

FAKE NEWS AND THE FACT-CHECKING STRATEGIES IN PAKISTAN AND THE UK: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Fake news has the power to corrupt public discourse, destroy enterprises, damage reputations, and influence political outcomes. The concept of the fact-checking organizations emerged with an aim to combat the virality and spread of the fake news and to create an informed citizenry in the society. Given the potential threat posed by the fake news in today's world, many countries have established fact-checking organizations at state and private levels. This research endeavor is an attempt to explore and analyze; the areas wherein fake news is spread, sources of fake news, and the strategies adopted by the fact-checkers in the UK (Fullfact, hereafter FF) and Pakistan (Soch Fact Check, SFC) to identify, verify, and refute fake news. Employing the content analysis and SPSS, we have found out that the majority of the fake news are about politics/politicians/political situation. The findings show that the major sources of fake news have been the "government official/agency/department" and the "politicians" in case of the fact-check done by the FF i.e. in the UK while in case of the fact-check done by the SFC i.e. in Pakistan the majority of the sources of fake news have been the "social media users". Fact-checkers in both the countries employ similar strategies but there is a difference in their reliance on 'accuracy' sources.

INTRODUCTION

A growing number of academics from a variety of fields, including computer engineering, psychological sciences, political studies, mass communication, and economics, have also, quite rightly, become interested in fake news. Given its detrimental effects in real life, it is crucial to comprehend fake news. Fake news has the power to corrupt public discourse, destroy enterprises, damage reputations, and influence political outcomes. Fake news has become serious concern around the globe since the advent of

social media. Recent studies have defined fake news highlighting the factor of facticity (Tandoc, 2019). According to Pennycook et al. (2018), false news is "completely fabricated and frequently politicized information that is portrayed as factual." However, the term "fake news" is not new. According to an examination of the term's usage in scholarly research, fake news can refer to a wide range of content, including state propaganda, misleading advertising,

political satires, and news parodies (Tandoc et al., 2017).

The degree of facticity and the actual intent to deceive are the two primary aspects along which these definitions differ. The attempt to imitate the conventional news format is another way that fake news differs from other types of deception. Therefore, the term "fake news" describes a certain kind of misinformation: it is untrue, it aims to trick people, and it attempts to pass for legitimate news. The primary purpose of the fake news is to mislead audience. The presentation of false assertions that pretend to be about the world in a format and with content that mimics that of actual media organizations is another definition of fake news (Levy, 2017). The proliferation of fake news has been attributed to tech businesses. In fact, messaging apps like WhatsApp and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, which offer quick and simple information transmission, have also turned into places for lies. Recent studies have explored that Financial and ideological motivations are the two primary drivers of false news fabrication (Nelson & Taneja, 2018).

When fake news is produced with the goal of turning online clicks into advertising money, this is referred to as having financial incentives. This drive propelled the extensive false news campaigns that are usually linked to youths working in a society (Kirby, 2016). The creation of fake news for ideological reasons includes the desire to undermine specific individuals or governments, sow division in society, sway elections, or incite violence for political ends (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Bakir & McStay, 2018). Fake news is typically created for different reasons than it is disseminated; common people may unwittingly transmit false information because they genuinely want to make fun of others or express concern to their loved ones (Tandoc et al., 2017).

People pick up and spread fake news from social media bots because they believe that information that confirms their preconceived notions is more convincing than information that challenges them. Social media's ability to keep users in their "filter bubbles," where they are only exposed to content that confirms their preconceived notions and interests, rather than exposing them to a variety of content, is another argument. Confirmation bias and

selective exposure are two techniques that make it easier for people to digest information. However, doing so makes users more susceptible to trusting false information, particularly in the context of social media's information overload. Indeed, people are more likely to believe bogus news when they lack critical thinking skills (Lazer et al., 2018).

