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Arbiters of Truth: Government Fact-checking in the South Asia

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Abstract. This study documents fact-checker prioritization of political agendas in government-run fact-checking in India and Pakistan. Government fact-checkers in both countries debunked the content critical of the government but failed to mention specific methods and sources of verification. The research also discussed the implications of government-run fact-checking in overall fact-checking practices and norms. This research also shows that Indian and Pakistani fact-checkers, both government-run and independent, interest areas are confined to issues related to politics, entertainment, sports, health, religion, economics, and international affairs.

Keywords: fact-checking; government-run fact-checker; political communication, India, Pakistan.

1. Introduction

As the number of fact-checking websites increased (Stencel & Ryan, 2023), academic research on fact-checking has also seen significant popularity (Nieminen & Rapeli, 2019). Some scholars investigated the fact-checked content (Nenno, 2025; Yousuf, 2023; Graves & Amazeen 2019), some investigated the effects of fact-checking on individuals (Nyhan et al., 2020; Amazeen et al., 2016; Fridkin et al., 2016), and some others investigated fact-checking practices, professions, and norms in different contexts (Schuldt, 2021; Singer, 2020; Haque et al., 2018).

Scholars have reported that fact-checking practices are shaped by organizational structure and ownership of the fact-checking organizations (Graves, 2018). Research on fact-checking and politics demonstrates how fact-checking has been impactful in overall political communication among political actors and people (Young et al., 2018; Nyhan et al., 2020). Most scholarly works on fact-checking practices have emphasized Western-style democracy (Nieminen & Rapeli, 2019), and only some of them focused in the South Asia (for example Ejaz et al., 2022, 2025; Kumar, 2022, 2025; Seelam et al., 2024).

The emergence of government as fact-checkers in the global south brings new dynamics. Three scholars have so far explicitly investigated how the government owned fact-checking works in Asian countries, in Hong Kong (Feng, 2024), in China (Fang, 2022), in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand (Schuldt, 2021). They argued that fact-checked content

from pro-government fact-check organizations or websites shielded the government from criticisms.

Both the neighboring countries in South Asia, India and Pakistan, have started their own fact-checking, while independent fact-checking organizations were also operating in both countries. According to Duke Reporters Lab (2024), a total of 29 active independent fact-checking organizations were providing services as of December 2025 to 1.5 billion of people in India. In Pakistan only three independent fact-checkers were actively providing services in December 2025. AFP Fact Check, a sister concern of French multinational news agency *Agence France-Presse,* was operating in both the countries.

The Economist's Democracy Index shows that India is right now ranked as a flawed democracy, a country that has an infringement on media freedom (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023). Meanwhile, Pakistan ranked as a hybrid regime where journalists and media face harassment (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023). India is ranked partly free in Global Freedom and Internet Freedom ranking, while Pakistan is considered not free in Internet Freedom and partly free in Global Freedom ranking (Freedom House, 2022a; Freedom House, 2022b; Freedom House, 2022c). In India, the online misinformation, which often shape the political discourse in the country, has become a significant concern for the country (Neyazi et al., 2021), while in Pakistan scholars found that political misinformation was shaping the public opinion and intensified political divisions (Kumari et al., 2025).

A few studies on fact-checking have so far investigated the fact-checking practices in these two countries. In Pakistan, the fact-checking scholarships focused on effectiveness of fact-checking (Ejaz et al., 2025). While in India, scholars investigated on independent fact-checkers practices, professional roles, and challenges (Kumar 2022, 2025; Seelam et al. 2024). For example, Kumar (2022) found that independent fact-checkers in India maintain transparent fact-checking practices. In a subsequent study on Indian independent fact-checkers, Kumar (2025) found that individual fact-check were facing different types of challenges including online harassment and abundant misinformation. According to the best knowledge of the authors, none of the available fact-checking scholarships in India and Pakistan investigated the government-run fact-checked content.

In less democratic countries the journalists and fact-checkers were facing political pressures among other challenges. In South Asia, precisely in Bangladesh, fact-checkers face pressure from the government to publish content critical of the government. A fact-checker, Mohammad Zubair of *Alt News in India*, was arrested by Indian authorities for a 4-year-old Tweet the allegation of inflaming religious strife in India. Zubair, however, claimed that his Tweet was based on facts (Smalley, 2022). In Pakistan, meanwhile, pro-government political actors harass journalists on social media in the name of 'fact-checking' (Jahangir, 2021). For example, the then-ruling party of Pakistan has made a strategy of discrediting legitimate media reports as 'fake news' (Jahangir, 2021).

