Check the checks: A comparison of fact-checking practices between newspapers and independent organizations in the United States

by

Diep Pham Phuong Uyen

B.A., Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, 2019

A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2022

Approved by:

Major Professor
Raluca Cozma

Copyright

Abstract

By conducting content analyses of 440 fact checks (N = 440), the study examined the fact-checking practices of three leading national newspapers (i.e., The New York Times, The Washington Post, and USA Today) and three independent fact-checking organizations (i.e., FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, and Snopes.com) in the United States during the 2020 presidential debates and town halls. The results found differences in how two types of organizations fact-check in terms of candidates, ratings, used sources, and topics. H1 and H2 were supported and partially supported, respectively, suggesting that three news organizations fact-checked Trump's statements more than Biden's, compared to three independent organizations. Fact-checking practices implications were further discussed in the context of polarization and truth decay.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Acknowledgements

I want to express my sincerest appreciation to Dr. Raluca Cozma and Dr. Sam Mwangi of the A.Q Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications, and Dr. Timothy Shaffer of the Department of Communication Studies, at Kansas State University, for being my committee members and supporting my working process. Without their advice and inputs, this project may not have come to fruition. I would like to thank Dr. Cozma, my major professor, specifically for her mentorship, not merely on this thesis but also during my Master's journey. It is my privilege and honour to work with her.

I benefited greatly from the expertise, wisdom, and support of professors, colleagues, friends, and students, at the A.Q Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications, Kansas State University. Thank you for helping me realise how I love teaching and doing research. I would also like to express my appreciation for my supervisors and colleagues in news organizations and former teachers for facilitating opportunities to explore myself and see the journalism and mass communications world from both practical and academic lenses. Additionally, I would like to thank anyone who never gave up on me, even when I did not believe in myself; you may not know every supportive word counts.

Eventually, my gratefulness goes to my family and friends, who have been walking with me on my bumpy roads. I might not be "me" now, without your care and love.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, who always supported my further education and wanted to witness my Master's graduation, but could not wait any longer. He passed away two months before my commencement. I hope I have made you proud.

To my parents and sister, who always supported every step I have taken and embraced every choice I have made. I was raised well and independently, fortunately. Being your pride is my biggest goal and achievement. *Con cám ơn ba mẹ!*

To my beloved teacher, professor Le Quang Nhat, who has been teaching me to be a good person and journalist.

To my significant other, who is also my mentor and colleague, in several aspects of life. Without your being, my very first walk in academia could be struggling. Thanks, particularly, for your cheat sheet; I hope I have not disappointed you.

To K-State, it is my privilege to be a Wildcat.

To my friends, specially My and Vi, and acquaintances, even those who no longer are, your existence meant the world to me.

To all youngsters, I can do it and so do you. Do not be afraid and hesitate to knock on any doors.

Veritas Omnia Vincit.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The 2020 U.S. election was marked by unprecedented chaos and hyper-political division for many reasons, including the COVID-19 pandemic, then-President Trump's coronavirus infection, and the increase of absentee ballots and their acceptance extension time. The situation sparked false claims about election fraud and ended up with an attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Indeed, during the previous campaign season, American voters had confronted inaccurate statements made by both presidential candidates and seen a rise in so-called fake news (Patterson, 2016). Given this political environment, scholars urged that it was more important than ever to correct misinformation delivered by political leaders swiftly and vigilantly (Amazeen, 2020; Dimitrova & Nelson, 2018).

Since the 2012 presidential election cycle, there has been a major spike in fact-checking sources, namely news media and independent organizations (Graves, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2015). The context has highlighted the vital role of the two institutions in verifying information given by political figures, which influences a healthy democracy predicated on a well and accurately informed electorate. Regarding the public, the more frequently audiences visit fact-checking websites, the more politically accurate they are compared to those who do not visit these sites (Gottfried et al., 2013). In other words, reading fact-checking articles can enhance the public's political knowledge, thus, their ability to make informed decisions at the ballot box (Dunn et al., 2015; Graves, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2015). Furthermore, fact-checking such as media's response to both candidates' misleading claims, can decrease politicians' likelihood to make incorrect statements (Amazeen, 2013; Nyhan & Reifler, 2012).

In view of the significance of fact-checking journalism, which is described as "truth-seeking" and as a new form of a "political watchdog" (Graves, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2015), the current study

sets out to examine how leading U.S. news outlets executed their role in the 2020 election, in comparison with independent fact-checking organizations. Its objectives are to explore the fact-checking practices of news media and independent bureaus by looking at multiple criteria such as statements' selection and evaluation, as well as cited sources, and to examine if there are any differences across two types of institutions. This comparison and the lack of consistency in approaching fact-checking among news outlets themselves are worth further investigation (Dimitrova & Nelson, 2018; Lowrey, 2017). Fact-checking of presidential debates is chosen for examination since they are key in the decision-making of voters (Katz, 2016). Plus, the 2020 presidential campaign presented an unprecedented situation when the second debate was canceled and replaced by two separate concurrent town halls, which was considered a good opportunity to explore fact-checking practices about two candidates separately, albeit in the same nature and occasion. By examining fact-checking practices at The New York Times, The Washington Post, and USA Today, versus at FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, and Snopes.com, this thesis aims to apply the gatekeeping theory to contribute to literature in an emerging field of scholarship (i.e., fact-checking) and to discuss implications for organizations.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Gatekeeping theory

As fact-checking is a new genre of journalism (Graves, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2015), this study chooses the gatekeeping theory to explore its practices across organizations. The theory suggests that there is a selection process within a media organization to determine what information will be turned into a story (Shoemaker, Vos, & Reese, 2009). That process, based on each organization's characteristics and influential forces, will also influence how the information is shaped and delivered to the public (Shoemaker & Vos, 2008). For instance, different media outlets may concentrate on distinct attributes of a chosen speech, debate, campaign advertisements, or claims, to fact-check (Dimitrova & Nelson, 2018). Thus, analyzing the process of information selection or omission, news stories' ranking, or publication's styles, can partly reveal an organization's ideologies and values (Preston & Metykova, 2009; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Indeed, the organization is one of five levels of influential forces that affect news selection (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The four others are individual, routine, social institutions or extra-media, and societal influences. Each level in the hierarchy, which is not necessary in order, is vital and impactful to one another. However, the organizational level would have the power to even eliminate individual and routine influences and, as a result, the autonomy from the micro levels of the hierarchy can be diminished or eliminated altogether (Preston & Metykova, 2009). This stresses the impact of a media organization's values and orientations on its gatekeeping role and consequently on its practices, such as fact-checking. Hence, Dimitrova and Nelson (2018) argued that it was important to acknowledge whether media organizations avoided reporting information, which might not have been in line with their political ideology, by comparing their coverage with

other organizations'. Selected or discarded information, in turn, will ultimately affect the political knowledge of the American public (Dimitrova & Nelson, 2018).

Fact-checking - a superior form of journalism

The emergence of fact-checking journalism can be traced back to the early 2000s, while its initial unofficial fact-checkers were seen as early as the muckraking journalism era when reporters challenged false claims of politicians or businesspeople, e.g., patent-medicine producers (Amazeen et al., 2018). Fact-checking practice has gained popularity and massive increase over election cycles (Fridkin, Kenney, & Wintersieck, 2015; Graves, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2015). Recent fact-checking trends seem to be a response to the public's perceptions of the journalism profession, including its declining trust in media organizations (Dimitrova & Nelson, 2018; Riffkin, 2015). Interestingly, Kurtzleben (2016) found that approximately 80 percent of Americans, either Democrat- or Republican-identified, likely favored the media's utilization of fact-checking.

Fact-checking possesses distinct characteristics compared to other forms of journalism. Its primary focus is the accuracy of information such as a speech rather than the concern if journalists collected the right information or quoted correctly (Amazeen, 2013; Graves, 2016). Hence, fact-checking arguably results in higher effectiveness at correcting false statements providing veracity scales to audiences with regular reporting methods of he-said/she-said (Pingree, Brossard, & McLeod, 2014). Amazeen (2020) even argued that fact-checking was "a superior form of journalism," whose diffusion helped to improve the profession in terms of practices, standards, and credibility.

Despite several attributing differences, fact-checking and other forms of journalism share one particular core characteristic: objectivity. Objective journalism finds its roots in the 1920s, which marked a distancing from partisan journalism and paved the way for the next century of journalistic trends (Graves, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2015). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) posited that the

goal of journalism remained consistent in its commitment to provide objective and fair reports to audiences while eliminating "personal and cultural biases" to deliver an accurate journalistic product. The objectivity of journalism is defined by a cluster of ideals, including neutrality and fairness (Maras, 2013). In the case of fact-checking, the first code of principles promoted by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), which has been providing more than 100 global fact-checking operations since 2015, is "commitment to non-partisanship and fairness." It means all parties' information needs to be fact-checked equally.

Likewise, two of multiple best practices for fact-checking coverage relate to IFCN's approach, namely lessening partisan cues and minimizing sources having political affiliations (Nyhan & Reifler, 2012). Graves (2016) also suggested five areas of fact-checking practices, specifically choosing claims to check, contacting the speaker, tracing false claims, dealing with experts, and showing your work. Each of them needs to ensure the objectivity of the reportage. For instance, "showing your work" is the claim to objectivity and transparency (Graves, 2016). These two frameworks are later discussed and applied to the current study. Similar to journalism in general, questions and revisions about objective practices are constantly asked by professionals and scholars, particularly when it comes to political fact-checking, and fact-checkers are not considered as "neutral arbiters" of facts but are perceived as hostile by many audiences (Graves, 2016; Uscinski & Butler, 2013; Zelizer, 1993).

Political fact-checking

The increase of partisanship and polarization has affected media systems around the globe since 2004 (Dunham, 2016). Amazeen (2020) portrayed the rise of political fact-checking as the reform movement of "consumer activism." During the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the significance of fact-checking journalism became more critical than ever. As a part of journalism's watchdog role, this practice has been valued by both sides of the political spectrum

amid election cycles since it offers the public evaluations of what information presented by politicians is true or false (Dimitrova & Nelson, 2018). Broadly, political fact-checking has three fundamental goals, including educating the public, improving political behavior, and ameliorating journalism (Amazeen, 2020). Therefore, fact-checkers nowadays focus on examining claims by political figures, whilst traditional professionals merely verify information in internal news reports (Graves, 2016).