The concept of the fact-checking organizations emerged with an aim to combat the virality and spread of the fake news and to create an informed citizenry in the society (Ceron et al., 2021). Given the potential threat posed by the fake news in today's world, many countries have established fact-checking organizations at state-level. For instance, to combat the deceptive TV ads called "adwatches" during the US presidential elections in 1988, various news organizations and scholars explored and analysed the accuracy of the ads shared and produced by the candidates (Cappella & Jamieson, 1994). And, by the 2000 many non governmental, nonpartisan, and independent fact-checking organizations were established in various countries (Vu et al., 2023) to combat misinformation and fake news for the purpose of creating informed citizenry which is an integral requirement for a true liberal democracy. In this study we focus on the fact-checking organisations working in Pakistan and in the UK (one country each from the Global South and Global North respectively).

Research Questions:

Following are our research questions for this study;

- What are the main areas identified (for instance; politics, religion, economy, international relations, climate change, private life/gossip, scientific discovery, health or 'others') by the fact-checkers in the UK and Pakistan about which fake news are spread?
- Who are involved in the spread of fake news in both the countries under study?
- What are the strategies employed by the fact-checkers (Fullfact and Soch Fact Check) to refute/verify claims in the fact-checked articles?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fact-checking has emerged as a vital journalistic function in the digital age, where the spread of misinformation is accelerated by social media

platforms and polarized political environments (Graves, 2016; Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Many studies situate fact-checking as a countermeasure to these trends, highlighting its role in fostering public trust and accountability. The journalist surveys in research largely agree on the importance of maintaining objectivity in fact-checking, echoing the findings of Graves and Amazeen (2019), who emphasize that neutrality enhances the credibility of fact-checking initiatives. Public trust in fact is shaped not only by journalist's adherence to ethical principles but also by the transparency and accessibility of their methods. Brandtzaeg et al. (2018) emphasizes the importance of explaining fact-checking processes to audiences to enhance credibility. Graves (2016) similarly argues that the effectiveness of fact-checking depends on its ability to engage audiences across the ideological divides, suggesting that journalists balance rigor with relatability.

Mena (2019) employs a survey-based approach to gather data from U.S. based journalists, providing a snapshot of professional attitudes toward fact checking. This method allows for a nuanced understanding of the ethical and practical dilemmas faced by practitioners. However, the study's geographic focus limits its generalization, as media systems and political contexts vary significantly across countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). Future research could build on Mena's work by conducting cross-national comparisons to explore how fact-checking principles are interpreted and implemented in different cultural and political environments. Mena's research also highlights the challenges posed by social media, which amplifies the speed and reach of misinformation. Tandoc et al. (2018) demonstrated the importance of trust in combating the virality of misinformation. While Mena's article provides valuable insights into journalists' perceptions, it leaves room for further exploration. For instance, how do audiences perceive the neutrality and effectiveness of fact-checking? How do journalists navigate the tension between rapid fact checking accuracy in breaking news scenarios? Addressing these questions could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of fact-checking in contemporary journalism. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches that integrate

psychological and sociological perspectives could shed light on the cognitive biases and cultural factors influencing the reception of fact-checkers.

The rise of disinformation has become a global challenge, fuelled by digital platforms and the ease of content creation and dissemination. Fact-checking, as a countermeasure, has gained prominence, yet its implementation and reception vary widely across countries. In their study, Mahl et al. (2024) provide a conceptual and comparative framework for understanding "fact-checking cultures" exploring how these practices evolve in different sociopolitical and cultural environments. Their work contributes to the field of studies and political communication by analysing the complex interplay between local contexts, global standards and operational dynamics of fact-checking organization.

Mahl et al. (2024) conceptualize fact-checking cultures as a dynamic interplay of institutional, social, and technological factors that shape how misinformation is addressed in specific contexts. Their approach builds on existing scholarship on media systems, particularly Hallin and Mancini's (2004) typology, which categorizes media systems into liberal, pluralist models. These models explain how journalistic practices and media accountability vary across regions, influencing fact-checking's role and reception. The authors address the tension between global initiatives, such as International Fact-Checking and the need to localized adaptations. For example, while global platforms like Facebook have partnered with fact-checking organizations to address misinformation, these efforts often face linguistic and cultural barriers, particularly in non-Western contexts (Graves, 2016).