To address this gap, this study investigated into the government-run fact-checkers' content in India and Pakistan. More specifically, this study also investigated whether government-run fact-checking shaped political discourse and whether it has any differences with the independent fact-checking content in both countries. This study applied mixed method content analysis to get answers to the research questions. This study, therefore, attempted find out answers to the following research questions: 1. What types of content were fact-checked by the government and independent fact-checkers in India and Pakistan? 2. How do government fact-checkers in India and Pakistan fact-check a claim?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Fact-checking and Politics

As mentioned beforehand, studies on fact-checking have significantly increased in the current years. Amazeen (2015) argued that fact-checking is a democracy building tool. Fact-checkers also argued that they were also involved in addressing the shortcomings of news media (Singer, 2020). Research on fact-checking and politics demonstrated how fact-checking has been impactful in overall political communication among political actors and people. Young et al. (2018) argued that independent fact-checking organizations were engaged in developing informed and engaged citizenry. According to Nyhan et al. (2020), journalistic fact-checks can lessen misperceptions but have little effect on candidate ratings or vote choice. Amazeen et al. (2018) found that fact-checking can change the attitudes of individuals significantly and correlated to individuals' political behavior. Other researchers (Haigh et al., 2017) found that fact-checking was acting as a tool against propaganda. Singer (2020) found that correcting misinformation and informing the public were the two most important perceived roles of fact-checkers.

Fact-checking, as we know it today, has started its journey to fight against misinformation and plays a watchdog role on journalism and political leaders, parties, or people in power (Graves, 2018). Fact-checking organizations operate as independent and non-profit organizations, while some are parts of the legacy of news outlets having well-established financial backgrounds, and some others are even openly partisan aligned to either left or conservative ideologues (Graves, 2016). While classifying the global fact-checking organizations into three groups – journalistic, academic, and political or civic – Graves (2018: 616) stated that the partisan fact-checking organizations, especially in the USA "have emerged as permanent institutional counterparts to journalistic fact-checkers." In the USA some fact-checkers are directly linked with political parties while in other places fact-checkers have close ties with political movements. For example, *Factcheckers* are in ties with the anti-corruption movement in India (Graves, 2018). *Media Research Center*, a conservative media-monitoring group, and *Media Matters*, aligned with the Democratic Party in the USA (Graves, 2018). In Ukraine, *StopFake* emerged as a fact-checking initiative to fight against the Russian state-sponsored propaganda (Haigh et al., 2017).

Based on the findings of a field study conducted on US fact checkers, Graves (2017) came up with the five phases of a typical fact check: (1) choosing claims to check, (2) contacting the target, (3) tracing false claims, (4) consulting experts and sources, and (5) publishing the check as transparently as possible. Mena (2019) investigated the perceptions of normative boundaries of fact-checkers in the United States and found that about 98 percent of the respondents thought that the primary purpose of fact-checking was to "evaluate the accuracy of statements by public figures and institutions" (Mena, 2019: 664).

Critics of fact-checking (Uscinski & Butler, 2013; Uscinski, 2015), however, asserted that fact-checkers for using 'non-scientific' methods of busting false claims. Uscinski and Butler (2013) also questioned the fundamental fact-checking epistemological premise that the boundaries between factual claims and opinions are always straightforward rather than open to interpretation. Scholars also questioned fact-checkers' role in disputed political realities as they found that fact-checkers did not follow any standardized method which yielded distinctive evaluations for same claims. Amazeen (2015: 15) argued that "none of the fact-checkers claim to use scientifically rigorous methods." She also claimed that like fact-checking, journalism itself is not a science (Amazeen, 2015). In this ongoing debate in academia, the

governments in different Western and non-western countries have started to mimic the professional fact-checkers and using fact-checking as a tool to exercise more control on the public opinion and attack on press freedom.

2.2. *Government-run Fact-checking*

As online disinformation has proliferated, governments across the world has set up initiatives to tackle disinformation and misinformation. In this context, scholars have investigated how democratic and authoritarian governments approach the fight against disinformation. They found that democratic countries with high press freedom had a more holistic approach, where the authoritarian governments used their initiatives to attack their political opponents. Governments in different countries have established a fact-checking unit for their political purposes (Granger, 2025; Meseret, 2024; Schuldt, 2021; Feng, 2024; Funke & Benkelman, 2019).