Despite a general appreciation from the public, journalism fact-checkers are facing the frequent accusation of being partisan, usually in favor of Democrats (Stencel, 2015), particularly when partisan media has started to grow in ratings since the latter part of the 20th century (Amazeen, 2020). Reporters' fact checks have been seen as commentary, which violates the rules of objectivity and impartiality of journalism (Li et al., 2018), thus, being found to backfire (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010; Garrett & Weeks, 2013). This is exaggerated by the hostile media bias perception of audiences, which makes they likely to perceive media bias if the articles do not align with their existing beliefs even when these reports are balanced (Gunther, Edgerly, Akin, & Broesch, 2012). Meanwhile, some, e.g., Uscinski and Butler (2013), contended that fact-checkers often ignored "the most important objective reality of politics," that everything discussed in politics was "ambiguous" and open to interpretation, and political statements cannot be neatly categorized as true or false. Other scholars, e.g., Krugman (2011), criticized fact-checkers' practices as a "false equivalence," trying to be objective by illustrating both parties as equally deceptive.

When covered unfavorably, politicians often attack media as biased to avoid accountability (Smith, 2010). Allegations of liberal media bias in the United States, which rose dramatically in the 1990s (Domke et al., 1999), have become extreme recently. Calling the press "fake news" or the "enemy of the American people" are unprecedented and threatening examples towards the fifth estate and watchdogs (Grynbaum, 2017; Sullivan, 2017). This rhetoric promptly turned into a

conspiracy theory claiming mainstream journalists as partisan actors who wrote misleading or even false stories (Hayes, 2008). Meanwhile, the attitudes towards news or perceptions of media bias are arguably shaped by others' comments, not by audiences' direct observations of news content (Domke et al., 1999; Ladd, 2011). Pingree et al. (2018) therefore posited that mainstream journalists should defend against claims calling them fake news or biased news to maintain audiences' trust and appreciation.

Fact-checkers strive to check actors from both political sides and dedicate pages for analyzing a claim to demonstrate that their work is conducted fairly; thus, audiences still agree with the result albeit disliking the process (Graves, 2012). Journalists as fact-checkers need to do an uncomfortable task of challenging public figures by checking and publicizing their mistakes, exaggerations, and deceptions. They interfere with heated political debates and decide which side tells the facts (Graves, 2016). Many reporter decisions are motivated by the caution to minimize risks of losing access to official sources or receiving negative reactions from audiences, which leads to a scarcity of sources willing to adjudicate and check facts in a story (Cunningham, 2003; Jamieson & Waldman, 2004; Pingree, Brossard, & McLeod, 2014). In many cases, journalists choose to practice the neutral he-said/she-said journalism when covering disputes and avoid a verdict that readers might mistakenly view as biased, even when a conclusion could be presented with supporting factual evidence (Pingree, Brossard, & McLeod, 2014). Thus, while many examined organizations in this study chose to provide a full verdict (i.e., all the claims were adjudicated), others just partially adjudicated (i.e., some of their fact checks did not have clear conclusions) (Table 1).

To address these critics, the current study explores whether media organizations applied approaches recommended by scholars for correcting false information in comparison with independent bureaus, in the context of a highly politicized and polarized situation of two

presidential debates and two town halls. Furthermore, while media outlets' fact-checking practices differed across newsrooms as gatekeeping theory and scholarly findings (e.g., Marietta, Barker, & Bowser, 2015) suggested, this lack of consistency in approaching ways is also worth exploring further (Dimitrova & Nelson, 2018).

Behind the checks

The study sets out to examine fact checks of three national newspapers, namely The New York Times, The Washington Post, and USA Today, and three independent organizations, including PolitiFact, FactCheck.org, and Snopes.com. Except for The New York Times, the rest of the organizations are Verified signatories of the IFCN code of principles. Although they have different guidelines, processes, ratings styles, and human resources for fact checks (Table 1), the core principles are similar. The New York Times, however, was included in the sample because of its status as newspaper or record (e.g., Ringel, 2021), which has been shown to be an influential agenda-setter for other news outlets (Golan, 2006).

Regarding topics of their operations, USA Today and Snopes.com fact-check several issues, while The New York Times, The Washington Post, PolitiFact, and FactCheck.org, put their focus on political subjects, particularly the people and party holding power. They strive for balanced, but not unintentionally count, and non-partisan articles by checking inaccurate statements on both the left and the right, committing not to participate in any partisan political activities, and using non-partisan sources. Speaking of sources, all of them prioritizes primary, original, and official ones, looking for experts and data documents, not statements from politicians.

	Number of editorial staff	Ratings	Verdict type
NYT	N/A[1]	N/A	Full verdict
The Post	5[2]	One pinocchio – "mostly true." Two pinocchios – "half true." Three pinocchios – "mostly false." Four pinocchios – Whoppers. The geppetto checkmark – Statements and claims that contain "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" will be recognized with our prized Geppetto checkmark. An upside-down pinocchio – A statement that represents a clear but unacknowledged "flip-flop" from a previously-held position. Verdict pending Bottomless pinocchio – Claims must have received Three or Four Pinocchios from The Fact Checker, and they must have been repeated at least 20 times.	Full verdict
USA Today	7[3]	True Satire Missing context Partly false Altered False	Partial verdict
PolitiFact	33[4]	True Mostly true Half true Mostly false False Pants on fire	Full verdict
FactCheck.org	11[5]	N/A	Partial verdict
Snopes.com	13[6]	True Mostly true Mixture	Partial verdict

---

[1] **NYT** does not mention fact-checkers on its site. While there is only one fact check reporter, its 2020 presidential debates' fact-checking was delivered by multiple journalists.

[2] https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/01/07/about-fact-checker/

[3] https://www.usatoday.com/contact/staff/

[4] https://www.politifact.com/staff/

[5] https://www.factcheck.org/our-staff/

[6] https://www.snopes.com/team/

		Mostly false	
		False	
		Unproven	
		Outdated	
		Miscaptioned	
		Correct attribution	
		Legend	
		Misattributed	
		Scam	
		Legit	
		Labeled satire	
		Originated as satire	
		Recall	
		Lost legend	

Table 1. Number of editorial staff and Ratings of six organizations

Scholars argued that fact-checking conducted by independent organizations such as FactCheck.org and PolitiFact was not identical to traditional journalism (Humprecht, 2020; Robertson, Mourao, & Thorson, 2020). Independent fact-checkers exclusively concentrate on debunking false information, which may complement their colleagues in media outlets (Brandtzaeg et al., 2016; Graves & Cherubini, 2016). Another area of difference concerns the use of rating systems (Graves & Amazeen, 2019; Amazeen, 2013). Fact-checkers seldom harmonize in adjudicated conclusions (e.g., Amazeen, 2015; Marietta, Barker, & Bowser, 2015). Most fact-checking organizations employ the accuracy scale to rate claims, while others view the practice as simplifying the complexity of rhetoric (Amazeen, 2013; Graves, 2018).

Furthermore, independent fact-checkers also distinguish themselves from media peers and aim to deliver neutral and non-partisan information (Humprecht, 2020). Thus, their fact-checking sources and targets are expected to differ from editorial outlets' practices. Independent organizations, for instance, were more often provided a higher level of source transparency than news agencies (Humprecht, 2020). Regarding fact-checking subjects, Bucciol (2018) found that Fact Checker, which belonged to The Washington Post, tended to fact-check Republicans, U.S.

Senators, and politicians living in the West. Meanwhile, PolitiFact was less focused on particular targets of political actors. The independent outlet indeed fact-checked a wide range of politicians, namely Democrats, Republicans, members from other parties, and even from other countries (Nieminen & Sankari, 2021). PolitiFact and Fact Checker staff rarely fact-checked the same statement, and if yes, verdicts were not consistent across outlets (Lim, 2018).

Graves (2018) urged research examining the relationship between differences in practice and organizational characteristics (e.g., independent and editorial outlets), especially when was comes to a highly polarized situation such as a presidential election. A lack of independent journalism might influence news organizations' targets of fact-checking, such as the willingness to fact-check their associated actors (Graves, 2018). Align with gate-keeping theory, it is therefore rational and arguable to hypothesize that at least 47 news outlets that endorsed Joe Biden for the presidency, including The New York Times, The Washington Post, and USA Today (Peters & Wolley, 2020), would fact-check Biden favorably compared to Trump.

Additionally, the 45th U.S President addressed unprecedented topics to the public, describing the press as fake news and "the enemy of the people," and threatening the Constitution of the United States (Brewer & Egan, 2021). In fact, Trump made 23.3 lies per day in 2020, as of early April (Markowitz, 2020), and 30,573 untruthful statements during his four-year presidency (Kessler, Rizzo, & Kelly, 2021). The media further amplified his misinformation (Gaufman, 2018), while he was the most influential individual in his network on Twitter, where his supporters unquestioningly circulated falsehoods he made (Tran, 2021). Hence, it is expected that he would be fact-checked more than his counterpart by both independent and news organizations.

Fact-checking in the era of Trump

"I will always tell you the truth," Trump promised at a campaign rally in August 2016, when he started his presidential race, becoming the 45th President of the United States. Nevertheless,

11

Trump has seemed to struggle with the truth during his presidency, triggering a new era of journalism fact-checking (Golshan, 2016). Donald Trump has made "fact-checking great again," at least by volume (Mantzarlis, 2016), leading to a 200% increase in fact-checking organizations launching since his 2016 election, according to data from the Duke Reporter's Lab. The 2016 and 2020 elections witnessed overwhelming figures for operating fact-checking outlets and their viewership. The big three (i.e., USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Times), for instance, broke their traffic records during the 2016 election, while PolitiFact recorded its 100 millionth page view on that year's election day (Mantzarlis, 2016). Similarly, in 2020, CNN, NPR, and The New York Times were the highest-trafficked websites for fact-check-related keywords; and even social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) provided their own fact-checking systems (Fischer, 2020).

Rieder (2020) described Trump as a fact-checkers' dream or nightmare because of his disregard for the truth, which kept the whole fact-checking industry busy and rarely had time to fact-check other politicians (Kessler, 2020). Its efforts to deal with Trump's falsehoods have indeed intensified throughout his presidency, with the production of plentiful lists of corrective information about Trump's repetitive untruthful statements, including some nonfacts (Rieder, 2020; Schwartzman, 2021). While misstatements from political figures are not a new phenomenon (e.g., Arendt, 1971), Trump stands out with what amounts to a firehose of exaggerating and untrue quotes and with his negligence regarding accuracy (Schwartzman, 2021). As mentioned previously, Trump made over 30,000 untruthful statements that were fact-checked by The Washington Post (Kessler, Rizzo, & Kelly, 2021). Pomerantsev (2019, p. 270) posited that "Donald J. Trump is famous for having no discernible notion of what is true and factual."

Meanwhile, analyzing authoritarian leaders worldwide, Ben-Ghiat (2020, p. 116) argued, "Trump departs from all previous heads of American democracy, though, in devoting so much

effort to the destruction of the meaning of truth in the absolute." He is different as having the unusual ability to spread misinformation while his supporters seem to appreciate rather than condemn it (Hahl, Kim, & Zuckerman Sivan, 2018). Trump performed his role as a U.S president who challenged factual reality (Schwartzman, 2021). His transcripts at rallies and White House briefings possessed two outstanding characteristics, namely the sheer volume of misinformation and its repetition regardless of the number times being fact-checked (Rieder, 2020).