Trust is central to the success of fact-checking initiatives. The study draws on research by Marwick and Lewis (2017), who argue that misinformation thrives in polarized environments where trust in media and institutions is already low. In such contexts, fact checking may be perceived as partisan or biased, undermining its credibility. The authors employed a comparative, mixed-methods approach, combining: case studies, content analysis, and interviews. Qualitative interviews with fact-checkers, journalists, and media researchers provide insights into the operational challenges and strategic decisions of fact-checking organizations.

The study reveals significant differences in how fact-checking organizations operate, shape by their funding sources, partnerships and institutional independence. United States: Fact-checkers benefit from established journalistic traditions and philanthropic support, focusing on political misinformation (Graves & Anderson, 2020). Brazil: Fact-checking operates in a polarized environment, where misinformation often targets political opponents. Organizations like Aos Fatos rely on public funding and collaborate with social media platforms to scale their efforts. India: The dominance of regional languages and platforms like WhatsApp presents unique challenges, necessitating localized approach to combat misinformation.

Fact-checking practices align with national media systems. In democratic corporatist systems like Germany, fact-checking is integrated into mainstream journalism, enhancing credibility. In polarized pluralist systems like Brazil, fact-checking often faces resistance from partisan media and political actors (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp are both vectors for misinformation and collaborators in fact-checking efforts. However, linguistic biases and algorithmic limitations often hinder the scalability of fact-checking initiatives, particularly in the Global South (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018).

Public trust varies widely across countries. In the U.S and Brazil, where media landscapes are highly polarized, fact-checking organizations often face accusations of partisanship. In contrast, countries with strong public service media, like Germany, exhibit higher trust in fact-checking. Fact-checking organizations in developing countries face significant resource constraints, limiting their ability to address misinformation across multiple languages and formats. For example, India, the linguistic diversity and lack of digital literacy present barriers to effective fact-checking (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Many fact-checking organizations rely on short-term funding from NGO's or tech companies, raising concerns about their long-term independence. The speed at which misinformation spreads on digital fact-checking efforts. During crises like elections or pandemics, the lag between misinformation and its correction can have significant consequences (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, (2018). Fact-checking

practices often fail to account for cultural nuances and linguistic diversity, particularly in non-English speaking regions. This limits the reach and effectiveness of global fact-checking initiatives. In authoritarian regimes. Fact-checking organization face censorship, harassment or co-optation by the state, undermining their independence and credibility. Policy makers should support fact-checking initiatives by ensuring legal protections, promoting media literacy and encouraging collaborations between fact-checkers, journalist and tech companies. Tailored approaches are essential to address region-specific misinformation. For instance, community-based fact-checking should be encouraged and can be more effective in rural and multilingual societies. Advance in artificial intelligence and machine learning offer opportunities to scale fact-checking efforts. Fact-checking organizations must prioritize transparency in their methodologies and funding sources to build credibility and trust with the public (Mahl et al., 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Keeping in view the broader research objective and the research questions we have employed the quantitative content analysis. The unit of analysis is each claim in every fact-check content i.e. a fact-check article about a news story, news item, picture, video, report etc. A code book has been developed on the basis of literature and assessment of preliminary data. The variables that has been studied through the code book in this research include; Topic of the claim- Nature of the claim/ Genre of the claim (for instance; is the claim about politician/political leader, celebrity other than politician, climate change, health, foreign country, crime etc.), the primary source of the claim/claim maker (who shared the fake news), strategies to ascertain the accuracy (by determining the truth scale used by the fac-checkers, for instance, Reverse image search, AI detector, image forensic tool, Meta-data analysis, Image comparison etc.), transparency (by counting the number of links to external sources and by determining the corrective sources used for factual authenticity such as; reports, experts/scientists, scientific studies, competent-relevant authorities, mainstream news media, websites, social media with

an option of 'others'), and accessibility (i.e. whether the fact-checkers employed any visual elements to debunk the claim and whether their verdict on the claim is clear).

