



FACT-CHECKING JOURNALISM

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Learning Objectives

- Understand the principles governing fact-checking.
- Be able to distinguish between fact-checking and news reporting.
- Become versatile Fact-checkers.

Outline

- Brief history of fact-checking journalism
- Elements of fact-checking journalism
- Verification and truth and their location in the practice of journalism
- Reporting versus fact-checking
- Facts: Do they matter?
- The misinformation ecosystem: rumours, hoaxes, propaganda

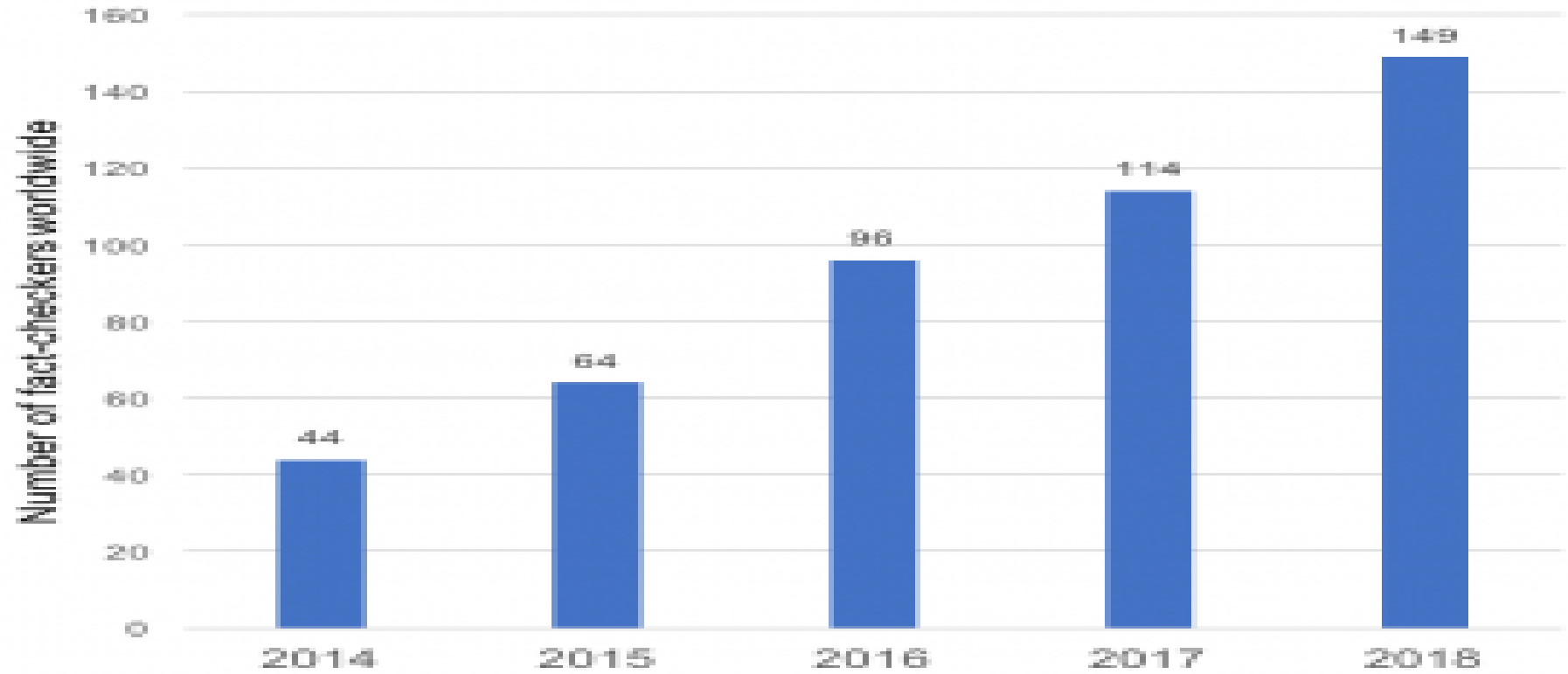
DEFINITION

- Fact-checking refers to the act of checking factual assertions in non-fictional text in order to determine the veracity and correctness of the factual statements in the text.
- It may be done either before (ante hoc) or after (post hoc) the text has been published or otherwise disseminated.
- It can also be conducted on any written body of work, and not just news.
- In journalism, fact-checking can be seen as a modern aspect of accountability journalism.

BRIEF HISTORY OF FACT-CHECKING JOURNALISM

- The practice of fact-checking has been evident in earlier journalistic ventures, especially in the [1980s and 1990s](#).
- In 1803, a modern fact-checker would have been referred to as a “proof reader” – a person who reads text in proof in order to find and mark errors for correction
- In 1899, he/she would have been referred to as a “copy editor” – one who edits copy for printing. It wasn’t until the 1920s that fact-checking obtained its name.
- Today, the term “fact-checking” is used and the number of fact-checkers around the world has more than tripled, increasing from 44 to 149 in about 53 countries.
- In Africa, the practice was institutionally pioneered by AfricaCheck.org in 2015, and culminated in the creation of the first nationwide fact-checking platform, “DUBAWA”.

Growth in fact-checking 2014-2018



Source: reporterslab.org

ELEMENTS OF FACT-CHECKING JOURNALISM

1. Ethical framework

- Philosophers talk of **necessary** and **sufficient** conditions to explain reality.
- In the making of a professional, skill, training and certification are all **NECESSARY** conditions but **ultimately**, the **SUFFICIENCY** quotient is the ethical condition.
- A professional is ultimately defined by his/her ethics [his or her fidelity to the ethics of that profession.]

