for fostering public confidence and elevating journalistic standards. His study uses a qualitative content analysis of the website declarations of seven Indian fact-checkers to examine their methodology justifications and transparency pledges. Results demonstrate that fact-checking is carried out in a methodical and transparent manner, emphasising openness as a fundamental tenet of fact-checking journalism and placing it in line with existing research on journalistic transparency.

Singhal et al. (2022), uses the dataset called FactDrill. It comprises 22,435 fact-checked social media postings from India in 13 languages between 2013 and 2020. It describes the multilingual, multi-domain, and multimedia characteristics of the dataset in 14 properties. FactDrill outlines possible applications for this resource and attempts to facilitate research on the dynamics of fake news in India's multilingual setting.

Arya, et al. (2023), describes that selecting themes, confirming debunked claims, and sharing fact-checked narratives are all aspects of professional fact-checking, each with its own set of difficulties. In their study fact-checkers from five organisations were interviewed, and their archives and social media were analysed. The results showed that these procedures have an impact on the stories that are refuted, the extent of the debunking, and the impact on the public. Fact-checking organisations' total reach and impact are influenced by these characteristics, which also have an effect on how they market themselves and how the public views the job they do. Seelam (2024), draws our attention to the increased usage of social media in rural India that has left individuals open to false information. Through interviews with 12 well-known fact-checking organisations in India, this study explores how these organisations respond to the demands of rural consumers. These organisations use strategies to increase the reach and relevancy of fact-checked information, such as utilising vernacular languages and activating stringer networks. They do, however, confront some obstacles, such as small size and low user participation in rural areas. The report illustrates

the technological and human resources these organisations employ as well as the challenges they face in growing their service offerings. The study provides design and policy recommendations to enhance the efficacy and outreach of fact-checking for rural social media users in India, based on these findings.

### 3. Research Gap

The works done in this field reveals that there are still a lot of unanswered questions about fact-checking, especially when it comes to comparing and comprehending the workings and efficacy of fact-checking organisations throughout the globe. The growth and significance of fact-checking in the United States have been well-documented in previous studies, with the Washington Post's Fact Checker, PolitiFact, and FactCheck.org setting the standard. Their impact on rating system development, political accountability, and global context adaptability has all been brought to light by previous researches. On the other hand, research conducted in India has concentrated on the particular problems caused by disinformation, which are made worse by the widespread use of encrypted messaging services like WhatsApp, multilingual material, and high levels of social media usage in rural regions. Although the research clarifies the theme of disinformation and the techniques employed by Indian fact-checking groups, it does not provide a comparison study with their American counterparts. A comparative examination is essential given the disparate political, social, and technical environments of India and the United States. It would provide a better understanding of the dynamics of disinformation throughout the world by shedding light on the various approaches, difficulties, and accomplishments of fact-checking organisations. This comparison may also help develop cooperative tactics and best practices to improve fact-checking's efficacy on a worldwide scale, addressing the urgent need for strong systems to counter false information.

### 4. Methodology

To accomplish its goals this study utilizes an in-depth approach to analyse data. Through this analysis a comprehensive understanding of fact checking in these two countries is revealed. The study systematically examined data from trustworthy sources such, as fact checking databases, academic research, government documents and organizational websites. The Duke Reporters Lab keeps a count of all the active fact-checking initiatives around the world and provides links to visit their websites, the

researcher has visited all the sites in both the countries (N=102). Six factors have been selected to comprehend the operations and make a comparison, between the fact checking practices in both nations. It examines the events that triggered the emergence of fact checking, the number and types of organizations engaged in fact checking, the sources of funding for organizations in both these countries, the areas and subjects focused on by fact checkers, language diversity and regional variations in fact checking practices and initiatives undertaken by fact checking sites to promote media literacy in both nations.

### 5. Fact-Checking Practices in United States

According to Dobbs (2012), from The Washington Post, fact checking websites in the United States originated in the 1980s as a response to the increasing use of PR tactics during Ronald Reagans presidency. At that time political operatives started "spinning" news and bypassing avenues causing concerns among journalists about a loss of professional control (Broder, 1987). With the growing popularity of the internet in the 1990s numerous oriented blogs with specific ideological leanings emerged. Many of these blogs began fact checking candidates and mainstream news outlets. Eventually mainstream media outlets also started getting involved in fact checking during the 2004 election campaign as a response to bloggers encroaching on their domain (Dobbs 2012; Perlmutter 2008). In 2003 Factcheck.org from the Annenberg Foundation became widely recognized as the non-partisan political fact checking website (Dobbs 2012).