We have collected data from the two fact-check organizations; Fullfact from the UK and Soch Fact Check from Pakistan during 2024 to explore and analyse the contents of the fact-checked articles/stories by the fact checkers in both the countries. By doing so, we have attempted to determine the areas, fields and subjects which are predominantly hit by the menace of fake-news. We have also attempted to explore and comparatively analyse the sources of fake news in both the countries. The data has been collected from the websites of the Soch Fact Check (Pakistan- <https://www.sochfactcheck.com/>) and Full Fact (UK- <https://fullfact.org/>) by applying; "Soch - "Fact or Fiction?" -inurl: tag site: <https://www.sochfactcheck.com/>" and "FullFact- "What was claimed" AND "Our verdict" site: <https://fullfact.org/>". By applying this search method during the time period January 01, 2024 to December 31, 2024, we found out 536 results from the "Fullfact" and 396 results from the "Soch Fact Check". At a second stage, we randomly selected one fact-checked article from the first ten pages on the google search. So, our total sample size is 20 fact-check articles. However, considering the fact that each fact-check article may contain more than one claim in it, we have considered each claim as a unit of analysis. And, we have found out that there are 14 claims in the ten fact-check articles selected from the "Fullfact" and ten claims in the ten fact-check articles selected from the "Soch Fact Check". We have used SPSS to interpret and analyze the findings.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Following pages contain the interpretation and analysis of the data retrieved from the SPSS files. The findings and analysis have been organised according to the variables under study.

First of all, we have focused on the "number of claims in the article i.e. how many claims have been fact checked in an article under study".

The findings show that the 'Fullfact' (FF) debunked 14 claims in its 10 articles selected for this study. There was one claim each in 09 articles and there

were five claims in one article among the sample under study. Hence, there were total 14 claims in 10 articles under study from the FF. On the other hand, the 'Soch' (SFC) debunked one claim in each of the selected 10 articles during the time period under study. hence, there were a total of 10 claims under study from the SFC.

Topic of the claim- Nature of the claim/ Genre of the claim;

Coding; N- No, Y- Yes, T- Total

Topics of Claims;

- I. Is the claim about a political leader (If it is about a political leader, political situation, etc.)
- II. Is the claim about a Celebrity (other than politician).
- III. Is the claim about a natural disaster?
- IV. Is the claim about a crime?
- V. Is the claim about science (discoveries, scientific facts, etc.)?
- VI. Is the claim about technology (devices, new technology, AI, etc.)
- VII. Is the claim about health?
- VIII. Is the claim about climate change?
- IX. Is the claim about a financial/economics related topic (claims about commercial entities/stock markets/economy/etc.)?
- X. Is the claim about a scenic view/natural beauty/natural phenomenon (beautiful solar eclipse/plant which flowers once in 140 years, etc.)
- XI. Is the claim about nationalistic pride (country/religion is great)
- XII. Is the claim about a foreign country/affairs (based on the country of the fact-check outlet)
- XIII. Is the claim about the private life/gossip/scandals/etc. of somebody?
- XIV. Is the claim about a category which does not fit any of the above?

The careful interpretation of the data shows that the FF debunked 8 out of 14 claims about politics/politician and SFC debunked 4 out 10 claims about politics/politician. FF debunked 2 claims about a crime. The SFC debunked 2 claims about technology (devices, new technology, AI, etc.). The FF debunked 1 claim about a financial/economics related topic (claims about commercial entities/stock markets/economy/etc.).