It is one of the discouraging aspects of fact-checking businesses when the perpetrator dismisses the fact that false information is discredited (Rieder, 2020). Fact-checkers normally track politicians repeating statements that have been debunked as false. They even create a special section on repeated inaccurate claims (Lim, 2018). Political actors, in turn, will decide to pull back fact-checked false claims since they are concerned about their reputation (Lim, 2018). Notwithstanding, Trump appeared to be immune to this. With the existing weaponized rhetoric on fact checks by politicians, the unrepentant attitude and attacks of then-President Trump toward misstatements has placed fact-checking in a more adversarial role and contributed to what scholars call a political crisis (Porter & Wood, 2019). His repeated falsehoods and indifference to truth arguably make him a fascist politician and signal the rise of fascism (Snyder, 2017; Stanley, 2018).

Donald Trump is seen as a prime exemplar of a broader political communication transformation, placing him in a context where "politics has become largely affective" (Grossberg, 2018; Schwartzman, 2021). Although he may not be the only political figure employing untruthful statements, he seems to be willing to make false claims with more ease than his predecessors (Porter & Wood, 2019). Compared to other politicians from different parties, Trump is also distinguished. Biden is assessed as more disciplined than Trump with short and well-drafted speeches (Kessler, 2020). Between October 12 to October 16, 2020, in six events of two hours and 46 minutes, Biden's statements were fact-checked as false nine times by FactCheck.org, compared

to 46 incorrect and misleading claims of Trump at six rallies with more than eight hours (Rieder, 2020). Despite the effort of organizations to fact-check both presidential candidates, Trump was debunked more partly due to the fact that "he spoke more," even in the 2016 election, with TV shows and unprepared scripts at rallies (Mantzarlis, 2016).

However, those problems were not barriers to his successful campaign but essential instead (Pomerantsev, 2019; Schwartzman, 2021). Politicians, e.g., Trump, are perceived as more "authentic" and "credible" by their supporters in crises of perceived legitimacy (Hahl, Kim, & Zuckerman Sivan, 2018). Trump arguably has the ability to persuade people to disregard corrective information (Porter & Wood, 2019). Many of Trump's loyalists accept his hostile characterization of the media as "fake news" and "the enemy of the people," thus, rejecting its works, including traditional products and fact checks (Rieder, 2020). The attitude and perception make Trump's supporters immune from corrections of his falsehoods (Porter & Wood, 2019).

During and after the 2016 U.S election, scholars have urged U.S. society entered a post-truth era, when some politicians disregard facts, and their supporters seem not to be swayed by contrary evidence or reasons (Nguyen, 2020). Echo chambers work based on this apparatus with the discrediting strategy to systematically isolate their members from out-group epistemic sources (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Nguyen, 2020). They are constructed by manipulating trust insiders and, in turn, gaining outward distrust, which becomes a powerful tool "for perpetuating epistemic injustice and active ignorance" (p. 149) (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Nguyen, 2020).

As such, Trump, who ignores facts, and his supporters, who are not swayed by scientific evidence or fact checks, are reasonable to be placed in the context of an echo chamber. "He alone can be trusted" while "most of the rhetoric supporting Donald Trump is disinformation" (Froehlich, 2020, p. 13-14). He is often claimed to possess cult personality, being able to influence his intra-party politicians and followers and create firmly-built connections (Hassan, 2020; Tran,

2021), or an echo chamber. Its members are expected to be exposed to out-group media to reinforce their allegiance (Nguyen, 2020). That suggests that Trump may find the media and fact checks politically advantageous rather than harmful to his chance of winning (Lim, 2018; Mantzarlis, 2016).

Chuck Todd on NBC's Meet the Press once argued that Trump's supporters, a solidly loyal group, seldom cared if he spoke without facts or with statements that fact-checkers proved to be false, since fact-checkers themselves are perceived as being partisan or having an agenda (Lim, 2018).[7] The more in-groups in echo chambers trust their belief systems, the more distrust and ignorance they have towards outsiders and counter-evidence (Nguyen, 2020). Furthermore, when politicians are accused of lying, they can degrade the seriousness of the acusation by attacking their opponents with worse disinformation or defending themselves by downplaying fact-checkers' legitimacy (Lim, 2018). The tactic increases the disparity between insiders and outsiders, then the echo chambers' beliefs system may be extremely challenging to remove (Nguyen, 2020).

---

[7] https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meet-press-november-29-2015-n470871

Chapter 3 - Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical frameworks and literature review, the current study sets forth the following research questions and hypotheses.

RQ1: How did three news organizations fact-check the 2020 presidential debates and town halls in terms of chosen candidates, corrections, sources, and topics?

RQ2: How did three independent organizations fact-check the 2020 presidential debates and town halls in terms of chosen candidates, corrections, sources, and topics?

H1: Compared to three independent organizations, three news organizations fact-checked Trump's statements more than Biden's statements.

H2: Compared to three independent organizations, three news organizations' fact checks about Trump were more likely to evaluate candidate claims as inaccurate compared to Biden's.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

Data collection

The study chose content analysis to examine fact-checking practices of news outlets and independent organizations during the presidential debates and town halls of the 2020 U.S. election. These events were selected for two reasons. First, they create an ideal opportunity to fact-check statements presented by two candidates; second, Americans find debates helpful in learning about the two candidates, thus, contributing to their decisions on election days (Dimitrova & Nelson, 2018; Heimlich, 2012; Holbrook, 1999). The first and final debates occurred on September 29, 2020, and October 22, 2020, respectively, while two town halls happened concurrently on October 15, 2020.

The study aims to explore fact checks of three leading national newspapers, namely The New York Times, The Washington Post, and USA Today, and three dedicated and popular independent organizations, namely PolitiFact, FactCheck.org, and Snopes.com. The three leading national newspapers were chosen because of their popularity and daily circulation in the United States, along with The Wall Street Journal and Los Angeles Times (Turvill; 2021; University of Minnesota, 2016). Compared to their colleagues, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and USA Today provided systematic fact-checking coverage during the 2020 presidential debates and town halls. Still, these three news organizations are alleged to lean left, and their audiences are more consistently liberal (AllSides, 2021; Grieco, 2020). Studies have shown, however, that journalists' political ideologies did not make their way into their coverage (Hassell et al., 2020), and meta-analysis research that examined news coverage across several presidential elections showed that the so-called liberal bias in the media was a myth (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000). It is both a limitation and a puzzle of "liberal myth" to explore of this study.

FactCheck.org launched in 2003, while PolitiFact.com and The Washington Post's Fact Checker began in 2007, both focusing on political issues. Non-political fact-checkers have also proliferated. For instance, Snopes.com launched in 1995. Two other news organizations, namely The New York Times and USA Today concentrate their fact-checking efforts on the political arena, such as politician's claims, along with "health, science and other topics in the news, significant national issues or those that could be confusing to people." The selection of organizations was adapted from multiple previous research investigating fact-checking practices (Dimitrova & Nelson, 2018; Graves, 2016; Luengo & García-Marín, 2020; Shin & Thorson, 2017). Regarding style of fact checks, PolitiFact.com, Snopes.com, Washington Post, and USA Today have explicit truth scales, while FactCheck.org and The New York Times do not mention their rating scales. The unit of analysis is a fact-check of claims made by each candidate, which were collected from six organizations' websites. The search resulted in a sample size of 440 fact checks (N = 440).

Coding scheme

Many recommended criteria for fact-checking include (a) getting the story right the first time, (b) early corrections are better, (c) beware making the problem worse, (d) avoiding negations, (e) minimizing repetition of false claims, (f) reduce partisan and ideological cues, (g) use credible sources, (h) don't give credence to the fringe, (i) use graphics where appropriate, and (j) beware of selective exposure (Nyhan & Reifler, 2012). Graves (2016) suggested looking at five areas of fact-checking execution, namely choosing claims to check, contacting the speaker, tracing false claims, dealing with experts, and showing the work. To understand and compare fact-checking coverage between news organizations and independent bureaus, the areas of examination are based on practices (d), (f), (g), and (i) proposed by Nyhan and Reifler (2012) and choosing claims and dealing with experts, as proposed by Graves (2016). They are answers to these questions: which

candidate was fact-checked, what the evaluation of fact-checking or rating was, what supporting information and/or visuals were used, as well as what sources were cited.

These variables' coding schemes are adapted from Dimitrova and Nelson (2018) as follows.

Candidate

Trump or Biden.

Rating

Correct (article states candidate statement is accurate);

Incorrect (article states candidate statement is inaccurate);

Partially correct (the article states candidate statement is somewhat, but not completely, accurate, e.g., candidate exaggerated facts or cherry-picked content);

Inconclusive (no explicit rating of claim is provided; statement cannot be determined as either accurate or inaccurate).

Supporting information/visuals

URL links, photos, videos, infographics, or tweets.

Sources

Since the literature suggests that fact checkers should use credible and neutral sources and avoid partisan cues, source categories are modified as:

Experts: such as academics and/or scientists;

Authority: such as government agencies;

Non-partisan sources: such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs);

Media: such as media organizations, fact-checking websites;

Others: individuals, politicians.

Fact checks' topics were manually noted and their frequencies analyzed by R to explore the

top ten topics that were chosen to be fact-checked by news and independent organizations.

Two coders coded 20% of the corpus (i.e., 87 fact checks). The intercoder reliability was

1.0 for candidate, 0.837 for rating, 0.84 for source, and 0.943 for supporting information, as

calculated using Krippendorff's alpha for nominal data via ReCal (Freelon, 2013).

Chapter 5 - Results

RQ1. How did three news organizations fact-check the 2020 presidential debates and town halls in terms of chosen candidates, ratings, sources, and topics?

Three news organizations had a total of 227 fact checks in the 2020 presidential debates and town halls. One hundred eighty fact checks (or 79.30%) were about then-President Trump's statements, while former Vice President Biden was fact-checked 47 times (or 20.70%). Ninety-six fact checks on Trump's statements (or 53.33%) were rated as incorrect, followed by 58 partially correct (e.g., misleading or exaggerating), 19 inconclusive, and seven correct claims (or 32.22%, 10.60%, and 4%, respectively). Meanwhile, Biden's statements were fact-checked as partially correct 18 times (or 38.30%), correct 14 times (or 29.80%), incorrect 11 times (or 23.4%), and inconclusive four times (or 8.51%) (Table 2).

Comparing the two candidates, Biden's claims were fact-checked as correct more than Trump's, 14 times (or 66.67%) and seven times (or 33.33%), respectively. Vice versa, 96 fact checks (or 89.72%) on Trump's statements were labeled as incorrect, compared to 11 publications on Biden's quotes (or 10.28%). Trump's claims were also adjudicated as partially correct and inconclusive more than his opponent's, 58 and 18 times (or 76.32% and 23.68%) and 19 and four times (or 82.61% and 17.40%).

