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Analysis of Fact-Checking Practices among Pakistani Journalists

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Abstract

Fact-checking has emerged globally to combat misinformation and ensure accuracy of information. In Pakistan, it is very intricate due to politically polarized media landscape. This study explores the fact-checking practices of Pakistani journalists amid rampant spread of fake news. Using Qualitative research approach, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews of 21 journalists (male/female) from mainstream media (electronic & print) and digital media news outlets selected through purposive sampling. The journalists were investigated about methodologies being employed and challenges being faced in fact-checking process. They were also inquired about the impact of fact-checking on quality of journalism and the influence of source's perspective and context of story during fact-checking. Findings reveal that, despite recognizing fact-checking as a professional and ethical commitment, its effective implementation is hindered by organizational policies, external pressures, the absence of proper mechanisms, time constraints, limited professional development training, and the inaccessibility of authentic data and reliable sources. The research suggests that fact-checking is not just a technical or ethical tool in journalism but a democratic requirement in Pakistan. Hence, adopting this practice profusely will reinforce watchdog role of media, and also help to mitigate polarization in social and political spheres by making people more informed citizens.

Keywords: fact-checking, journalists, Pakistan, gate-keeping, social responsibility theory.

1. Introduction

Fact-checking is a tool to counter rapid flow of misinformation (Singer, 2019), and the media scholars are concerned about the negative effects of misinformation on the overall intellectual wellbeing of the masses (Smith, Seitz, 2019). The concept of fact-checking was introduced in the first decade of 21st century, however, Graves and Amazeen (Graves, Amazeen, 2019) elucidate that the terminologies of fact-checker and fact-checking became a part of vocabulary in 1930s referring to a new role and obligation of media to report factually and objectively. Örsek (Örsek, 2019) highlights that the concept of International Fact-checking Day was also introduced at a conference held at London School of Economics for the journalists and fact-checkers in June 2014. Lewandowsky et al. (Lewandowsky et al., 2017) analyze the prevalence of misinformation during post-truth era and highlight that the Oxford Dictionary chose the term "post-truth" as the word of the year in 2016. The collaborative effort of Amazeen et al. (Amazeen et al., 2017) highlights the necessity for systematic developments to improve the quality and efficacy of fact-checking practices. Various studies highlight the rise of fact-checking as a new and dynamic tool or institution to safeguard democratic values in a country (Amazeen, 2020; Graves, Cherubini, 2016). This growth in fact-checking practices can be seen as an actual global movement in the field of

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journalism (Graves, 2016) which lays stress on the awareness of public and improvement of political behavior as well as the quality of journalism (Amazeen, 2020); Seaton et al. (2020) argue that almost a decade after the creation of fact-checking, it gained even more popularity in a far more cluttered media landscape where the challenges of fact-checkers need to be addressed.

Nieminen and Rapeli (Nieminen, Rapeli, 2019) argued that fact-checking is carried out routinely by many organizations and not merely during elections. An annual event is organized by the Poynter Institute which invites the fact-checkers from all over the world. They have also established an international fact-checking network (IFCN) to guide the fact-checkers across the globe (Singer, 2019). Nieminen and Sankari (Nieminen, Sankari, 2021) analyze the statistics of active fact-checking projects which increased from 44 to 226 between 2014 and 2019 across 60 countries in the world (Juneja, Mitra, 2022).

Though the United States of America boasts to be the major market for fact-checking in the world (Graves, 2016; Graves, Amazeen, 2019), yet just before the reappointment of US President Donald Trump, Meta announced a termination of its fact-checking program in the U.S. Hence, the Duke Reporters' Lab counts 443 dynamic fact-checking projects around the world in 2025, down about 2 percent so far from last year. However, the number of projects has remained largely consistent in recent years, hovering around 450. According to the report, Fact-checkers around the world feared the move could lead to similar cutbacks elsewhere (Duke Reporters' Lab). Graves and Amazeen (Graves, Amazeen, 2019) elaborate that there are basically two kinds of fact-checking. The fact-checking which is done before dissemination of information is known as Ante hoc fact-checking. On the other hand, a report in written form about the inaccuracies, occasionally with a visual system of measurement given by the fact-checking organization is known as post hoc fact-checking. Another quality control process performed by sub-editor is regarded as the first line of defense against misinformation which is done before publication of the content (Prieto, 2023). Currently, the typical fact-checking process consists of (i) claim detection- identifying salient text spans from a large collection; (ii) evidence retrieval- finding sources that either support or repudiate the claim; (iii) fact verification- assessing the accuracy of the claim on the basis of regained proof (Guo et al., 2022).