The FF debunked 3 claims about a foreign country/affair (based on the country of the fact-check outlet) and SFC debunked 1 claim about this topic. The SFC debunked 3 claims about the private life/gossip/scandals/etc. of somebody.

So, the data shows that the FF debunked majority of the claims (57.14%) related to the politics/politician during the time period under study. The second highest debunked claims (21.43%) by the FF were related to the foreign country/affair (based on the country of the fact-check outlet). While 14.29% claims debunked by the FF were related to crime and 7.14% claims debunked by the FF were related to a financial/economics related topic (claims about commercial entities/ stock markets/ economy/etc.). On the other hand, the majority of the claims debunked by the SFC (40%) were also related to the politics/politician during the time period under study. The second highest debunked claims (30%) by the SFC were related to the private life/gossip/scandals/etc. of somebody. While 20% claims debunked by the SFC were related to the topics of technology (devices, new technology, AI, etc.). and, 10% claims debunked by the SFC were related to the topics of a foreign country/affair (based on the country of the fact-check outlet).

Primary source of the claim: (based on what is presented in the fact-check as the primary source of the claim.

Coding; N- No, Y- Yes, T- Total

Primary source of the claim;

- I. Does the claim originate from social media users?
- II. Does the claim originate from mainstream media?
- III. Does the claim originate from a politician?
- IV. Does the claim originate from Public Figures other than politicians?
- V. Does the claim originate from Alternative media/partisan media? (depending on the country's context, organizations which are not considered mainstream media can be alt media or partisan media)
- VI. Does the claim originate from a government official/agency/department
- VII. Does the claim originate from a source other than the categories above? Please mention in remarks

The careful interpretation of the data shows that the SFC debunked all the 10 claims that “originated from social media users”. There was only one instance/claim wherein the SFC debunked a claim originated from ‘Public Figures other than politicians’. However, the platform used for the claim was social media. On the other hand, the FF debunked 7 out of 14 claims (50%) that were originated from the “social media users”. There were 08 claims (57.14%) debunked by the FF which were originated by the “politicians”. There was one claim (7.14%) debunked by the FF which was originated from “Alternative media/partisan media? (depending on the country's context, organizations which are not considered mainstream media can be alt media or partisan media)”. And, there were 08 claims (57.14%) which were originated from “a government official/agency/department”. It is important to note that, the FF debunked 57.14% of its claims which were originated by the “a government official/agency/department”.

The findings show that the major sources of fake news have been the “a government official/agency/department” and the “politicians” in case of the fact-check done by the “Fullfact” i.e. in the UK while in case of the fact-check done by the “Soch Fact Check” i.e. in Pakistan the majority of the sources of fake news have been the “social media users”.

Here, one aspect is noteworthy that either the “politicians” and “government official/agency/department” in Pakistan do not spread fake news or the “Soch Fact Check” did not focus to or intended to debunk any fake news/claims from the “politicians” and “government official/agency/department” in Pakistan.

Fact-checking strategies involved; Whether the fact-check mentions its methodology clearly? (Here methodology means any information shared in the fact-check article about how they debunk/verify the claim.

Coding; 0- No, 1- Yes, 2-Partially transparent (some details of the method shared)

The careful interpretation of the data shows that the FF employed a clear fact-checking strategy in 8 out of total 14 debunked claims (57.14%) while such clear/transparent strategies were absent in remaining

6 claims (42.86%) debunked the FF. on the other hand, the SFC employed a clear fact-checking strategy in all of its 10 debunked claims. This implies that, during the process of fact-checking, the transparency level was 100% among the fact-checkers at SFC as compared to those 57.14% at the FF.

Strategies used in the fact-check to ascertain if the image/video/other is actually original or manipulated;

Coding; 0- Absent, 1- Present, 2-Not applicable (claim is non-visual – statement/factual assertion, etc.)