Org	Candidate		Correct	Incorrect	Partially correct	Inconclusive	Total
					Rating		
NYT	Trump	Count	2.000	37.000	40.000	11.000	90.000
		% within row	2.222 %	41.111 %	44.444 %	12.222 %	100.000 %
	Biden	Count	12.000	4.000	7.000	0.000	23.000
		% within row	52.174 %	17.391 %	30.435 %	0.000 %	100.000 %

	Total	Count	14.000	41.000	47.000	11.000	113.000
		% within row	12.389 %	36.283 %	41.593 %	9.735 %	100.000 %
The Post	Trump	Count	2.000	51.000	11.000	8.000	72.000
		% within row	2.778 %	70.833 %	15.278 %	11.111 %	100.000 %
	Biden	Count	1.000	6.000	9.000	4.000	20.000
		% within row	5.000 %	30.000 %	45.000 %	20.000 %	100.000 %
	Total	Count	3.000	57.000	20.000	12.000	92.000
		% within row	3.261 %	61.957 %	21.739 %	13.043 %	100.000 %
USA Today	Trump	Count	3.000	8.000	7.000	0.000	18.000
		% within row	16.667 %	44.444 %	38.889 %	0.000 %	100.000 %
	Biden	Count	1.000	1.000	2.000	0.000	4.000
		% within row	25.000 %	25.000 %	50.000 %	0.000 %	100.000 %
	Total	Count	4.000	9.000	9.000	0.000	22.000
		% within row	18.182 %	40.909 %	40.909 %	0.000 %	100.000 %
Total	Trump	Count	7.000	96.000	58.000	19.000	180.000
		% within row	3.889 %	53.333 %	32.222 %	10.556 %	100.000 %
	Biden	Count	14.000	11.000	18.000	4.000	47.000
		% within row	29.787 %	23.404 %	38.298 %	8.511 %	100.000 %
	Total	Count	21.000	107.000	76.000	23.000	227.000
		% within row	9.251 %	47.137 %	33.480 %	10.132 %	100.000 %

Table 2. Candidates and ratings fact-checked by three news organizations

There was no statistically significant difference among the three news organizations in choosing which candidate to fact-check (χ^2 (2) = 0.154, p = 0.926). Nevertheless, their rating employment was significantly different (χ^2 (6) = 23.348, p < .001, Cramer's V = 0.227). The New

York Times was likely to balance its rating as incorrect and partially correct with 47 fact checks (or 41.60%) and 41 fact checks (or 36.30%), respectively. It also had the highest number of partially correct works (61.84%) compared to the two other organizations. Meanwhile, publications from The Washington Post were dominantly rated as incorrect, 57 works (or 62%), while partially correct and inconclusive adjudications were employed equivalently, 20 and 12 times (or 21.74% and 13.04%). The USA Today fact-checked the least and equally used incorrect and partially correct rating, nine fact checks each (or 41%). No inconclusive rating was used by USA Today.

Regarding sources, three news organizations had no statistically significant difference in using them (χ^2 (10) = 11.874, p = 0.294). The media, i.e., news agencies and fact-check organizations, was the most frequently used source of the three newspapers, acquiring 36.60% of the total, followed by the authority at 24.23% and other sources, including individuals, politicians, and campaigns, comprising 17.62%. Notably, there were 14 fact checks from The New York Times and seven from The Washington Post that did not cite any sources.

Regarding topics, the top ten issues fact-checked by three news organizations were COVID-19, election fraud, health care, climate change, Hunter Biden, economy, Trump's tax, black community, candidate background, and COVID-19 prevention, while three independent bureaus focused on fact-checking statements about COVID-19, health care, economy, Hunter Biden, climate change, COVID-19 prevention, election fraud, Fauci, black community, and candidate background (Table 3).

Number of fact checks by topic of newspapers		Number of fact checks by topic of organizations	
COVID-19	25	COVID-19	26
election fraud	14	health care	11

health care	13	economy	9
climate change	7	Hunter Biden	8
Hunter Biden	7	climate change	7
economy	6	COVID-19 prevention	7
Trump's tax	6	election fraud	6
black community	5	Fauci	6
candidate background	5	black community	5
COVID-19 prevention	5	candidate background	5

Table 3. Number of fact checks by topic of newspapers and independent organizations

RQ2. How did three independent organizations fact-check the 2020 presidential debates and town halls in terms of chosen candidates, ratings, sources, and topics?

Three independent organizations fact-checked 213 statements in the 2020 presidential debates and town halls. One hundred thirty-nine fact checks (or 65.26%) were about Trump's claims, while Biden was fact-checked 74 times (or 34.74%). Trump's statements were predominantly rated as incorrect 68 times (or 49%) and partially correct 51 times (or 36.70%), while the adjudication of inconclusive and correct was 19 (or 13.70%) and one (0.71%), respectively. Meanwhile, 28 claims of Biden (or 37.84%) were labeled as partially correct, followed by 20 incorrect (or 27.03%), 14 correct (19%), and 12 inconclusive statements (or 16.22%), as shown in Table 4.

Between two candidates, Biden's claims were dominantly fact-checked as correct more than Trump's, 14 times (or 93.33%) and once (or 6.67%), respectively. In contrast, 68 fact checks (or 77.27%) on Trump's quotes were adjudicated as incorrect, compared to Biden's 20 inaccurate

claims (or 22.73%). Trump's claims were also rated as partially correct and inconclusive more than his rival's, 51 times compared to 28 times (or 64.56% and 35.44%) and 19 times compared to 12 times (or 61.30% and 38.71%).

Org	Candidate		Correct	Incorrect	Partially correct	Inconclusive	Total
					Rating		
PolitiFact	Trump	Count	0.000	24.000	24.000	6.000	54.000
		% within row	0.000 %	44.444 %	44.444 %	11.111 %	100.000 %
	Biden	Count	4.000	5.000	15.000	1.000	25.000
		% within row	16.000 %	20.000 %	60.000 %	4.000 %	100.000 %
	Total	Count	4.000	29.000	39.000	7.000	79.000
		% within row	5.063 %	36.709 %	49.367 %	8.861 %	100.000 %
FactCheck.org	Trump	Count	0.000	36.000	21.000	10.000	67.000
		% within row	0.000 %	53.731 %	31.343 %	14.925 %	100.000 %
	Biden	Count	0.000	13.000	8.000	7.000	28.000
		% within row	0.000 %	46.429 %	28.571 %	25.000 %	100.000 %
	Total	Count	0.000	49.000	29.000	17.000	95.000
		% within row	0.000 %	51.579 %	30.526 %	17.895 %	100.000 %
Snopes.com	Trump	Count	1.000	8.000	6.000	3.000	18.000
		% within row	5.556 %	44.444 %	33.333 %	16.667 %	100.000 %
	Biden	Count	10.000	2.000	5.000	4.000	21.000

		% within row	47.619 %	9.524 %	23.810 %	19.048 %	100.000 %
	Total	Count	11.000	10.000	11.000	7.000	39.000
		% within row	28.205 %	25.641 %	28.205 %	17.949 %	100.000 %
Total	Trump	Count	1.000	68.000	51.000	19.000	139.000
		% within row	0.719 %	48.921 %	36.691 %	13.669 %	100.000 %
	Biden	Count	14.000	20.000	28.000	12.000	74.000
		% within row	18.919 %	27.027 %	37.838 %	16.216 %	100.000 %
	Total	Count	15.000	88.000	79.000	31.000	213.000
		% within row	7.042 %	41.315 %	37.089 %	14.554 %	100.000 %

Table 4. Candidates and ratings fact-checked by three independent organizations

There were statistically significant differences across three independent organizations regarding their chosen candidates, ratings, and sources. The association between organizations and examined candidates was however low, (χ^2 (2) = 7.775, p = 0.02, Cramer's V = 0.191). The PolitiFact and FactCheck.org were more likely to fact-check Trump's statements than Biden's, 54 times compared to 25 times (or 68.35% and 31.65%) and 67 times compared to 28 times (or 70.53% and 29.47%); whilst Snopes.com had balanced publications on two candidates. In fact, Biden was fact-checked more (21 times, or 53.85%) than Trump (18 times or 46.15%).

Cross-tabulation of organizations and their rating tendency suggested differences across these outlets (χ^2 (6) = 45.020, p < .001, Cramer's V = 0.325). The PolitiFact tended to rate claims as partially correct (39 fact checks, or 39.37% across three organizations), while FactCheck.org was more likely to adjudicate statements as incorrect (49 fact checks, or 55.82% across three

organizations). Snopes.com considerably balanced its ratings as correct, incorrect, partially correct, and inconclusive with 11, 10, 11, and seven publications, correspondingly. Overall, incorrect and partially correct ratings were frequently used, whilst the accurate evaluation was employed the least. There was notably no correct rating from Factcheck.org, which could be explained by its fact-checking mission, focusing on "claims that are false or misleading."

Organization		Source						
		Expert	Authority	Non-partisan	Media	Others	None	Total
PolitiFact	Count	4.000	18.000	4.000	44.000	9.000	0.000	79.000
	% within row	5.063 %	22.785 %	5.063 %	55.696 %	11.392 %	0.000 %	100.000 %
FactCheck.org	Count	9.000	31.000	12.000	36.000	7.000	0.000	95.000
	% within row	9.474 %	32.632 %	12.632 %	37.895 %	7.368 %	0.000 %	100.000 %
Snopes.com	Count	0.000	3.000	2.000	32.000	1.000	1.000	39.000
	% within row	0.000 %	7.692 %	5.128 %	82.051 %	2.564 %	2.564 %	100.000 %
Total	Count	13.000	52.000	18.000	112.000	17.000	1.000	213.000
	% within row	6.103 %	24.413 %	8.451 %	52.582 %	7.981 %	0.469 %	100.000 %

Table 5. Sources employed in three independent organizations' fact checks

There existed a moderate association between the three organizations and the sources employed in their fact checks, χ^2 (10) = 32.592, p < .001, Cramer's V = 0.277. Similar to news organizations, the three independent organizations primarily employed the media as their main source, being cited in 52.58% of 213 fact checks. While it was a predominant source in PolitiFact's (55.70%) and Snopes.com's fact checks (82.05%), the media and the authoritative sources shared an equal prominence in FactCheck.org's works, with 36 (or 37.90%) and 31 fact checks (32.63%) respectively.

Former Vice President Joe Biden said: "We inherited the worst recession short of a depression in American history. I was asked to bring it back. We were able to make the economic recovery to create the jobs…"

snopes.com @snopes

Fact: During the final three years of the Obama-Biden presidency, the number of jobs added was 1.5 million greater than the number added during Trump's first three years in office. #Debates2020 bit.ly/2GqgcJF

RATING: TRUE

"We inherited the worst recession short of a depression in American history. I was asked to bring it back. We were able to make the economic recovery to create the jobs…"

JOE BIDEN   DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE | MORE ELECTION COVERAGE ON SNOPES.COM

9:14 PM · Sep 29, 2020

"They said it would take a miracle to bring back manufacturing. I brought back 700,000 jobs. They brought back nothing."