It's important to note that fact checking websites are not descendants of busting websites that emerged in the 1990s. While sites, like Snopes.com initially focused on debunking types of hoaxes they eventually started addressing claims as well. This evolution closely aligns with the growth of the internet itself which facilitated widespread circulation of highly diverse claims. According to Graves (2016) the rise of fact checkers, in the US can be attributed to the decline of objective reporting. In his assessment of the fact checking movement, he outlined three main factors that contributed to its emergence; changes in journalistic standards and practices the diminishing gatekeeping role of traditional news organizations due to advancements in technology and a fragmented media landscape that has limited opportunities for civil public debate. Graves described fact checkers as a part of a reform movement aimed at addressing the division in American society over the past few

decades. It is worth noting that while many fact checkers outside of the US are not associated with outlets, they also play a role, in institutional reform purposes (Amazeen, 2017; Graves, 2018).

In the United States there are types of fact checkers that have emerged. These can generally be categorized into two models; the "newsroom model" and the "NGO model". The newsroom model consists of fact checking organizations affiliated with established media companies. They have an advantage as they can rely on resources and utilize their parent media company's infrastructure.

However, fact checkers who align with the newsroom model are dependent, on their media parents' interests and financial support. On the hand the NGO model involves fact checkers who operate separately from traditional newsrooms. These organizations are not bound by the editorial and business limitations of established media outlets. They may lack the level of editorial resources and a reliable audience (Graves and Cherubini 2016).

In the United States numerous local and nearly all national news sources have incorporated fact checking during both the 2012 and 2016 elections. This includes networks such as NPR, CBS, ABC, NBC, CNN, Fox, MSNBC well as renowned newspapers, like The New York Times, The Washington Post and USA Today (Graves, 2016).

### 5.1 Events that Triggered the Fact-Checking Movement

There are three events that are believed to have sparked the rise of fact checking, in the United States. The first event was the emergence of the internet, which gave rise to journalism. Around the end of 2001 there was an expansion in the fact checking ecosystem online as a response to the influence of digital journalism. As communication technologies advanced the overload of information caused strain on offices. News sources were under pressure to provide more news and verification. Pre internet fact checking methods were too slow (Lowrey, 2019).

This situation led to a flood of news and analysis in mainstream media frustrating both news consumers and independent "citizen journalists." Ken Layne, a blogger from the US who ran the LA Examiner. A news outlet critical of the Los Angeles Times. Suggested that traditional media verification mechanisms were struggling to keep up with the rapid pace of digital interconnectedness. He argued for verification systems since mechanisms were no longer effective (Lowrey, 2017 & Amazeen 2019).

Layne believed that society needed a system for verifying news that could address flaws, in mainstream media and hold them accountable. The momentum and interest surrounding this movement led to the emergence of a brand ecosystem dedicated exclusively to fact checking platforms. These platforms, FactCheck.org (established in 2003) PolitiFact, Media Matters (founded in 2004), Newsbusters (established in 2005) gradually gained global recognition as the demand, for fact checking soared (Graves, 2016). Since then, the number of fact-checking services has steadily grown, becoming increasingly popular worldwide over the decade.

Two significant events played a role in shaping this approach. The first was the awarding of the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for reporting to PolitiFact—a fact checking initiative launched over a year earlier by the St Petersburg Times (now Tampa Bay Times) in Florida. This recognition solidified the credibility and professional acceptance of this style of journalism. For news organizations it put an end to debates, about whether political fact checking or general fact checking's a legitimate and acceptable journalistic technique (Amazeen, 2013; Amazeen, 2015; Graves, 2016b; Graves et al., 2016; Mantzarlis, 2018).

Following the surge of called "fake news " a second wave of fact checking initiatives emerged. The term refers to articles that are intentionally created to attract a number of followers by taking advantage of social media technologies. When it became clear during the 2016 elections that online platforms were highly susceptible, to spreading disinformation and misinformation more and more organizations chose to prioritize fact checking. This second wave of fact checking often focused on verifying statements and debunking falsehoods. Debunking is an aspect of fact checking that requires skills especially when dealing with user generated content (UGC) (Mantzarlis, 2017).