Strategies used;

I. Reverse image search (In cases where it was used to find a longer version of the video/actual version of an image)

II. AI detector use

III. Error-level analysis/image forensic tool use (like Forensically/other)

IV. Meta-data analysis (checking EXIF data of an image/video, social media metadata like timestamps, etc.)

V. Image comparison (the image in the claim visually compared with original image)

VI. Interviewing the uploader for the purpose of getting the original file

The careful interpretation of the data shows that the SFC employed the “Reverse image search (In cases where it was used to find a longer version of the video/actual version of an image)” strategy in 5 out of 10 claims (50%) that they debunked. In case of four claims (40%) this strategy was not applicable and in one case i.e. debunking one claim the SFC did not apply this strategy. Similarly, the strategy of “Image comparison (the image in the claim visually compared with original image)” was employed in 5 out of 10 debunked claims (50%), the “meta-data analysis (checking EXIF data of an image/video, social media metadata like timestamps, etc.)” strategy was employed in debunking 03 claims (30%), and the “image forensic tool” was use as strategy to debunk 01 claim (10%). While, “the AI detector” and “Interviewing the uploader” were not applicable or employed by the fact-checkers at the SC.

On the other hand, the FF employed the strategy of “Reverse image search” in 3 out of 14 claims (21.43%), and the strategies of “AI detector”, “image

forensic tool”, and “Meta-data analysis” were not employed or they were not applicable. The strategy of “image comparison” was employed in 2 (14.29%) and “Interviewing the uploader” was employed in 01 case (7.14%).

Factual Authenticity strategies; Corrective source used- use of any source of information to refute/verify factual authenticity of the claim made, which is clearly attributed.

Coding; 0- No, 1- Yes

Factual Authenticity strategies (corrective sources used-Truth Scale);

I. Expert comments (scientists or other experts who are quoted for their expertise)

II. Government officials comment (officials quoted for factual input/clarification)

III. Witness account (Witness on ground quoted for factual verification)

IV. Official documents (Quoting excerpts or information from official documents for factual clarification)

V. Social Media Accounts (Quoting previous posts/clarifications from social media handles for factual verification)

VI. Research journals/papers/thesis, etc. (Quoting from academic/research documents for clarifying factual authenticity)

VII. Media reports (Quoting other media reports for factual clarity)

VIII. Books/Industry reports/ Encyclopedia/ etc. (Quoting from other kinds of publications for factual clarity)

IX. Other fact-checking organizations (Quoting other fact-checking organizations for factual clarification)

X. Own fact-checks in the past (past fact-checks by the same organization being used as corrective source)

When it comes to the “factual authenticity strategies-corrective sources used-truth scale” employed by the fact checkers, we have found out that the FF relied heavily on the “Government officials” as “corrective sources” by debunking 12 out of 14 claims (85.71%) on the basis of verification of the claims through government officials. Second highest ‘corrective source’ used by the FF was “official documents” wherein the FF debunked 10 out of 14 claims/fake

news (71.43%). The FF debunked 2 claims each by using “Expert comments”, “media reports”, and “Books/Industry reports/ Encyclopedia/ etc.” as “corrective sources” to ensure the factual authenticity of the claims. The “witness account” and “Research journals/papers/thesis” were used to debunk 1 claim each (7.14%) by the FF. The FF employed 33 “corrective sources” in total to debunk 14 claims under study.

On the other hand, the SFC employed “media reports” and “social media accounts” as “corrective sources” to debunk 8 out of total 10 claims/fake news (80%). Both of these corrective sources were used to debunk 8 claims each. Apart from this, 6 claims (60%) were debunked by using “official documents”, 4 claims (40%) were debunked by using “government officials”, 3 claims (30%) were debunked by using “expert comments”, 2 claims were debunked by using “witness accounts”, and 1 claim each (10%) was debunked by employing the “Other fact-checking organizations” and “Research journals/papers/thesis” as corrective sources. Overall, the SFC employed 38 corrective sources to debunk the selected 10 claims/fake news under study.