— Mr. Trump

This is false.

Mr. Trump did not "bring back" 700,000 manufacturing jobs, even before the coronavirus recession. In his first three years as president, manufacturing employment rose by just under 500,000 jobs. Through August, because of jobs lost to the pandemic recession, the sector it is down by more than 200,000 jobs from when Mr. Trump took office.

Figure 1. Examples of fact checks from Snopes.com and The New York Times.

Fact checks' topics in number of Trump		Fact checks' topics in number of Biden	
COVID-19	31	COVID-19	20
election fraud	18	health care	7
Hunter Biden	18	Affordable Care Act	6
health care	17	COVID-19 prevention	6
economy	11	climate change	4
climate change	10	crime rate	4
black community	9	economy	4
Fauci	9	trade deficit with China	4
candidate background	8	Trump's bank account	4
Trump's tax	8	crime bill	3

Table 6. Top fact checks' topics by two candidates

H1. Compared to three independent organizations, three news organizations fact-checked Trump's statements more than Biden's statements.

A Chi-square test was performed to examine the difference between organizations, i.e., newspapers and independent fact-checking agencies, and their fact-checked candidate. There was a

statistically significant albeit low association between them, χ^2 (1) = 10.860, p < .001, Cramer's V = 0.157. The log odds ratio further posited that group Trump was greater than Biden. The log odds ratio value of 0.712 was calculated to the probability, suggesting that newspapers had two times more chance of fact-checking Trump than independent outlets (Table 7). Thus, the first hypothesis was supported.

| | Log Odds Ratio | 95% Confidence Intervals | | p |
		Lower	Upper	
Odds ratio	0.712	0.285	1.140	
Fisher's exact test	0.711	0.332	∞	< .001

Note. For all tests, the alternative hypothesis specifies that group *Trump* is greater than *Biden*.

Table 7. Log Odds Ratio

| Candidate | | Organization | | Total |
		Newspapers	Independent organizations	
Trump	Count	180.000	139.000	319.000
	Expected count	164.575	154.425	319.000
	% within row	56.426 %	43.574 %	100.000 %
	% within column	79.295 %	65.258 %	72.500 %
	% of total	40.909 %	31.591 %	72.500 %
Biden	Count	47.000	74.000	121.000
	Expected count	62.425	58.575	121.000
	% within row	38.843 %	61.157 %	100.000 %
	% within column	20.705 %	34.742 %	27.500 %
	% of total	10.682 %	16.818 %	27.500 %
Total	Count	227.000	213.000	440.000
	Expected count	227.000	213.000	440.000
	% within row	51.591 %	48.409 %	100.000 %
	% within column	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %
	% of total	51.591 %	48.409 %	100.000 %

Table 8. Candidates fact-checked by news and independent organizations

In a total of 440 fact checks, 180 (or 40.90%) were fact checks of Trump's statements by three newspapers, while independent organizations fact-checked the candidate's claims 139 times

(or 31.60%). The three newspapers' fact checks were more likely to focus on Trump (79.30%) than

Biden (20.70%. The proportion of fact-checked statements from Trump was higher in newspapers

than in independent organizations, whose works focused on Trump's statements 139 times (or

65.26%) compared to 74 Biden's quotes (or 34.74%) (Table 8).

H2. Compared to three independent organizations, three news organizations' fact checks about

Trump are more likely to evaluate candidate claims as inaccurate compared to Biden's.

A Chi-square test of independence was performed to determine the relation among

organizations, fact-checked candidates, and ratings. The relation among these variables was

statistically strongly significant, χ^2 (3) = 59.302, p < .001, Cramer's V = 0.367 (Table 9). The rating

of each candidate was different across organizations, i.e., newspapers and independent outlets.

The three newspapers' fact checks on Trump's statements as incorrect had the largest

proportion within 440 works across organizations, acquiring 42.30%. The three independent fact-

checking organizations adjudicated Trump's claims as incorrect 31.92% of the time, the second-

highest ratio. Compared to his opponent, Biden was fact-checked as incorrect merely 11 times (or

4.85%) by newspapers and 20 times (or 9.40%) by independent organizations, much lower than

fact checks on Trump's claims.

| Organization | Candidate | | Rating | | | | Total |
			Correct	Incorrect	Partially correct	Inconclusive	
Newspapers	Trump	Count	7.000	96.000	58.000	19.000	180.000
		% within row	3.889 %	53.333 %	32.222 %	10.556 %	100.000 %
		% within column	33.333 %	89.720 %	76.316 %	82.609 %	79.295 %
		% of total	3.084 %	42.291 %	25.551 %	8.370 %	79.295 %
	Biden	Count	14.000	11.000	18.000	4.000	47.000
		% within row	29.787 %	23.404 %	38.298 %	8.511 %	100.000 %

		% within column	66.667 %	10.280 %	23.684 %	17.391 %	20.705 %
		% of total	6.167 %	4.846 %	7.930 %	1.762 %	20.705 %
	Total	Count	21.000	107.000	76.000	23.000	227.000
		% within row	9.251 %	47.137 %	33.480 %	10.132 %	100.000 %
		% within column	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %
		% of total	9.251 %	47.137 %	33.480 %	10.132 %	100.000 %
Independent organizations	Trump	Count	1.000	68.000	51.000	19.000	139.000
		% within row	0.719 %	48.921 %	36.691 %	13.669 %	100.000 %
		% within column	6.667 %	77.273 %	64.557 %	61.290 %	65.258 %
		% of total	0.469 %	31.925 %	23.944 %	8.920 %	65.258 %
	Biden	Count	14.000	20.000	28.000	12.000	74.000
		% within row	18.919 %	27.027 %	37.838 %	16.216 %	100.000 %
		% within column	93.333 %	22.727 %	35.443 %	38.710 %	34.742 %
		% of total	6.573 %	9.390 %	13.146 %	5.634 %	34.742 %
	Total	Count	15.000	88.000	79.000	31.000	213.000
		% within row	7.042 %	41.315 %	37.089 %	14.554 %	100.000 %
		% within column	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %
		% of total	7.042 %	41.315 %	37.089 %	14.554 %	100.000 %
Total	Trump	Count	8.000	164.000	109.000	38.000	319.000
		% within row	2.508 %	51.411 %	34.169 %	11.912 %	100.000 %
		% within column	22.222 %	84.103 %	70.323 %	70.370 %	72.500 %
		% of total	1.818 %	37.273 %	24.773 %	8.636 %	72.500 %
	Biden	Count	28.000	31.000	46.000	16.000	121.000
		% within row	23.140 %	25.620 %	38.017 %	13.223 %	100.000 %
		% within column	77.778 %	15.897 %	29.677 %	29.630 %	27.500 %
		% of total	6.364 %	7.045 %	10.455 %	3.636 %	27.500 %
	Total	Count	36.000	195.000	155.000	54.000	440.000
		% within row	8.182 %	44.318 %	35.227 %	12.273 %	100.000 %

	% within column	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %
	% of total	8.182 %	44.318 %	35.227 %	12.273 %	100.000 %

Table 9. Fact checks' ratings on two candidates of two types of organizations

To examine differences in organizations' rating tendency more closely, the researcher re-coded the rating variable from categorical to continuous variable by giving four rating scores, incorrect = 1, inconclusive = 2, partially correct = 3, and correct = 4. It postulated that the higher score a candidate had, the likelihood an organization would fact-check his statement as partially correct or correct increased; and vice versa, if the score were lower, the more likely an agency would adjudicate a candidate's claims as inaccurate.

Candidate	Organization	Mean	SD	N
Biden	Independent organizations	2.486	1.088	74
	Newspapers	2.745	1.132	47
Trump	Independent organizations	1.892	0.938	139
	Newspapers	1.867	0.999	180

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2_p
Candidate	44.102	1	44.102	43.151	< .001	0.090
Organization	0.275	1	0.275	0.269	0.604	6.165e -4
Candidate � Organization	1.692	1	1.692	1.656	0.199	0.004
Residuals	445.604	436	1.022			

Note. Type I Sum of Squares

Table 10. ANOVA test of differences in candidate ratings by type of organization
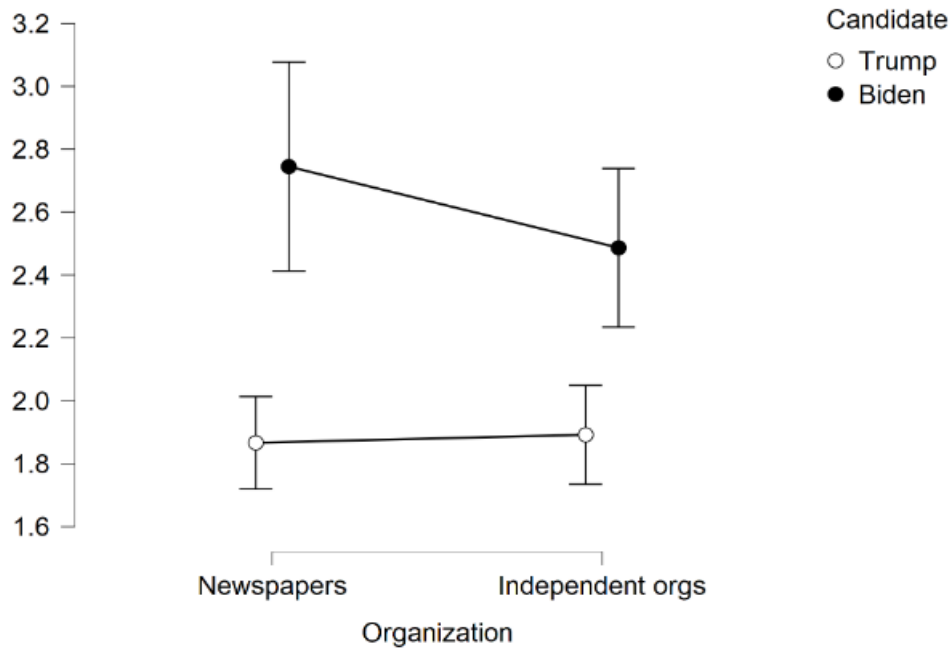
Figure 2. Descriptive plots of the average score of two candidates' statements

An analysis of variance showed that the difference of ratings towards candidates between newspapers and independent organizations was not significant, $F(1,436) = 1.656$, p = 0.199. Nevertheless, the means of the two candidates' ratings were unequal according to a one-way ANOVA, $F(1, 436) = 43.151$, $p < .001$ (Table 10).