## 5.2 Number and Type of Fact-Checking Organizations

In the United States there are a total of 76 fact checking sites (Figure 2). Among these sixty are affiliated with media organizations, six are associated with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) or non-profits. Additionally, five are independent organizations, whereas four are connected to academic institutions and one fact checking site based in the Washington bureau of the Agence France Presse news service operates internationally (Figure 3).

Interestingly only eight, out of all these organizations have signed on as signatories to the IFCN Code of Principles. This highlights the ownership landscape within the fact checking community, in the USA.

## 5.3 Funding Sources

All media affiliated organizations receive funding, from their parent media companies as other sources such as the Democracy Fund, Ford Foundation and seed funding from Craig Connects also helps. NGOs, CSOs and non-profits have funding sources including individual and family gifts that are listed on their websites. One such organization called "MediaWise" focuses on fact checking claims made by teenagers as part of a media literacy program run by the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida. Financial support, for MediaWise has been provided by Google and Facebook.

Another organization called "Based on Science" is a project of The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine—a institution established by the federal government in 1863. The Academies bring together experts to offer guidance to policymakers and the public. Although they do not receive appropriations, their work is funded by Congress, the federal government, state and local government agencies, nonprofit institutions and foundations.

Three, out of the four organizations affiliated with academic institutions receive their funding from PolitiFact, a known fact checking site in the US. PolitiFact started as a project of the Tampa Bay Times. Gained nonprofit status in 2018 when it became part of the Poynter Institute. The funding for PolitiFact comes from advertising fees from state level affiliates, grants and individual donors who're part of "The Truth Squad" membership program. The remaining one organization is "Fact check.org " which is run by reporters and editors at the Annenberg Public Policy Centre at the University of Pennsylvania. This organization receives funding from the Annenberg Foundation grants from the Flora Family Foundation and public donations.

There is one organization called "Lead Stories," which focuses on using a technology called Trendolizer to identify and debunk trending fake news stories and hoaxes on social media platforms. Lead Stories is funded through investments made by its owners advertising revenue and income generated by providing access to Trendolizers capabilities, to parties. The

other four organizations mentioned are privately funded.

#### 5.4 Scope of Fact-Checking

The claims under check are mostly political, followed by crime, health and environmental issues other than that these sites also fact-check news pertaining to day-to-day events and news which are in reference to elite personalities like actors, politicians and sportspersons etc.

#### 5.5 Language and Regional Variation

All these organisations fact-check claims in English only. Most of these organisations lie on the eastern coast in prominent cities like Washington, New York, Chicago and Boston (Figure 4). A total of forty-five organisations lies on the eastern region, ten on western region, nine in the northern, five in the central region and the other five in the southern region (Figure 4). So, the important cities where most of the media houses are present shows up for more of these fact-checking sites.

#### 5.6 Media Literacy Initiatives

Some notable Media Literacy Initiatives were implemented by organizations. One instance was, in June 2020 when the Poynter Institute partnered with Facebook to introduce the MediaWise for Seniors program. This program aimed to educate Americans on how to find information and identify misleading content related to the presidential election and COVID 19. By expanding the MediaWise program beyond teenagers and college students it empowered Americans with digital media literacy skills and fact checking abilities ensuring that their decisions are based on facts rather than fiction.

Furthermore, Oklahoma State University in collaboration with fact checking websites such as FactCheck.org, Snopes.com, Politifact.com, Washington Post Fact Checker and Rumour Guard has launched a project, at the Edmon Low Library. The goal of this initiative is to assist citizens in understanding and addressing misinformation and disinformation while improving their habits of consuming information. This dedicated Fact Checking page provides user steps that enable individuals to assess the quality and authenticity of information found on the internet.

#### 6. Fact-Checking Practices in India

In India, fact-checking does not have a lengthy history; the first dedicated programme, named 'Fact Checker,' began operations in 2014. Other organisations, such as News Mobile (2014), Factly (2014), Boom Live (2016), Alt News (2017), Fact

crescendo (2018), and DigitEye India (2018), progressively entered the competition (Md Mahfuzul Haque, 2018).