In Pakistani media landscape, fact-checking is very intricate due to prevalent political polarization and rapid proliferation of fake news. Jane (Jane, 2019) argues that it is the responsibility of every individual to support factual data and censure false data. The fact-checking organizations in Pakistan are tasked with verifying information but no one scrutinizes their processes, partisanship and overall reliability.

A report published in Daily Times in January 2024 by H. Hassan has explained Pakistan's media evolution from broadcast to bytes. The traditional media has always operated under stern regulatory frameworks, influenced by political and military powers. Pakistan's journalism landscape is filled with challenges, where journalists navigate a hazardous balance between reporting and state scrutiny, particularly from powerful state institutions. Reporters Without Borders ranks Pakistan at 152 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index of year 2024 (Ahmed, Karikalan, 2024, para. 3).

H. Hassan (Hassan, 2024) in his report mentions that Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) which was created in 2002 in order to regulate the media sector focuses more on the content regulation overlooking its main objective. PECA (Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act) which was implemented in 2016 to put an embargo on online crimes is putting a censor on critical voices through warrantless and extended detentions depriving them of legal assistance (Observer Diplomat, 2025). H. Hassan (Hassan, 2024) also alludes in his report that the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021) is not properly implemented since the so-called 'protection' is provisional only for those journalists who adopt a certain code of conduct.

Reporters Without Borders released its annual World Press Freedom Index in May 2025, where Pakistan was ranked 158 out of 180 countries in the world indicating a decline in Pakistan's ranking from preceding years despite being a nuclear power and a democratic country. Toxic polarization has divided our society into mutually distrustful "us & them" groups based on religion, ethnicity, language, cultural & provincial lines (Sadiq, 2024). Media outlets owned by pressure groups and political elites promote their agendas through biased reporting and polarization (Arshad et al., 2023).

Media researchers also opine that social media impacts political ideologies and creates political polarization in society (Himma-Kadakas, Ojajets, 2022; Maqsood et al., 2024) especially

the youngsters (Ferguson, 2021) and the more people tend to use social media algorithms, the more they are vulnerable to political polarization (Javed et al., 2023; Kubin et al., 2021). It is also pertinent to mention that social media has a positive effect in the development of a well-balanced society (Calderaro, 2018), but in Pakistan social media is developing political biasedness through fake news (Riasat et al., 2025). Hence, in Pakistan, where the media landscape is vibrant yet often criticized for lacking verification protocols, fact-checking practices play a critical role in maintaining journalistic integrity. However, there is very limited research on the methods and effectiveness of fact-checking by Pakistani journalist which raises concerns about the standards of accuracy and accountability in their reporting.

Foregoing in view, the current study focuses on the predominant methodologies and strategies employed by journalists in the process of fact-checking information (RQ1), impact of fact-checking practices on the accuracy and reliability of journalistic outputs (RQ2), the primary challenges encountered by journalists in verifying the accuracy of sources and information and strategies utilized by them to address these challenges (RQ3) and the influence of perspectives of sources and the contextual elements of a story on the process of fact-checking within journalistic practices (RQ4). Hence, following objectives of the study are derived:

- To identify and analyse the predominant methodologies and strategies employed by journalists in the fact-checking process.
- To explore the primary challenges faced by journalists when verifying the accuracy of sources and information, and to investigate the strategies they use to overcome these challenges.

2. Materials and methods

This study employs Qualitative research as it bears an exclusive operational goal to produce propositional knowledge relevant to some policy or general human concerns (Hammersly, 2012) to explore human beings' perception about the social world and their interpretation of the world to others (Sandelowski, 2004). Barbour (Barbour, 2014) opines that qualitative research is a researcher's mindset to understand the creative process in social situations, providing best research design to explore, comprehend and interpret social phenomena (Sargeant, 2012) by centralizing the individual experiences of those who conduct it (Alasuutari, 1999). Semi-structured interviews have been conducted as data collection technique in this study which is a recurrently used technique by the qualitative researchers. The semi-structured interview grounds itself on a set of candid, amicable and open-ended questions from interviewees to respond freely (Galletta, 2012; Husu, 2020) in order to reach till the core of the matter (Tracy, 2020). It enables the researchers to focus on methodologies, strategies and challenges pertaining to journalists' fact-checking allowing them to give new meanings to fact-checking in the context of journalism. The researchers in this study conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 key stake-holders i.e., journalists from mainstream media (print and electronic) and digital media news outlets, selected through purposive sampling technique which helps to represent the sample for specific purposes (Lavrakas, 2008).