Pairwise comparisons of the means of ratings towards candidates between newspapers and independent organizations using Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference procedure indicated that the average score of Trump's claims fact-checked by the three newspapers (M = 1.867, SD = 0.999) was significantly lower than the score of fact checks' ratings on Biden's statements of newspapers themselves (M = 2.745, SD = 1.132) and of the three independent organizations (M = 2.486, SD = 1.088) ($p < .001$). The mean of publications' ratings on Trump by newspapers was also lower than ratings' score on Trump by independent organizations, albeit statistical insignificance ($p = 0.996$) (Table 11).

		Mean Difference	SE	t	p tukey	p sidak
Trump, Newspapers	Biden, Newspapers	-0.878	0.166	-5.302	< .001***	< .001***
	Trump, Independent organizations	-0.025	0.114	-0.223	0.996	1.000
	Biden, Independent organizations	-0.620	0.140	-4.440	< .001***	< .001***
Biden, Newspapers	Trump, Independent organizations	0.853	0.171	4.998	< .001***	< .001***
	Biden, Independent organizations	0.258	0.189	1.369	0.519	0.677
Trump, Independent organizations	Biden, Independent organizations	-0.594	0.145	-4.086	< .001***	< .001***

*** p < .001

Note. P-value adjusted for comparing a family of 4

Table 11. Post Hoc Comparisons - Candidate * Organization

The results suggested differences in ratings' tendency towards candidates within each

organization type (i.e., newspaper and independent outlet), but not across organizations. Along

with the aforementioned Chi-square test, the second hypothesis was partially supported.

Chapter 6 - Discussion

Overwhelming truthless claims

Overall, there were solely 36 in a total of 440 statements from two candidates that were rated as correct, whilst 195 claims were adjudicated as incorrect and 155 claims were partially correct. The finding was concerning, given debates' demonstrated effects of political decision-making, yet expectable and not unique. Political rhetoric has been shown to be less honest than other speech types because of its short-term consequences for politicians (e.g., they had limited years in office) and the limited means for verifying the veracity of political quotes (Davis & Ferrantino, 1996), highlighting the importance of fact-checks. These innate reasons have led to a tendency of political actors and officials to exaggerate the deficiencies of their opponents, i.e., negative campaigning.

The two 2020 election candidates frequently adopted this negative approach in which one tended to attack the other, targeting their background, family, and scandals, as well as incompetency. For instance, Trump was fact-checked 18 times when mentioning Hunter Biden, Biden's son. At the same time, Biden mostly talked about Trump's administration's allegedly failed handling of the pandemic, trade deficit with China, and Trump's Chinese bank account, with six, four, and four fact checks, respectively.

Adverse political claims, then communication, and eventually partisanship, have turned into major elements of American politics, saturating the political market with rivalries and falsehood (Flynn, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2017; Klein, 2020). Lying, even exaggerating and misleading rhetoric, is arguably a rational response of politicians to increase the chances of election and lower the cost of losing their reputation (Davis & Ferrantino, 1996). Negative claims are indeed more complex to verify than positive ones, and the conspiracy theories' genius is the inability to prove

them wrong (Davis & Ferrantino, 1996; Ellerton, 2014). Aided by the rise of cheap speech, e.g., amplified communication systems and social-media platforms, these lies spread widely and fuel the polarization among like-minded people in multiple political markets (Hasen, 2022).

The dominance of truthless rhetoric of the two candidates was partly due to the guidelines of the six examined organizations, which highlighted the mechanics of the gate-keeping theory. On their websites, newspapers and fact-checking outlets emphasized the concentration on verifying inaccurate and controversial claims, leaving the precise ones aside. These codes of conduct also clearly stated the tendency to fact-check people in power or a ruling party. It explained why then-President Donald J. Trump was fact-checked more than his counterpart, not merely because he might, in fact, have made more untruthful claims. However, the fact that Trump's claims were rated as equally inaccurate between news organizations and independent fact-checking organizations (Figure 2) lends credence to the literature suggesting the so-called liberal media bias is merely a myth (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000; Hassell et al., 2020).

Inconsistency in fact-checking

The findings demonstrated an inconsistency in fact-checking practices among newspapers and independent organizations themselves and across two types of outlets. Within similar events, i.e., 2020 presidential debates and town halls, newspapers tended to fact-check Trump more than Biden compared to fact-checking bureaus and rated the then-President negatively. On the one hand, the results were consistent with previous studies suggesting that fact checks labeling claims of Trump and Republican political actors false were higher than Democratic politicians.

On the other hand, it posed a question that was asked before: to what extent fact-checkers agreed on who lied more, as well as the concern about how these organizations complied with their promises of non-partisan and balanced works (Davis, 2013; Ostermeier, 2011). Not to mention, rating scales for veracity levels were considerably distinct across outlets. During the coding and

analyzing process, coders also recognized the inconsistency in labeling the same statements among organizations. For instance, when fact-checked on Trump's claim that he had done for "the African American community" more than any president since Abraham Lincoln, PolitiFact rated it as inconclusive, citing historians who disputed this, and as partially correct when suggesting the claim needed context. Meanwhile, The Washington Post labeled it as wrong when stating historians dismissed Trump's statement as a fantasy.

This lack of consistency might be problematic, especially in currently politicalized and polarized political spheres like in the United States. Rich, Milden, and Wagner (2020) argued that the higher rate of fact checks on Republicans than on Democratic counterparts could lead to backfires toward fact-checking and exacerbate partisan beliefs about attacking conservatives. In short, the excessive difference in the number of fact checks comparing two political sides might negatively influence the effectiveness of fact-checking movements.

Scholarship on fact-checking fruitfulness has at least developed in two ways, including how fact checks corrected false claims and factual beliefs, and if they altered attitudes (Barrera et al., 2020). There was little evidence of the latter (e.g., Barrera et al., 2020; Nyhan et al., 2019), and instead, fact-checking sparked public debates about facts and had undesired consequences (Graves, 2016). Shin and Thorson (2017) found that sharing fact checks was selective based on partisan preferences and the existence of hostility towards outgroup fact checks, particularly among Republicans.

Fact checks and false information often had dissimilar audiences (Rogers & Niederer, 2020). A Pew Research Center once found that Americans were split in their views of fact-checkers: half of the participants considered fact-checking efforts by news outlets and other organizations as fair to all sides. In contrast, the other half said they favored one side. Specifically, seven-in-ten Republicans believed fact-checkers focused on their political party (Walker &

Gottfried, 2019). Other studies on fact-checking labels also showed that rating claims were insufficient to convince people who saw these labels as a biased attack on the then-President (Hasen, 2022).

There were also 54 fact checks labeled as inconclusive, higher than the number of correct statements. It was arguably a limitation of fact-checking which might not determine the truthfulness of information. Cloud (2018) posited that fact-checking outlets limited their attention to definition and conjecture, overlooking a bigger and more prominent picture of value and direction of actions. In other words, the central problem of fact-checking was the lack of guarantee about substance; thus, despite continual fact-checking on Trump, it did not work in the case of Trump, or any cases of political figures having immunity from responsibility and reasoning (Cloud, 2018).

It was found that fact-checking might reduce the chance of politicians making repeated false claims after they were debunked (Amazeen, 2013; Graves, 2016). Even Trump's probability of repeating a statement decreased by 9.2 percentage points if it was fact-checked as inaccurate (Lim, 2018). Nevertheless, Porter and Wood's (2019) findings suggested that fact checks had little impact on Trump himself, as president, and he continued to spread misinformation. Not only Trump, but politicians also embedded in a widespread disregard for the truth kept making debunked false claims (Carr, 2012; Graves, 2016).

The current study and previous literature did not intend to disregard the critical role of fact-checking. However, they suggested different approaches for achieving their missions and goals, particularly to deal with outliers, who did not follow the rules of fact-checking and when institutional trust levels in media and the government were at an all-time low (Edelman, 2018). The current practices of overtly and overwhelmingly fact-checking one political side, although its politicians spread false information, were considerably deemed as inappropriate way and

backfired, leading to reduced trust in the fact-checking entities rather than the fact-checked politicians.

Implications

Given the fact that fact-checking still limits the spread of dis- and misinformation, fact-checkers are encouraged to keep doing their work. "While the appeal of the lying demagogue is real, through continued correction that appeal can be blunted," Porter and Wood (2019, p. 63) recommended. Fact-checkers indeed took the right direction to fulfill their democratic ideal mission as political watchdogs (Lim, 2018). Conducting fact checks did not aim to influence the behaviors of politicians and readers but to inform voters. Therefore, what they did with the fact checks was truly their decision (Kessler, 2020). Full Fact Director Will Moy said the organization had put efforts to "play the ball and not the man," the approach to isolate audiences from political tugs of war; meanwhile, PolitiFact Editor-in-chief Angie Drobnic Holan employed fact-checking strategies "with an emphasis on newsworthy claims and a research method based on primary evidence."[8]

Trying to balance the fact checks is a dilemma. More false statements appeared from the right than from the left; thus, fact-checking organizations, similar to many social media platforms, had to fact-check those statements. Nevertheless, it, in turn, triggered a backlash from audiences blaming the fact-checkers of partisanship. It eventually drove people who did not believe in fact-checking to other sources offering inaccurate information (Hasen, 2022). The evenhandedness in fact-checking was indeed ideal and necessary to follow, albeit impractical, as the illusion of the media's objectivity. Another solution was finding ways to make fact checks an engaging read and reach diverse audiences, not separate publics (Rogers & Niederer, 2020).

---

[8] https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2016/fact-checking-under-president-trump/

Additionally, the defense of fact-checkers was considered vital in explaining why and how they did their jobs, as Pingree et al. (2018) posited when talking about journalists' defense of media bias. Studies found that media literacy could reduce perceived media bias (Vraga & Tully, 2015; Vraga & Tully, 2016). These interventions, e.g., defending journalism, might focus on articulating professional norms and practices that ensure journalism impartiality (Ashley, Maksl, & Craft, 2013). Currently, the six fact-checking organizations mentioned their guidelines and processes on their websites. These defenses should be included in their works, where audiences could directly absorb information to explain their choice of actors, topics, and sources.

One question posed for fact-checking outlets is shall they include the personality of political actors in deciding factors, particularly those who do not follow the rules or keep repeating their false claims. If so, the practice needs to be careful to avoid bias and backfire responses from the audience. Moreover, labeling a politician as a liar, e.g., Pinocchio, can be problematic in terms of journalistic subjectivity violation when judging and the reality that fact-checkers do not know absolutely if that person intends to make false statements. They rather fact-check and rate the information based on facts and reliable data they collect, not an individual's personality. If they intend to do so, an alternative approach is frame-checking proposed by Cloud (2018), which aims to critique political discourse that is possibly partially false. Discovering the discursive frame in a certain instance can explain the context and purpose why a politician omits or exaggerates pieces of information, which makes their claims hard to fact-check (Cloud, 2018).