The study also understood, why fact-checking is so inevitable in the Indian context through data. In the beginning of 2024, there were 1.12 billion active cellular mobile connections in India, which is the equivalent of 78.0% of the country's population. India has 751.5 million active Internet users as of January 2024 (Kemp, 2024). IAMA Kantar ICUBE 2020 Report estimates that by 2025, there will be over 900 million active Internet users in India, representing a growth rate of nearly 45%. There were over 462 million social media users (Kemp, 2024) which equates to 32.2% of the total population, WhatsApp is the most popular social media app, followed by YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

The statistical data indicates that India encounters opportunities and challenges, due to the use of the Internet and social media. It is also evident that combating misinformation is particularly challenging in developing countries with scarce resources and technology (Ghadyalpatil and Das, 2018). Therefore, fact checking plays a pivotal role in a country, like India.

Furthermore, the Indian government has taken measures to verify the accuracy of information. The PIB Fact Check Unit was established in November 2019 with the aim of combating news and misinformation. This unit specifically handles queries related to aspects of the Government of India its departments and ministries as well as Public Sector Entities. According to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (updated on 06/04/2023) the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has stated that a separate fact check unit will be established by the Central Government. The Ministry may officially announce this through publication, in the Gazette.

#### 6.1 Events that Triggered the Fact-Checking Movement

The growth of fact checking, in India was triggered by events that occurred at time periods. In 2005 India implemented one of the "Right to Information" laws globally which significantly changed the landscape of public information and accessibility in the country. This law marked a step towards transparency and accountability in governance. Additionally in 2012 India introduced the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP) also known as the "Open Data policy " to make government data more accessible. Despite these measures data and

information often remain complex and overwhelming for the public to comprehend. Some intended data even fails to exist within the domain. Consequently, “Factly” emerged as an organization dedicated to bridging this gap by creating platforms and infrastructure thereby strengthening democracy through engagement. Furthermore, a significant factor contributing to the growth of fact checking, in India has been the pattern of misinformation and disinformation primarily focused on attacking government officials, opposition political parties, tarnishing reputations of individuals inciting communal discord, making false historical claims and promoting pseudoscience among other things (Sinha et al., 2019).

## 6.2 Number and Type of Fact-Checking Organizations

India has a total of 26 active fact-checking sites out of which, fifteen are affiliated with media organisations, two of them are affiliated to any Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)/Civil Society Organisation (CSO)/Non-profit, nine of them are independent organisation, there is not a single organisation affiliated to academic institutions and three fact-checking sites in three different languages are associated to an international media organisation- Agence France- Presse news service (Figure 3).

Other than that, fifteen out of the total number of organisations are signatories to the IFCN Code of Principles. The above information helps us understand the varied nature of ownership patterns prevalent in the Indian fact-checking organisations.

India also has “PIB Fact-check”, a fact-checking unit of the Government of India (GOI), which exclusively fact-check claims related to the GOI and its entities.

## 6.3 Funding Sources

Diversified ownership patterns come with unlike sources of funding; all the sites affiliated to media houses are funded by their parent media house which generates revenue mainly through advertisement. The other types of sites generate revenue from partnerships with social media platforms, their respective private owners, some of them are self-funded digital journalism initiative, few are supported by crowdfunding and donations.

The main sources of funds for independent organisations comes from revenue through online ads and acceptance of donations from readers, few of the organisations are personally funded with its founder's personal savings and family

businesses and with venture capital investments. One unique organisation “The Healthy India Project” which specifically debunks misinformation related to health got a project which was funded by the World Health Organization (WHO). AFP which runs three sites in different languages generates revenue from a mix of sources, such as media clients, online platforms and the French state.

## 6.4 Scope of Fact-Checking

The Indian fact-checking site has numerous varieties in claims under check; Most of these site fact checks claims which range from political, business, social, health & medicine to brands, daily viral photos and videos, products and services and misinformation that spread via social media platforms, Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter.

Some focuses particularly on data Journalism. One of these sites “Climate Fact Checks” specifically detects mis/dis-information related to climate and climate change. One focuses on fact-checking social media rumours and identifying hate speech. One exclusive site named “First Check” A pan-Asia initiative challenges misleading health information, especially on YouTube, WhatsApp and other social media and messaging services. The Healthy Indian project examines misleading news reports and social media posts about health and medicine.