Hence, the careful interpretation of the data suggests that the FF relied heavily of government sources to debunk the claims/fake news while the SFC used more variety of corrective sources to debunk the claims/fake news under study.

Tools used- what are the tools used to refute/verify factual authenticity of the claim made, which is clearly attributed.

Coding; 0- No, 1- Yes

tools used to refute/verify factual authenticity of the claim;

- I. Reverse image search tool
- II. Search engine for keyword search
- III. Geolocation tool
- IV. AI detector tool

The careful interpretation of the data suggests that the FF employed “reverse image” as a tool in 21.43% of the claims/fake news and “Geolocation tool” in 7.14% of the claims/fake news to refute/verify factual authenticity of the claims under study. In rest of the claims, either the tools were not required or they were not relevant. On the other hand, the SFC employed “reverse image” as tool in 50% of the claims/fake news and the “search engine” in 30% of

the claims/fake news to refute/verify factual authenticity of the claims under study.

These findings show that the SFC relied more on the tools as compared to the FF to refute/verify factual authenticity of the claims under study.

Type of final decision; the final decision about the claim being fact-checked as per the conclusion of the fact-check article.

Coding; 0- Real, 1- Fake, 2-Misleading, 3-Missing context, 4-Other (please mention in the remarks column)

The findings show that the FF debunked 7 out 14 claims (50%) as “fake”, and 7 out 14 (50%) were decided as “misleading”. On the other hand, the SFC debunked all of the fact-checked articles and claims in them (100%) as “fake”.

Nature of final decision; Whether the final decision is conclusive or inconclusive.

Coding; 0- Inconclusive, 1 - Conclusive

The findings show that the “nature of the final decision” on the 7 out of 14 claims (50%) by the FF fact-checkers was conclusive by marking them “fake” and the “nature of the final decision” on the 7 out of 14 claims (50%) by the FF fact-checkers was inconclusive by marking them “unproven” and/or “mixed”. On the other hand, the fact-checkers at the SFC were more “conclusive” in the “nature of the final decision” on all of the claims under study. They marked all the claims as “fake”.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this study, we intended to explore and comparatively analyze the fact-checking strategies among the fact-checkers in the UK and Pakistan. We set our goals; to explore the main areas/topics identified (for instance; politics, religion, economy, international relations, climate change, private life/gossip, scientific discovery, health or ‘others’) by the fact-checkers in the UK and Pakistan about which fake news are spread, to explore the sources of fake news in both countries, and to explore and analyze the strategies employed by the fact-checkers (Fullfact and Soch Fact Check) to refute/verify claims in the fact-checked articles. We employed the quantitative content analysis and SPSS to analyze and describe the findings. To achieve the research

goals and to answer the research question under study, we devised five notable variables that has been studied through the code book in this research include; Topic of the claim- Nature of the claim/ Genre of the claim (for instance; is the claim about politician/political leader, celebrity other than politician, climate change, health, foreign country, crime etc.), the primary source of the claim/claim maker (who shared the fake news), strategies to ascertain the accuracy (by determining the truth scale used by the fact-checkers, for instance, Reverse image search, AI detector, image forensic tool, Meta-data analysis, Image comparison etc.), transparency (by counting the number of links to external sources and by determining the corrective sources used for factual authenticity such as; reports, experts/scientists, scientific studies, competent-relevant authorities, mainstream news media, websites, social media with an option of 'others'), and accessibility (i.e. whether the fact-checkers employed any visual elements to debunk the claim and whether their verdict on the claim is clear).