One more way to guarantee their non-partisanship and avoid unintentional imbalance among political sides is to have associations to certify the quality and compliance of members (Hasen, 2022). As previously mentioned, except The New York Times, the other five organizations examined in this thesis are Verified signatories of the International Fact-Checking Network code of principles. If they do not abide by the code, audiences can report them to the

IFCN. However, the penalty is not clearly stated, and it is not always easy to report an imbalance or partisan stance of an organization, which may require well-studied and statistical reports.

Another problem is the emergence of a post-truth era and truth decay, where the line between opinion and fact is increasingly blurring, resulting in the influence and replacement of opinion and personal experience over facts (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018). While many societies need facts and reliable data to survive and succeed through subjective judgments and complex decisions, their existence is under threat due to the greater than ever disagreement over facts in political and civil discourse (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018). People tend to reject outward fact-based evidence, for instance, fact-checking works, and trust their own belief system, especially within echo chambers (Nguyen, 2020). Restoring trust in institutions and renewing interests in accountable authorities and journalism can clarify the blurred line between opinion and facts (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018). It again re-emphasizes the hard work of fact-checking journalism and organizations. Average Americans are still more responsive and appeal to factual information. For example, views toward Trump can be set straight by corrections (Porter & Wood, 2019).

Limitations

While the study's findings contribute to the literature on fact-checking, for instance, examining its limit when operating on Trump's statements and an era of truth decay, it has several limitations to address. First, the study chose solely three leading national news organizations in the United States, all three of which have been rated as "lean-left" outlets by companies like AllSides (2021). Their editorial board even endorsed Joe Biden for president in the 2020 presidential election, an unprecedented move conflicting with their commitment to non-partisan journalism.

They had their rationale for an abnormal election[9] and showed the desire to expel "the worst president of modern times,"[10] while believing Joe Biden was "the best choice" between the two candidates.[11] It might be reasonable to understand their fact checks placing on Trump's rhetoric, which was primarily false and inconclusive, as the findings demonstrated.

The choice of three news organizations is deemed the most noteworthy limitation of this thesis, although it followed procedures employed in previous literature and was guided by the outlets' popularity and leadership, as well as their systematic and live fact-checking of 2020 presidential debates and town halls. Given the fact that there were no newspapers considered neutral or lean-right that fact-checked these events, the choice was reasonable. Examining them further suggested the likelihood of depending on their editorial boards and the inconsistent practices between newspapers and independent organizations. Future studies may expand the sample to diverse topics which would be covered by multiple news outlets stretching across the political spectrum. A practical implication would be to suggest to news outlets rated as "center," such as the Associated Press or The Wall Street Journal, to start their own fact-checking operations and use their gravitas to set the record straight.

The second limitation was related to the scope of the analysis. The current study merely looked at 2020 presidential debates and town halls involving two main characters of two parties. The conclusion of partisan cues in fact-checking labels might be too early to call. Furthermore, comparing Trump and Biden may be an expectably statistically significant difference, given that Biden is viewed as more disciplined than his opponent. At the same time, Trump seems to talk

---

[9] https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/opinion/2020/10/20/backstory-usa-today-editorial-board-endorsed-joe-biden-heres-why/3667802001/

[10] https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/09/28/editorial-board-endorsement-joe-biden/

[11] https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/06/opinion/joe-biden-endorsement-editors-note.html

more, producing more materials to fact-check. Future research could investigate broader events with the participation of various politicians, which may start with comparing intra-party-political figures.

References

AllSides (2021). AllSides Media Bias Chart. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-
bias-chart

Amazeen, M. A. (2013). A Critical Assessment of Fact-checking in 2012. Research Paper: *New
America Foundation Media Policy Initiative*.
https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/10215-making-a-difference/Amazeen_-
A_Critical_Assessment_of_Factchecking.4a3289cb3fcd4a8faf0d94f40ebcdc35.pdf

Amazeen, M. A. (2020). Journalistic interventions: The structural factors affecting the global
emergence of fact-checking. *Journalism, 21*(1), 95-111.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917730217

Amazeen, M. A., Thorson, E., Muddiman, A., & Graves, L. (2018). Correcting political and
consumer misperceptions: The effectiveness and effects of rating scale versus contextual
correction formats. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 95*(1), 28-48.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699016678186

Arendt, H. (1971). *Crises of the Republic.* Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Company.

Ashley, S., Maksl, A., & Craft, S. (2013). Developing a news media literacy scale. *Journalism &
Mass Communication Educator, 68*(1), 7-21. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695812469802

Barrera, O., Guriev, S., Henry, E., & Zhuravskaya, E. (2020). Facts, alternative facts, and fact
checking in times of post-truth politics. *Journal of Public Economics,* 182, 104123.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2019.104123

Ben-Ghiat, R. (2020). *Strongmen: Mussolini to the present.* WW Norton & Company.

Benkler, Y., Faris, R., & Roberts, H. (2018). *Network propaganda: Manipulation, disinformation,
and radicalization in American politics.* Oxford University Press.

Berlinski, N., Doyle, M., Guess, A. M., Levy, G., Lyons, B., Montgomery, J. M., ... & Reifler, J.

    (2021). The effects of unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud on confidence in elections.

    Journal of Experimental Political Science, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2021.18

Brandtzaeg, P. B., Følstad, A., & Chaparro Domínguez, M. Á. (2018). How journalists and social

    media users perceive online fact-checking and verification services. *Journalism practice,*

    12(9), 1109-1129. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1363657

Bucciol, A. (2018). False claims in politics: Evidence from the US. *Research in Economics, 72*(2),

    196-210. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rie.2018.04.002

Carr, D. (2012). A last fact check: It didn't work. *The New York Times.*

    https://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/06/a-last-fact-check-it-didnt-work/

Cloud, D. L. (2018). *Reality bites: Rhetoric and the circulation of truth claims in US political*

    culture. The Ohio State University Press. https://doi.org/10.26818/9780814213612

Cunningham, B. (2003). Re-thinking objectivity. *Columbia Journalism Review, 42*(2), 24-32.

    https://archives.cjr.org/feature/rethinking_objectivity.php

D'Alessio, D., & Allen, M. (2000). Media bias in presidential elections: A meta-analysis. *Journal of*

    communication, 50(4), 133-156. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02866.x

Davis, K. (2013). Study: Media fact-checker says Republicans lie more. *Center for Media and*

    Public Affairs at George Mason University. http://www.cmpa.com/study-media-fact-

    checker-says-republicans-lie-more.

Davis, M. L., & Ferrantino, M. (1996). Towards a positive theory of political rhetoric: Why do

    politicians lie?. *Public Choice, 88*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00130405

Dimitrova, D. V., & Nelson, K. (2018). Fact-checking and the 2016 presidential election: News

    media's attempts to correct misleading information from the debates. *An Unprecedented*

Election: Media, Communication, and the Electorate in the 2016 Campaign, 134.

> https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/jlmc_pubs/19/

Domke, D., Watts, M. D., Shah, D. V., & Fan, D. P. (1999). The politics of conservative elites and

> the "liberal media" argument. *Journal of communication, 49*(4), 35-58.

> https://doi.org/10.1177/009365099026002003

Dunham, J. (2016). Press freedom in 2015: The battle for the dominant message. *Freedom*

> *House*. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/battle-dominant-message

Dunn, S. W., L. Butler, S., Meeks, K., & Collier, J. (2015). Communication Quarterly Rockin'the

> Gubernatorial Vote?: Young People's Normative Democratic Attitudes and Behaviors in a

> Low-Involvement Election. *Communication Quarterly, 63*(5), 603-619.

> https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2015.1078830

Edelman (2018). 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer. https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/

> fijiles/aatuss191/fijiles/2018-

> 10/Edelman_Trust_Barometer_Employee_Experience_2018_0.pdf

Ellerton, P. (2014). The ironclad logic of conspiracy theories and how to break it. *The*

> *Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/the-ironclad-logic-of-conspiracy-theories-and-

> how-to-break-it-31684

Fischer, S. (2020). Fact-checking goes mainstream in Trump era. *Axios*.

> https://www.axios.com/fact-checking-trump-media-baad50cc-a13f-4b73-a52a-

> 4cd9e63bd2fc.html

Flynn, D. J., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2017). The nature and origins of misperceptions:

> Understanding false and unsupported beliefs about politics. *Political Psychology, 38*(S1),

> 127-150. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12394

Freelon, D. (2013). ReCal OIR: Ordinal, interval, and ratio intercoder reliability as a web service. *International Journal of Internet Science, 8*(1), 10-16. https://www.ijis.net/ijis8_1/ijis8_1_freelon.pdf

Fridkin, K., Kenney, P. J., & Wintersieck, A. (2015). Liar, liar, pants on fire: How fact-checking influences citizens' reactions to negative advertising. *Political Communication, 32*(1), 127-151. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2014.914613

Froehlich, T. J. (2020). A disinformation-misinformation ecology: The case of Trump. *Fake News is Bad News-Hoaxes, Half-Truths and the Nature of Today's Journalism.* https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/74337

Garrett, R. K., & Weeks, B. E. (2013, February). The promise and peril of real-time corrections to political misperceptions. In *Proceedings of the 2013 conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 1047-1058). https://doi.org/10.1145/2441776.2441895

Gaufman, E. (2018). The Trump carnival: Popular appeal in the age of misinformation. *International Relations, 32*(4), 410-429. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117818773130

Golan, G. (2006). Inter-media agenda setting and global news coverage: Assessing the influence of the New York Times on three network television evening news programs. *Journalism studies, 7*(2), 323-333. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700500533643

Golshan, T. (2016). Donald Trump has ushered in a whole new era of fact-checking in journalism. *Vox.* https://www.vox.com/2016/7/13/11944674/fact-checking-donald-trump

Gottfried, J. A., Hardy, B. W., Winneg, K. M., & Jamieson, K. H. (2013). Did fact checking matter in the 2012 presidential campaign?. *American Behavioral Scientist, 57*(11), 1558-1567. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213489012

Graves, L. (2016). *Deciding What's True: The Rise of Political Fact-Checking in American Journalism.* Columbia University Press.

Graves, L. (2018). Boundaries not drawn: Mapping the institutional roots of the global fact-

    checking movement. *Journalism Studies, 19*(5), 613-631.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1196602

Graves, L., & Cherubini, F. (2016). The rise of fact-checking sites in Europe. *The Reuters Institute*

    for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/rise-fact-

    checking-sites-europe

Graves, L., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2015). *The Diffusion of Fact-checking* (Vol. 22). American

    Press Institute. https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/The-

    Growth-of-Fact-Checking.pdf

Grieco, E. (2020). Americans' main sources for political news vary by party and age. *Pew Research*

    Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/01/americans-main-sources-for-

    political-news-vary-by-party-and-age.

Grossberg, L. (2018). *Under the cover of chaos: Trump and the battle for the American right.*

    London: Pluto Press.