What is ethics?

- Ethics as that philosophy of morality which assists our decision making by helping us do two basic things:
- First, to discern between right and wrong, good versus evil, and appropriate versus inappropriate conduct.
- Secondly it then urges us to act right, resolve our moral dilemma in support of the good, and to act appropriately
- Ethics can help journalists think through their ethical dilemma and make sound decision.

Basic Ethical Elements

- Accountability

In a democracy, the purpose of fact-checking is to ensure accountability of the government and public figures to the citizens at all times.

- Credibility and integrity

The outcome of all fact-checking is credibility while the process must be defined and driven by integrity.

- Media credibility is built on strict accuracy, and not on the promptness of story.

- The Society for Professional Journalists' designed a model code in 1996 containing four principles [Nigerian media professionals in 1998 did the same with 15 codes]
- The SPJ code helps to summarize many such codes: the Poynter Institute helped modified it recently to include two additions:
 - [a] **Seek the truth and report it**
 - [b] **Be accountable**
 - [c] **Be independent**
 - [d] **Minimize harm**
 - [e] **Maintain transparency**
 - [f] **Erect your reporting around community**

Principles of Data Journalism/ Fact-Checking Journalism

10 Principles of Data Journalism

(after Kovach & Rosenstiel)

1: Data journalists should strive to interrogate data as a power in its own right

2: Editorial independence includes technological independence

3: We should strive for objectivity not just in the sources and language that we use, but also the way that we design our tools

4: Impartiality means not relying only on stories where data exists and is easy to obtain

5: We should strive to give a voice to those who are voiceless in data by seeking to create or open up data which would do so

6: We retain editorial responsibility for context and breadth of coverage where we provide personalisation

7. We should strive to keep the significant interesting and relevant by seeking to find and tell the human story that the data shines a spotlight on

8. The algorithms in our work - both human and computational - should be open to scrutiny, and iteration

9. Sharing our code also allows us to work more efficiently and raise standards

10. We should seek to empower citizens to exercise their rights and responsibilities

ONLINE JOURNALISM

BLOG

2. Public Good

- Good journalism (fact-checking) helps provide citizens with information they need to make informed decisions about their choices.
- A fact-checker must show an ultimate allegiance to citizens by striving to put the public interest and the truth above their own self-interest or assumptions.
- By so doing, the fact-checker places power in the hands of the general public as the active actors in not only the making of a functioning and accountable democracy, but also in demanding the rights due to them.

3. Verification and Truth and their Location in the practice of journalism

- Fact-checking journalism's first obligation is to the truth and its first loyalty is to citizens
- It is not the truth in the absolute or philosophical or scientific sense but rather a pursuit of "truths by which we can operate on a day-to-day basis".
- In the fact-checking process (which would be discussed later), conclusions are only arrived through rigorous evidence scrutiny, a system of peer review and sorting/testing of information.

REPORTING VERSUS FACT-CHECKING

Reporting	Fact-check
You report on what is being said	Report on the accuracy of what is being said
You break news and grind out headlines	Are not restricted to a 24-hour
You tell a story about an event	Focus on a specific claim in an event
You protect your sources	Reveal the sources

FACTS: DO THEY MATTER?

“It’s standard journalism practices that should be used more by more journalists, but sometimes they don’t have the time or they’re on deadline, and you just — so it becomes ‘he said, she said,’ and the reader is left confused and not really knowing what’s the truth. And that’s where we try to come in.”

- unknown

Facts Matter!

- Although it is argued that backfire effect may exist, studies show that “citizens heed factual information, even when such information challenges their partisan and ideological commitments”.
- Fact-checking can affect citizens' belief in the accuracy of claims made in political advertisement.
- Fact-checking can change politicians behaviour.
- People can learn from fact-checkers work. Knowledge of relevant facts are increased through fact-checking.

THE MISINFORMATION ECOSYSTEM: RUMOURS, HOAXES, PROPAGANDA

- The ease of publishing on the internet, the rise of social media memes, the increase in campaign rhetoric and advertising – all of these phenomena contribute to what is often called the “misinformation industry.”
- Players: Official sources of propaganda (governments and companies), fake news websites, individual hoaxsters, unintentional propagators and news websites.
- Journalists are usually targets of hoaxsters because of their ability to attract large followers.
- News websites become instruments of propaganda when they do not conduct independent verification before publishing stories.

Psychology and Truth About Rumour

- Rumour is human.
- Journalists sometimes hunt for rumours just as social media and 24/7 news reporting propagates rumours.
- Rumours are inevitable and spread rapidly in a connected world
- Repetition has an effect on belief. The more a rumour is repeated, the more likely it is to be believed.
- People are more likely to believe a rumour if it aligns with their existing beliefs/knowledge. And if you believe something you are more likely to propagate it.
- It matters how journalists treat rumours because we can give them credibility and oxygen.

Best practices for debunking misinformation and covering rumours

- Evaluate before you propagate
- Be sceptical: don't rush to be right
- Identify the original source and interview them
- Investigate the network, the history of a social media account (who do they follow and who follows them, does their content align with what they say they are, do credible orgs follow them)
- Confirm content of the information, especially date, time, location (is it representative of what it says it is, what is the time)

Cntd:

- Research similar events, content (are they the only one with this photo – red flag)
- Verify the person spreading it and the content. People think it takes so long but it may not be so.
- Speak to additional sources. When sources assert something, ask “How do you know that?”
- Triangulate all collected information. Look at everything you’ve gathered holistically.
- Communicate and collaborate. Verification is a team sport; make use of journalistic angle in asking questions

Thank you!!!