Our findings show that the Fullfact (the fact-checker from the UK) debunked 14 claims in its 10 articles selected for this study. There was one claim each in 09 articles and there were five claims in one article among the sample under study. Hence, there were total 14 claims in 10 articles under study from the FF. On the other hand, the 'Soch' (SFC) debunked one claim in each of the selected 10 articles during the time period under study. Hence, there were a total of 10 claims under study from the SFC. As for the "topic/nature/genre of the claim" is concerned, the findings show that the FF debunked majority of the claims related to the politics/politician during the time period under study. The second highest claims debunked by the FF were related to the foreign country/affair. Overall, the "topic/nature/genre of the claims" debunked by the FF include; politics/politicians, foreign country/affair, crime, and financial/economics. Similarly, the majority of the claims debunked by the SFC were also related to the politics/politician during the time period under study. The second highest claims debunked by the SFC were related to the private life/gossip/scandals/etc. of somebody. While, the SFC also debunked fake news related to the topics of technology and foreign country/affair. So, overall,

the majority of the fake news debunked by the factcheckers in both the countries were related to the politics/politicians/political situation in their respective countries.

As for the "primary source of the claim/fake news" is concerned, our findings show that the major sources of fake news have been the "a government official/agency/department" and the "politicians" in case of the fact-check done by the FF i.e. in the UK while in case of the fact-check done by the SFC i.e. in Pakistan the majority of the sources of fake news have been the "social media users". Here, one aspect is noteworthy that either the "politicians" and "government official/agency/department" in Pakistan do not spread fake news or the "Soch Fact Check" did not focus to or intended to debunk any fake news/claims from the "politicians" and "government official/agency/department" in Pakistan.

The next variable under study was the "fact-checking strategies used" by the selected fact-checkers. Our findings show that, the SFC employed clear methodology to debunk the claims/fake news during the time period under study. While, the methodology adopted by the FF was not clearly mentioned in all of the debunked fake news/claims. Hence, the "transparency" level among the fact-checkers in Pakistan found to be on the higher side as compared to the factcheckers in the UK. As for the strategies used by the fact-checkers to ascertain the authenticity of the claims, we have found out that the SFC used more strategies to debunk the claims as compared to the strategies used by the FF. So, it can be concluded that the SFC employed more transparent methods to debunk the claims/fake news as compared to the methods employed by the FF.

When it comes to the "accuracy- truth scale" i.e. the "factual authenticity strategies-corrective sources used" by the fact checkers, we have found out that the FF relied heavily on the "Government officials" or the "official documents" as "corrective sources". On the other hand, the SFC employed "media reports" and "social media accounts" as "corrective sources" to debunk majority of the claims. In a scenario, wherein the majority of the fake news/claims are related to the politics/politicians/political situation, the use of independent corrective sources seems to be more

accurate. A careful interpretation of the data suggests that the FF relied heavily on the government sources to debunk the claims/fake news while the SFC used more variety of corrective sources to debunk the claims/fake news under study. Therefore, it can be concluded that the SFC employed more accurate corrective sources to debunk/refute the fake news during the time period under study.

Next variable under study was to explore the tools used by the fact-checkers to refute/verify factual authenticity of the claim. It was measured to see which fact-checkers used more tools to enhance the accuracy of their verdict regarding the claims. Our findings evidence that both the fact-checkers employed variety of tools to check/refute/verify the claims/fake news. The tools used by the fact-checkers include reverse image, geolocation tools, and search engine. However, in terms of comparison, it can be concluded that the SFC relied more on the tools as compared to the FF to refute/verify factual authenticity of the claims under study.

Finally, as for the “type of final decision” and the “nature of final decision” is concerned, the findings show that the SFC categorically decided that all the claims under study were “fake” while the FF was clear on half of the claims by mentioning them “fake” and half of the claims/fake news were mentioned as “misleading. So, it can be concluded that the fact-checkers at the SFC were more “conclusive” in the “nature of the final decision” on all of the claims under study as compared to the FF fact-checkers who were inconclusive in their decisions in half of the claims debunked by them. The “type of final decision” and the “nature of final decision” were analyzed to determine the accessibility (i.e. whether the fact-checkers employed any visual elements to debunk the claim and whether their verdict on the claim was clear. The “accessibility” element helps the audience/receivers to make their decisions regarding the information offered by the claim makers.

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