Grynbaum, M. (2017). Trump calls the news media the enemy of the people. *The New York*

    Times, 17. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/business/trump-calls-the-news-media-the-

    enemy-of-the-people.html

Gunther, A. C., Edgerly, S., Akin, H., & Broesch, J. A. (2012). Partisan evaluation of partisan

    information. *Communication Research, 39*(4), 439-457.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650212441794

Hahl, O., Kim, M., & Zuckerman Sivan, E. W. (2018). The authentic appeal of the lying

    demagogue: Proclaiming the deeper truth about political illegitimacy. *American*

    Sociological Review, 83(1), 1-33. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0003122417749632

Hasen, R. L. (2022). *Cheap Speech: How Disinformation Poisons Our Politics—and How to Cure It.* Yale University Press.

Hassan, S. (2020). *The cult of trump: A leading cult expert explains how the president uses mind control.* Free Press.

Hassell, H. J., Holbein, J. B., & Miles, M. R. (2020). There is no liberal media bias in which news stories political journalists choose to cover. *Science advances, 6*(14), eaay9344. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aay9344

Hayes, A. S. (2008). *Press critics are the fifth estate: Media watchdogs in America.* Greenwood Publishing Group.

Heimlich, R. (2012, September 11). Most say presidential debates influence their vote. *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2012/09/11/most-say-presidential-debates-influence-their-vote/

Holbrook, T. M. (1999). Political learning from presidential debates. *Political Behavior, 21*(1), 67-89. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023348513570

Jamieson, K. H., & Cappella, J. N. (2008). *Echo chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the conservative media establishment.* Oxford University Press.

Jamieson, K. H., & Waldman, P. (2004). *The press effect: Politicians, journalists, and the stories that shape the political world.* Oxford University Press, USA.

Kavanagh, J. & Rich, M. D. (2018). Truth decay: An initial exploration of the diminishing role of facts and analysis in American public life. *Rand Corporation.*

Katz, A. (2016, October 22). Presidential debates set ratings records in 2016, but does the format need to change? *Adweek.* http://www.adweek.com/tv-video/presidential-debates-set-ratings-records-2016-does -format-need-change-174205/

Kessler, G. (2020). Fact-checking in a post-Trump era. *The Washington Post.*

    https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/11/09/fact-checking-post-trump-era/

Kessler, G., Rizzo, S., & Kelly, M. (2021). Trump's false or misleading claims total 30,573 over 4

    years. *Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/01/24/trumps-false-

    or-misleading-claims-total-30573-over-four-years/

Klein, E. (2020). Why we're polarized. Simon and Schuster.

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). *The elements of journalism. What newspeople should know*

    and the public should expect. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Krugman, P. (2011, December 20). Politifact, R.I.P. *The New York Times.*

    https://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/20/politifact-r-i-p/

Kurtzleben, D. (2016, September 27). Do fact-checks matter? *NPR.*

    http://www.npr.org/2016/09/27/495233627/do-fact-checks-matter

Ladd, J. M. (2011). *Why Americans hate the media and how it matters.* Princeton University

    Press.

Li, S., Zhao, S., Cheng, B., & Yang, H. (2018, November). An end-to-end multi-task learning

    model for fact checking. In *Proceedings of the First Workshop on Fact Extraction and*

    VERification (FEVER) (pp. 138-144). https://aclanthology.org/W18-5523.pdf

Lim, C. (2018). Can Fact-checking Prevent Politicians from Lying?. *Disponible en.*

    https://discuss.tp4.ir/uploads/default/original/2X/6/620e0f36b3d2898e3a4672aa572cb0c95

    0448ed0.pdf

Lowrey, W. (2017). The emergence and development of news fact-checking sites: Institutional

    logics and population ecology. *Journalism Studies, 18*(3), 376-394.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1052537

Luengo, M., & García-Marín, D. (2020). The performance of truth: politicians, fact-checking journalism, and the struggle to tackle COVID-19 misinformation. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology, 8*(3), 405-427.

Mantzarlis, A. (2016). Fact-checking under President Trump. *Poynter*. https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2016/fact-checking-under-president-trump/

Maras, S. (2013). *Objectivity in journalism*. John Wiley & Sons.

Marietta, M., Barker, D. C., & Bowser, T. (2015). Fact-checking polarized politics: does the fact-check industry provide consistent guidance on disputed realities?. *The Forum, 13*(4), 577-596. https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2015-0040

Marietta, M., Barker, D. C., & Bowser, T. (2015). Fact-checking polarized politics: Does the fact-check industry provide consistent guidance on disputed realities?. *The Forum, 13*(4), 577-596. https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2015-0040

Markowitz, D. (2020). Trump is lying more than ever: Just look at the data. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidmarkowitz/2020/05/05/trump-is-lying-more-than-ever-just-look-at-the-data/

Nguyen, C. T. (2020). Echo chambers and epistemic bubbles. *Episteme, 17*(2), 141-161. https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.32

Nieminen, S., & Sankari, V. (2021). Checking PolitiFact's Fact-Checks. *Journalism Studies, 22*(3), 358-378. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1873818

Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2010). When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions. *Political Behavior, 32*(2), 303-330. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-010-9112-2

Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2012). Misinformation and Fact-checking. Research Findings. *New America Foundation Media Policy Initiative*. https://www.issuelab.org/resources/15316/15316.pdf

Nyhan, B., Porter, E., Reifler, J., & Wood, T. J. (2020). Taking fact-checks literally but not

    seriously? The effects of journalistic fact-checking on factual beliefs and candidate

    favorability. *Political Behavior, 42*(3), 939-960. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-019-09528-x

Ostermeier, E. (2011). Selection bias? PolitiFact rates Republican statements as false at three times

    the rate of Democrats. *Smart Politics,* 10.

    https://smartpolitics.lib.umn.edu/2011/02/10/selection-bias-politifact-rate/

Patterson, T. E. (2016). News coverage of the 2016 general election: How the press failed the

    voters. HKS Working Paper No. RWP16-052. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2884837

Peters, G., & Woolley, J. T. (2020). 2020 General Election Editorial Endorsements by Major

    Newspapers. *The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara.*

    https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/2020-general-election-editorial-

    endorsements-major-newspapers

Pingree, R. J., Brossard, D., & McLeod, D. M. (2014). Effects of journalistic adjudication on

    factual beliefs, news evaluations, information seeking, and epistemic political efficacy. *Mass*

    Communication and Society, 17(5), 615-638.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2013.821491

Pingree, R. J., Watson, B., Sui, M., Searles, K., Kalmoe, N. P., Darr, J. P., ... & Bryanov, K.

    (2018). Checking facts and fighting back: Why journalists should defend their profession.

    PloS one, 13(12), e0208600. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208600

Pomerantsev, P. (2019). *This is not propaganda: Adventures in the war against reality.*

    PublicAffairs.

Porter, E., & Wood, T. J. (2019). *False alarm: The truth about political mistruths in the Trump*

    era. Cambridge University Press.

Preston, P., & Metykova, M. (2008). From news nets to house rules: Organisational contexts. In *Making the News* (pp. 80-99). Routledge.

Rich, T. S., Milden, I., & Wagner, M. T. (2020). Research note: Does the public support fact-checking social media? It depends who and how you ask. *The Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review.* https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-46

Rieder, R. (2020). Checking the Facts in the World of Trump. *FactCheck.org.* https://www.factcheck.org/2020/11/checking-the-facts-in-the-world-of-trump/

Ringel, S. (2021). Digitizing the paper of record: Archiving digital newspapers at the New York Times. *Journalism,* 14648849211023849. https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211023849

Robertson, C. T., Mourão, R. R., & Thorson, E. (2020). Who uses fact-checking sites? The impact of demographics, political antecedents, and media use on fact-checking site awareness, attitudes, and behavior. *The International Journal of Press/Politics, 25*(2), 217-237. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161219898055

Rogers, R., & Niederer, S. (2020). The politics of social media manipulation. *The Politics of Social Media Manipulation,* 19-70. Amsterdam University Press.

Schwartzman, R. (2021). Trumping Reason: Political Communication in the Post-Truth Era. In *Rationalist Bias in Communication Theory* (pp. 269-295). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-7439-3.ch015

Shin, J., & Thorson, K. (2017). Partisan selective sharing: The biased diffusion of fact-checking messages on social media. *Journal of Communication, 67*(2), 233-255. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12284

Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message* (pp. 781-795). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. P. (2014). Media gatekeeping. In *An integrated approach to communication theory and research* (pp. 89-103). Routledge.

Shoemaker, P. J., Vos, T. P., & Reese, S. D. (2009). Journalists as gatekeepers. In *The handbook of journalism studies* (pp. 93-107). Routledge.

Smith, G. R. (2010). Politicians and the news media: How elite attacks influence perceptions of media bias. *The International Journal of Press/Politics, 15*(3), 319-343. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161210367430

Snyder, T. (2017). *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. New York: Penguin University Press.

Stanley, J. (2020). *How fascism works: The politics of us and them*. Random House Trade Paperbacks.

Stencel, M. (2016). Global fact-checking up 50% in past year. *Duke Reporters' Lab*. https://reporterslab.org/global-fact-checking-up-50-percent/

Sullivan, M. (2017). Trump's vicious attack on the media shows one thing clearly: He's running scared. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/trumps-vicious-attack-on-the-press-shows-one-thing-clearly-hes-running-scared/2017/08/23/4fc1a6a2-8802-11e7-a50f-e0d4e6ec070a_story.html

Tran, H. D. (2021). Studying the Community of Trump Supporters on Twitter during the 2020 US Presidential Election via Hashtags# maga and# trump2020. *Journalism and Media, 2*(4), 709-731. https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia2040042

Turvill, W. (2021). Top 25 US newspapers by circulation: America's largest titles have lost 20% of print sales since Covid-19 hit. *Press Gazette*. https://pressgazette.co.uk/biggest-us-newspapers-by-circulation/

University of Minnesota (2016). *Understanding Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication.* Current Popular Trends in the Newspaper Industry. https://doi.org/10.24926/8668.260

Uscinski, J. E., & Butler, R. W. (2013). The epistemology of fact checking. *Critical Review, 25*(2), 162-180. https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2013.843872

Vraga, E. K., & Tully, M. (2015). Media literacy messages and hostile media perceptions: Processing of nonpartisan versus partisan political information. *Mass Communication and Society, 18*(4), 422-448. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695815623399

Vraga, E. K., & Tully, M. (2016). Effectiveness of a non-classroom news media literacy intervention among different undergraduate populations. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator, 71*(4), 440-452. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2014.1001910

Walker, M., & Gottfried, J. (2019). Republicans far more likely than Democrats to say fact-checkers tend to favor one side. *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/27/republicans-far-more-likely-than-democrats-to-say-fact-checkers-tend-to-favor-one-side/

Zelizer, B. (1993). Journalists as interpretive communities. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 10*(3), 219-237. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039309366865