At the very latest, in December 2025, Trump administration has started a new feature called "*Media Offender of the Week*" on the website of White House that listed out name of some media outlets and journalists claiming they have misled the public (Granger, 2025). In this attempt, the White House claimed that they were attempting to holding media accountable, while the critic said that this was "about controlling the narrative — especially as the president faces backlash for his own words" (Granger, 2025: para 2.). Earlier, Tandoc (2019) also documented that President Trump labelled media organizations which were critical of him as 'fake news'. In other countries, for example in Mexico, the then President Andrés Manuel López Obrador started a fact-checking unit, mimicking the other Mexican independent fact-checkers name (Funke & Benkelman, 2019).

Governments in various non-western countries use public funding to facilitate the media outlets "that advance the government agenda and the interests of its allies and supporters, either political groups or businesses" (Dragomir, 2018: 1131). Meseret (2024) reported that the rise in government-run fact-checking raised concerns among the fact-checkers and scholars, asserting that this trend could damage the reputation and credibility of independent fact-checking initiatives. The government-run initiatives were often criticized for abandoning the key ethical and normative principles of fact-checking – non-partisanship and transparency, which are essential to credible verification (Meseret, 2024).

As mentioned beforehand, this trend has also seen in Asian countries in recent period where the governments started own fact-checking units in different countries. Schuldt (2021) investigated three government-run fact-checking organizations in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, and found that government-run fact-checking organizations shaped the political discourses, and fact-checked contents were defending the governments of these countries. Investigating news articles related to 'fake news' published by Asian News Network in the context of four authoritarian countries in Southeast Asia – Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam, Chang et al. (2013) found similar findings that the governments and political leaders in these countries used this term to curb free speech and civil liberties.

In China, the authoritarian government were adopting fact-checking initiatives during the Covid 19 pandemic for propagating official statements, controlling the media and acting censorship on press freedom (Fang, 2022). Furthermore, Fang (2022) also reported that the Chinese government fact-checkers were mimicking the then global fact-checking practices in debunking the claims. However, these fact-checkers were also used as tools to protect China's image globally by labeling the foreign media and politicians as false rumors.

In another study in the context of Hong Kong, Feng (2024) investigated how pro-government fact-checking handled COVID 19 related disinformation and/or misinformation. Feng (2024) found that the government owned fact-checked content was relying mostly on government's official sources and emphasized on claims that targeted both the Hong Kong and China governments. This study also found that although the government fact-checker mimicked the style of global fact-checkers in some ways, it failed to provide transparent sources – an important tool for the verification process in checking any claims (Feng, 2024). Furthermore, fact-checking initiatives by governments and politicians are often used as a tool of propagandistic activities (Feng, 2024; Funke & Benkelman, 2019).

Although the less democratic governments were using fact-checking initiatives to control public opinion, people were not relying on official statements more than independent fact-checking initiatives. For example, in China, researchers found that audiences tend to believe in independent fact-checking and consider it more credible than official fact-checked content. In the context of the Tianjin blast of 2015, the official narratives on social media were challenged, and the fact-checked contents on the issue were also questioned (Zeng et al., 2019).

3. Method

This study applied quantitative and qualitative content analysis to explore types of content being fact-checked by government-run and independent fact-checkers in India and Pakistan. These methods also used to explore how the government fact-checkers fact-check a false claim and what they include in their response. India and Pakistan experienced political tensions in the last quarter of 2022 and in the beginning of 2023. The political tensions were high after Imran Khan's ouster from Prime Minister Office on April 10, 2022, which lead to country-wide protests, and later his disqualification from running the office for five years (Aljazeera, 2023). This political tension escalated when former Prime Minister Imran Khan survived an assassination attempt during a public rally and got gunshots in his leg on November 3, 2022 (Aljazeera, 2023). In the first quarter of 2023, after several failed attempts to arrest Imran Khan, the government was able to arrest him from the premises of Islamabad High Court on May 9, which led to protests resulting in 10 death, hundreds of injuries, and several government and military buildings were damaged (Dawn, 2024).