## 6.5 Language and Regional Variation

Indian languages vary with different geographical regions so to cover them some fact-checking sites debunk claims in more than one language, for example “BOOM” is presently available in five Indian languages, English, Hindi, Bengali, Kannada and Malayalam with dedicated on ground teams working on all five. But there are other sites which debunks claims in one of these particular languages.

If we consider the regional variation, we find that fourteen of these organisations are located in the National Capital Region (NCR) which accounts to approximately 54% of the total active ones, four are in Bengaluru, four in Mumbai, three in Hyderabad and one in Gujrat. So, only the main tier-one cities hold all these offices (Figure 4).

## 6.6 Media Literacy Initiatives

In addition, to addressing the issue of news and disinformation these websites also make efforts to promote media literacy among the public. One notable campaign is Sach Ke Sathi by Vishvas News, where their team conducts on the ground verification of news and provides awareness training and workshops throughout the country.

Through this flagship initiative they aim to educate and empower people in recognizing and combating news and misinformation related to events or issues. The program focuses on equipping individuals with fact checking skills helping them identify and debunk fake news. Vishvas News reaches out to individuals through various activities and seminars conducted by a qualified team specializing in fact checking.

BOOM also organizes Media Literacy Training and Workshops for people of all ages. Their program called Media Buddhi serves as a guide, on news, politics and culture enabling individuals to understand how to verify claims.

### 7.Results of Comparative Analysis

This section has comparatively analysed the fact-checking practices in both the countries through texts and visual representation, based on the six above mentioned parameters.

#### 7.1 Events that Triggered the Fact-Checking Movement

As per Figure 1, there are both similarities and differences in the triggering events. In both the countries politics as a news commodity have pulled the trigger. Figure 1 also clearly states that

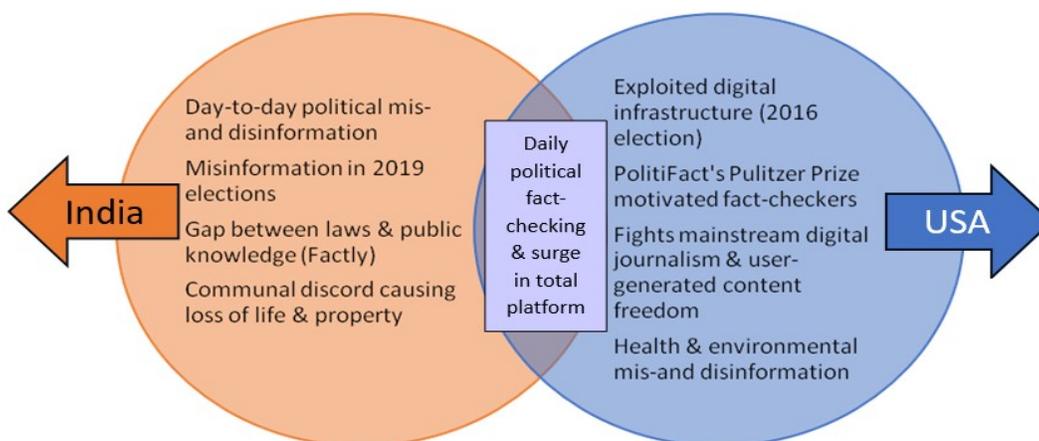
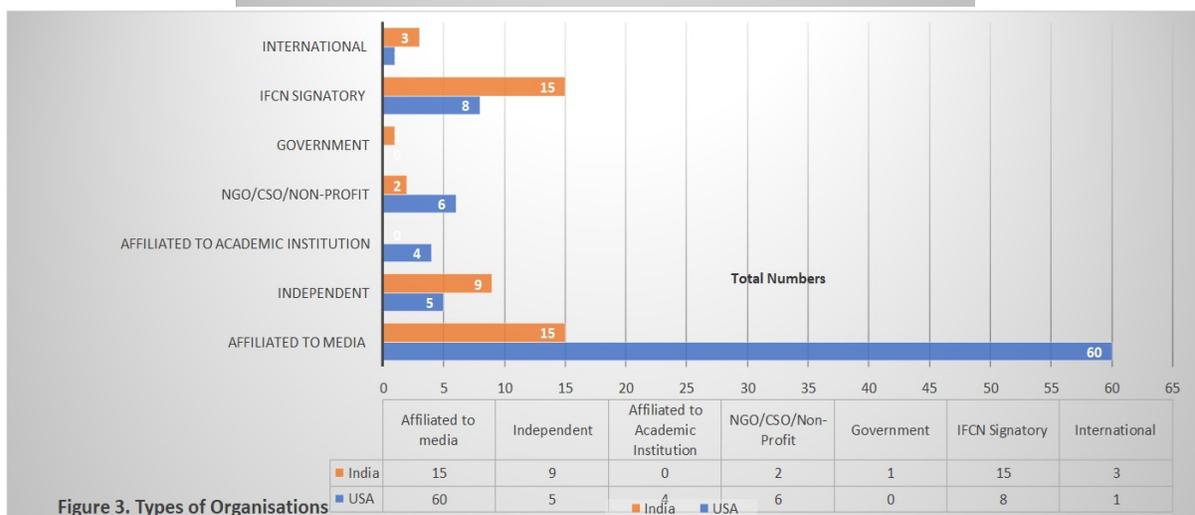
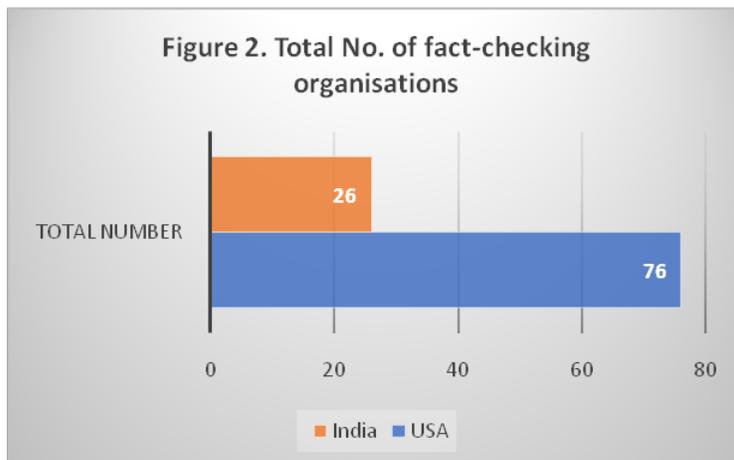