On the other hand, India was facing criticism due an increased discrimination, decreasing civil liberties, and using government institutions against those who had a different political view. The Bharat Jodo Yatra was a massive 'unity march' launched by Indian National Congress (INC) and led by Rahul Gandhi (Kumar, 2023). In February 2023, Indian tax authorities searched BBC offices in New Delhi and Mumbai — shortly after the broadcaster released a documentary critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi — alleging the BBC had under-declared income, misreported profits, and failed to pay taxes on foreign remittances tied to its Indian operations (Das & MacLellan, 2023). Critics, including media-freedom groups, described the investigations as a politically motivated attempt to intimidate independent journalism (Ganguly, 2023). This research, therefore, focused on the fact-checked contents during this time period.

A total of six fact-checkers' contents were analyzed for the study. The two independent fact-checkers, *Soch Fact Check* (Pakistan) and *BOOM* (India), were selected as they were the largest English fact-checkers in each country and among the signatories of the fact-checkers global consortium - *International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN)* at *Poynter Institute*. *Agence France-Presse* (AFP) chapters in both countries were also selected to include independent organizations which are not based in these countries. This allowed a comparison,

for example between local independent and international affiliation fact-checkers. Among the government-run fact-checkers - *Fact Checker MoIB* (Pakistan) and *PIB Fact-check* (India) were selected.

The two government-based fact-checkers publish their content on their Twitter accounts, and therefore this study collected data from their Twitter accounts. For the independent fact-checking organizations, *Soch Fact Check* (Pakistan), *BOOM* (India), *AFP Fact-Check* (India), and *AFP Fact-Check* (Pakistan), this study collected their contents from their website. Apart from the *Fact Checker MoIB,* other data were collected from November to December 2022. At this period, *Fact Checker MoIB* had published only six tweets, therefore, to reach the saturation level, the contents from September 2022 to February 2023 were collected for analysis. A total of 312 English language contents published by the selected six fact checkers were selected for analysis. The tweets and headlines of these fact-checking websites were analyzed.

The first part of the study contains quantitative content analysis which helped to understand what types of claims are fact-checked. The fact-checking organizations often labelled one fact-checked claim under different categories. For example, a claim about Covid-19 was labelled under health and a political figure/institution was labelled under politics. For the purpose of clarity, this study developed a codebook where one fact-checked claim was assigned to only one category. This addressed the overlapping categories and helped us understand the data clearly. Two authors randomly selected 30 fact-checked claims and assigned these to a category based on a dominant theme. An intercoder reliability test was conducted, and the Kappa was equal to .66 (Cronk, 2016). The intercoder reliability was lower than the standard but at an acceptable level. Ten different categories were developed for the purpose of coding the rest of the data. These categories were entertainment, politics, social/religion/communal, sports, science/technology, business/finance/economy, covid/health, international, education, and war/conflict.

To investigate how the government fact-checkers fact-check claims, a qualitative content analysis of fact-checked claims was conducted. This qualitative content analysis was used as a systematic coding and categorization approach to explore and interpret textual data (Vaismoradi et al. 2013). Earlier, Iosifidis and Nicoli (2020) also used this method when they investigated *Facebook's* announcements on fighting disinformation. An inductive coding approach was used to code 61 tweets from Indian and Pakistani government fact-checkers.

4. Results

To answer the first research question, a descriptive analysis was performed to check the frequency of fact-checked claims under different categories. There were differences in coverage between government and independent fact-checkers in Pakistan. The government fact-checker only addressed the claims related to politics, whereas *AFP Pakistan* and *Soch Fact* addressed a variety of issues related to other categories such as international stories, social issues, business, and technology. *AFP Pakistan* fact-checker was dominated by politics and international news, while *Soch Fact* gave considerably more attention to claims related to politics. The total number of fact-checked claims were 17 by the Government of Pakistan, 11 by AFP, and 87 by Soch Fact.