Figure 1. Similarities and difference in triggering points

USA’s 2016 presidential election where digital infrastructure was exploited for personal benefits and in India where day-to-day mis- and disinformation related to politics have been counted as a reason. Almost all the fact-checking organisations in India fact-check several political claims on a daily basis, apart from that the spread of mis/disinformation 2019 General elections also acted as a trigger (Figure 1). These practices have also evolved by fighting against mainstream digital journalism and the freedom of user-generated content on them and health & environmental related mis- and disinformation in both USA and India. Circle to the right of Figure 1

shows the key different triggering events were, 2009 Pulitzer Prize for national reporting (Figure 1), awarded to PolitiFact, which motivated budding fact-checkers in USA to pursue this new journalistic practice. Left circle of Figure 1 demonstrates that in India gaps between governmental laws and the public knowledge pushed the first dedicated fact-checking effort (Factly), it helped bridge this gap and strengthen democracy through engagement. Other than this sowing the seeds of communal discord which caused huge loss of lives and properties for either side involved, also pulled the trigger for more of these organisations coming up.

### 7.2 Number and Type of Fact-Checking Organizations



### 7.3 Funding Sources

Since both the countries have more organisations affiliated to media (Figure 3), most of them are funded by the revenue generated by parent media house. Other than that, also, similar funding sources were identified in different types of organisations like gifts from individuals and family, social media and intermediaries like Google and Meta involves organisations as third-party fact-checkers (3PFC Program) and provides capital to some of them, donations from the public, personal investments by its owners, advertising and revenue generated from selling access to others and some are supported by crowdfunding and donations by readers. A few of

them who are committed to a particular beat like health gets funded from World Health Organization, and one in USA and India each is supported by their respective governments.

### 7.4 Language and Regional Variation

Since the native language of USA is English, all the organisations fact-check claims in English only. As far as India is concerned diverse languages are spoken here so fact-checkers also have opted to debunk claims in different languages based on the region where the organisations are established. Other than English, they check claims in Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

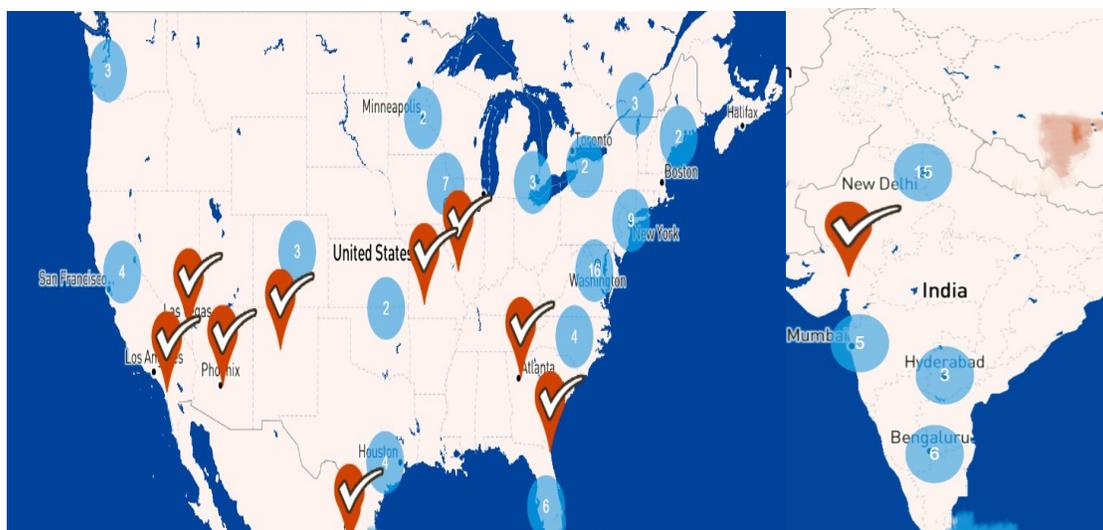


Figure 4. Regional variation in both the countries.  
Source: Duke Reporters Lab Database

### 7.5 Media Literacy Initiatives

Not all the fact-checking organisations have shown interest in promoting media literacy on a larger scale in both the countries. MediaWise in USA fact-checks written by and for teens as part of a media literacy program run by the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida. Three sites have joined hands with a state university to promote media literacy. In India Vishwas news and Boom are two sites, who have taken large chunk of the responsibility to encourage media literacy.

### 8. Conclusion & Discussion

The main objective of this study is to provide a deep understanding of the fact-checking practices in India and USA based on the six mentioned parameters, two democratic countries with one-fourth of total number of active fact-checking organisations. USA, a place which is considered as the mother of dedicated fact-checking efforts and India where this practice is relatively new, both the countries have faced the growing concern of mis- & disinformation with utmost vigour.

This comparative study comes up with key conclusions, which conspicuously shows that both the countries can learn a lot from each other's practices. India, has only 26 fact-checking sites on a population which is four times the total population of USA (Figure 2). The findings suggest that India needs to come up with more such sites in order to debunk more claims. Media houses in India needs awakening, only 15 of them operates a fact-checking unit as compared to 60 from USA (Figure 3). Government in both the countries also needs to put in more efforts in

fighting this menace as its clearly evident by the data, where India has 1, USA has no government sites dedicated to fact-checking (Figure 3). India should start including academic institutions as part of fact-checking projects, which seems to be a critical feature in USA, where they have 4 such institutions whose media departments works in collaboration with established fact-checkers (Figure 3).

Fact-checking in India is still at a nascent stage so NGO's, Private owners should combine more with organisations like International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), whose sole purpose is to help fact-checkers grow. More language diverse fact-checkers are required in India so that mis- and disinformation can be checked in local context, establishment of fact-checking also seems very region specific, like NCR constitutes of half-of-the total Indian sites (Figure 4), other states in central, east and west India has to come up with similar efforts. In general, this research emphasizes the importance of scholars, media professionals, government officials and investors paying attention to promote the expansion of fact checking efforts. The difficulties presented by this issue also present opportunities, for conducting research and developing tools to combat misinformation and disinformation in both countries, and especially in a developing nation like India.

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