Table 1. *Types of fact-checked claims (%) in Pakistan*

Category	Pakistan Govt.	AFP Pakistan	Soch Fact
Entertainment	0	0	5.7
Politics	100	45.45	34.5
Social/religion/communal	0	9.1	13.8
Sports	0	0	14.9
Science/technology	0	0	2.3
Business/finance/economy	0	0	3.5
Covid/health	0	0	4.6
International	0	45.45	18.4
Education	0	0	1.2
War/conflict	0	0	1.1
Total	100	100	100

In India, government and independent fact-checkers addressed variety of claim related to several categories. The Indian-based fact-checkers had a total number of 197 tweet posts and contents, with the Indian government having 44, *AFP India* 21, and *Boom* 132 fact-checked items. AFP and Boom both fact-checked claims related to politics more than the government fact-checker, whereas government fact-checker paid a lot of attention to fake news related to business/finance/economy category, followed by politics. This study found that 40.9 percent of fact-checked materials by the government covered business, finance, and economic activities. This was followed by politics which covers 27.3 percent of all fact-checked materials during the survey period. For AFP, nearly every second fact-checked claim was related to politics, and for Boom every third fact-checked claim was related to politics.

Table 2. *Types of fact-checked claims (%) in India*

Category	Indian Govt.	AFP India	Boom
Entertainment	0	4.8	9.9
Politics	27.3	42.8	34.8
Social/religion/communal	13.6	23.8	25
Sports	0	4.8	12.1
Science/technology	4.6	4.8	2.3
Business/finance/economy	40.9	0	2.3
Covid/health	4.5	0	3
International	0	14.3	5.3
Education	6.8	0	0
War/conflict	2.3	4.7	5.3
Total	100	100	100

4.1.   *Qualitative Content Analysis of Pakistani Government Fact Checks*

To answer the research question 2, how the government fact-checkers in India and Pakistan fact-check a claim, a qualitative content analysis was performed. This method was applied to investigate how government fact-checkers fact-check a claim and what they include in their response.

From the analysis of the government fact-checkers, four main themes emerged: fact-checking as a tool to defend government, the contents were condemning fake news, they did not establish clear method, as well as did not provide 'true' information. In other words, all the tweets were defending government and its functionaries, text included in posts condemned fake news, but it did not establish the origin of fake news, and no information was given about what is truth. The government fact-checkers also did not discuss about the method of checking the claims, suggesting that they were doing more labelling the content as 'fake news' than fact-

checking. The source-based verification process was also seen absent in the practices of the fact-checkers.

All the information fact-checked by Government of Pakistan was related to the incumbent government, the prime minister of Pakistan, cabinet ministers, and politicians who were related to the government. The fact-checking was used to defend a few key functionaries in the government, and the goal seemed to repair the image of the government. Some of the misinformation was related to the economy and inflation, but these were directed to criticize the key functionaries of the government, making it political in nature.

The fake news items shared with the Twitter posts were mostly in *Urdu language* and were in the form of screenshots and pictures. One of the authors of this study, who knew the *Urdu* language, examined the pictures and screenshots. In the Twitter posts, government fact-checkers labeled the news fake by using a screenshot of it, while the text of the post itself remained unchanged for every fact-checked claim. The text posted by the government fact-checker, written in English, condemned the spreading of fake news and called it a violation of ethics, illegal, and a disservice to the nation. The text also appealed to the people to reject the irresponsible behavior of spreading fake news. However, the government's Twitter account did not mention the source of misinformation. For example, did they find a fake news on social media or mass media. Government fact-checkers did share some screenshots which had breaking news templates of television news channels, but it was hard to identify whether this information belonged to mainstream media, or the templates of television news channels were used by some other sources or platforms to spread misinformation.

There was only one case when a rebuttal was posted about the misinformation about parliamentarians' visit to Canada. The government gave a rebuttal to circulating misinformation which alleged that the visit cost $1.6 million to the national exchequer. The Twitter post also contained the press release issued by the National Assembly of Pakistan refuting the news, but there was no mention of the actual cost incurred by this specific visit. The government fact-checker identified the fake news, but it did not give true information.

In this way, the government-run fact-checkers played the role of 'lie buster' who can identify the 'falsehoods' against the ruling quarters of the country but are unable to provide the counter or 'true' information. The analysis also reflected how the government-run fact-checking was involved in image repairing and defending the government of Pakistan as well as the ruling political parties. Thus, the government-run fact-checking in Pakistan also attempted to shape the political discourse of the country. Further, the government used fact-checking to build a positive image of the government by calling several false claims and propaganda against the government. However, the government failed to provide accurate information to the public. The government called out fake news, but they shied away from providing the public with truthful information.

4.2.   *Qualitative Content Analysis of Indian Government Fact Checks*

The qualitative content analysis of Indian government-run fact checks gives the impression that they were more interested in serving the government institutions. Most of the fact-check materials found to be related to false claims about Prime Minister Narendra Modi, different ministries, the Supreme Court, and the President of India. The government organizations mention the YouTube channels or websites and debunks their claim as false or fake. It is interesting to know why news about these political institutions was published on social media. Furthermore, it is also interesting from the political perspective as this fact-checking

organization worked like a public relations wing of the government. In the Indian government fact checking approach we tried to identify main criteria of their responses.

As one might expect, the Indian government-run fact-checkers have provided no counterarguments for any of the fact-checked contents. For example, a tweet claiming a visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi cost Rupees 30 crore ($ 3.6 million) was declared false. But there was no claim from the fact-checkers what the actual cost was. This exercise does not try to establish facts nor attacks oppositional political entities for spreading such a false claim.

As mentioned beforehand, we found that 40.9 percent of the fact-checked contents fall under either business, financial, or economic category. Further analysis of the data found that they all are connected to politics. Fact-checked contents categorized as business, financial, and economic were related to political institutions including the Prime Minister of India. Though the headlines of this fact-checked material were connected to business or finance, the subsequent reading gave the big picture of the politics behind them.

It appears from the text that, on numerous occasions, the government used its channel to label some claims on social media or websites as fake. However, there were no explanations. Science and technology category, however, shows some public interest issues like misinformation regarding SIM card blockage within 24 hours. The government also advised people to refrain from providing personal information, which was also linked to public service. Some of the texts gave the understanding that there were deliberate efforts to make a section of the public confuse and trap them into acquiring money in the name of fees or registrations.

The government fact-checked issues related to the Prime Minister including the distribution of Rs 135,000 ($1,648) to women. The government will distribute Rs 50,000 ($610) to all *Adhar* card holders (Indian national identity cards). The Central Bank of India is providing loans to *Adhar* card holders. Some other news seems politically motivated like the Prime Minister has resigned and the President's rule has been imposed, the Chief Justice ordered not to use EVM during the election, PM's visit to Morbi cost the Indian government Rs 50 crores ($ 6.1 million).

The Indian government fact-checking organization never provided any rationale behind their claim of the fake or false information. They did not even provide any additional information or facts that may contradict the information claimed as false. It is also very clear that the surveillance of government-run fact-checks was limited to mostly government activities. The text suggests that no mainstream media, during the period investigated, came under the fact-checking radar of the Indian government fact-checkers. The fact-checker does not post any credentials to the website, YouTube content, or social media posts they find fake.

5. Discussion

This mixed method study found some critical evidence on how the government-run fact-checkers set the political discourse in two South Asian countries by heavily defending governments and therefore lacking democratic values. Unlike the findings of Schuldt (2021) or Feng (2024), the qualitative analysis of this study reflected that the government-run fact-checkers did not provide any source or method when they played the role of lie busters who could identify falsehoods against the ruling classes. The study's findings also reflected the similar notion to previous research on state owned fact-checking (Schuldt, 2021; Fang, 2022; Feng, 2024) that government-run fact-checking organizations had some major roles: defending the government from attacks, repairing their images, and then accusing the opponents of the government.

In this process, the government fact-checkers were leaving aside the 'watchdog' role of fact-checking on powerful people as discussed by Graves (2018) or role of fighting against propaganda (Haigh et al., 2017). It is no surprise that the government-run fact-checkers would facilitate government by acting as press bureaus or the state-owned news media which often represent government mouthpieces (Funke & Benkelman, 2019; Pandey, 2022). This propagandistic turn of government fact-checking initiatives reduces the credibility of fact-checking among audiences and may raise concerns about the editorial independences of fact-checking (Meseret, 2024). In this sense, government-run fact-checking initiatives may also damage the image of global fact-checking movements by flouting the basic normative functions of fact-checking, namely nonpartisanship and transparency.

Research on fact-checking and politics demonstrated the impact of fact-checking in overall political communication among political actors and people (Young et al., 2018; Nyhan et al., 2020). However, the question remains whether this impact will continue in future when governments start to play the role of arbiters of truth. This also leads to an avenue for future research to investigate whether government-run fact-checking has effects on the overall impact of fact-checking in political communication.

In the first research question, this study asked what types of content were published by the fact-checkers and found that political content was at the top. Our study findings partially supported the claim that fact-checkers used 'non-scientific' methods for busting false claims (Uscinski & Butler, 2013; Uscinski, 2015). The government-run fact-checkers in India and Pakistan just labeled information as 'fake' or 'misinformation' without providing any methodological rigor. These exercises reflected a naive and non-scientific method that facilitates ruling quarters in the political debates surrounding those claims and counterclaims. This study's findings also echoed Meseret (2024) and Feng (2024) that the government-run fact-checkers check claims without providing any transparent sources or verification procedures. Thus, this study also suggests that future studies may investigate ethical fact-checking practices by government-run fact-checkers or compare the methodological practices between independent and government-run fact-checkers.

According to Mena (2019: 664), the primary purpose of fact-checking was to "evaluate the accuracy of statements by public figures and institutions." Similarly, Singer (2020) found that correcting misinformation and informing the public were the two most important roles of fact-checkers. This study also found that government-run fact-checkers did not follow properly the normative practices discussed by these scholars. The government-run fact-checkers indeed provide information to the public through their social media presence; however, they did not intend to correct misinformation as they just labelled the claims and abandoned checking accuracy of statements.

The second research question of this study asked how different fact-checked content is produced by government and independent fact-checking organizations. This study found evidence that Pakistan-based fact-checkers focused more on politics, international, and communal/religious issues. However, the locally funded independent fact-checker *Soch Fact* emphasized other issues such as sports. Interestingly, *AFP* Pakistan, which is funded by a foreign entity, emphasized political and international issues. In the Indian context, the fact-checked content from both the government and independent quarters emphasized politics, business/finance, and communal issues. In both countries, communal and religious tensions and violence frequently dominated the headlines, and researchers also found link between misinformation and the communal violences (Badrinathan et al., 2025). This indicates why this type of content was prevalent among the fact-checked contents. This study also found that

in terms of variations, the locally funded independent fact-checkers *Soch Fact* and *Boom* published more varied contents compared to their government and internationally funded counterparts. These findings also echoed the idea of Graves (2018) that the organizational structure of a fact-checking organization may influence the fact-checked content.

This study contributed to the scholarship in two ways: it enriched the fact-checking scholarship which is now seen as a significant growth and brought to the forefront the political communication spheres in the less discussed context of South Asia. Besides, this study also compared the independent and government-run fact-checked content and hinted at how the government-run fact-checkers were involved in defending the governments and shaped the political discourse in two neighboring and less democratic South Asian countries. Despite its contribution, this study's findings are not generalizable to overall fact-checking in both Pakistan and India. A future study could apply inferential statistics to analyze more data that may reflect the saturation for generalizability.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the complex and politically consequential role of government-run fact-checking initiatives in India and Pakistan. This study found patterns that diverge substantially from the normative ideals of transparency, methodological rigor, and nonpartisanship central to the global fact-checking movement. By examining both quantitative patterns and qualitative characteristics of fact-checked content, the study demonstrated that government-run fact-checkers in India and Pakistan function less as impartial verifiers of public claims and more as instruments of press bureaus of the governments. They frequently defend ruling political entities while offering little evidence of systematic verification practices. These findings align with earlier research in China and Southeast Asia, suggesting that when state actors become arbiters of truth, fact-checking risks being repurposed for image repair and political insulation rather than public enlightenment.

A major contribution of this study lies in its comparative approach, juxtaposing government fact-checkers with their independent counterparts. The analysis revealed meaningful differences in content diversity and topical focus. While government fact-checkers in both countries concentrated heavily on political, business, and communal issues, independent fact-checkers, particularly locally funded organizations, engaged with a wider variety of topics, including sports and entertainment. This reinforced arguments that organizational structures and funding streams influence editorial priorities and may shape the fact-checking agenda itself. Importantly, the strong presence of communal and religious content across organizations highlighted the broader information environment in South Asia, where misinformation frequently intersects with societal tensions and episodes of violence.

At the same time, this study also underscored the limitations and unanswered questions within current scholarship. While prior research has emphasized fact-checking's potential to improve political communication, this study raised the concern that such an impact may diminish when governments assume the role of truth arbiters—an area that warrants deeper empirical investigation. This study is limited by its reliance on a small dataset from a single time period; therefore, future research could focus on a longitudinal analysis using inferential statistics to examine fact-checked content published by governments worldwide.

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