The selection criteria for the interviewees are based on the previous literature (Butt, Rabbani, 2023; Dierickx et al., 2024; Ejaz et al., 2025; Haque et al., 2018; Himm-Kadakas, Ojamets, 2022; Husu, 2020; Jamil, Appiah-Adjei, 2020; Juneja, Mitra, 2022; Micallef et al., 2022; Miguel, 2022; Moreno-Gil et al., 2022; Rabby, 2023; Sah et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2024; Singer, 2019; Steensen et al., 2023).

- To fix the appointment, the journalists were contacted through email/phone along with an ethical consent form.

- The male and female journalists who have been interviewed are full time employees of Pakistan's mainstream media and digital news outlets i.e. 4 Urdu and English language newspapers (Daily Dawn, Daily Express, Express Tribune, The News), 5 leading television news channels (Geo News, Dunya News, Express News, Samaa News, ARY News, Dawn News) and 4 digital news outlets (BBC, Urdu News, WE News, Independent Urdu News)

- Every individual has been interviewed for 30-45 minutes in Urdu or English language which happen to be the national and official languages in our country respectively. The interviews' audios have been transcribed in English afterwards

- All interviews were conducted between 1st May to 1st June 2025.

- The interviewees have academic backgrounds mostly connected to journalism, communication, media studies, law, international relations and political science etc.

– The participants had an average experience of 17 years in Pakistani journalism, with a range of 5 to 34 years.

The selection of 21 journalists as participants in this study is consistent with the principles of qualitative research where the focus is on profundity rather than the extensiveness of data as employed by various scholars in their qualitative research (Brandtzaeg, Chaparro, 2017; Butt et al., 2023; Dierickx, Lindén, 2024; Ejaz et al., 2025; Jamil, Appiah-Adjei, 2020; Juneja, Mitra, 2022; Micallef et al., 2022; Miguel, 2022; Moon et al., 2023; Moreno-Gil et al., 2022; Sharma, 2017; Singer, 2019; Steensen et al., 2023). In semi-structured interviews, sample sizes are typically smaller (15-30 participants) and based on the concept of data saturation – a point at which no new themes or ideas emerge (Creswell, 2013; Guest et al., 2006; Marshall et al., 2013).

3. Discussion

Fact-checking is deeply rooted in investigative and watchdog journalism (Cavalier, 2020; Miguel, 2022) based on the principles of correctness, clarity, confirmation and impartiality while handling news (Coddington et al., 2014; Graves, 2016). Journalists have always endeavoured to maintain their integrity and identity through publicly-appealing ethical norms (Schudson, 2001) and by scrutinizing the statements of public officials and inform citizens accordingly (Dobbs, 2012).

Fact-checking has become a global phenomenon being led by some news organizations, independent media outlets and NGOs (Graves, 2018). Many scholars argue that fact-checking organizations play fundamental and effective role in detecting and debunking misinformation (Aruguete, 2022; Graham, Porter, 2025; Johnson, 2024; Kumar, 2024; Micallef et al., 2022; Miguel, 2022; Nanhekhan, 2024; Nyhan et al., 2019; Primig, 2024; Saeed et al., 2022; Xue, 2021; York et al., 2020). Exposure to fact-checks improves recognition of facts (Nyhan, Reifler, 2015), and even a single exposure to fact-checks can reduce misconceptions of people (Walter et al, 2020).

The wide dissemination of misinformation across social media platforms has badly influenced many facets of society i.e. presidential elections, public health sector and the global economy (Reporters Without Borders, 2023; Shan, 2024). An overwhelming flow of information has made people, especially the dogmatic and religious fundamentalists, more vulnerable to fake news (Abels, 2022; Bronstein, 2019). Fact-checking plays an important role in countering misbeliefs on social media (Aruguete et al., 2023; Park et al., 2021) especially during crises like Covid-19 when information and health crisis got accelerated (Seaton et al., 2020). Scholars suggest that traditional fact-checking practices utilize fewer human resources, hence they don't scale well when it comes to counter a flood of misinformation on social media platforms.

Saeed et al. (Saeed et al., 2022) present a data-driven analysis of the Birdwatch program which carries out fact-checking in three steps: firstly, claim detection is done on the basis of check-worthiness of data; secondly, evidence is retrieved in support of a claim, and thirdly, claim is verified. Scholars also opine that social media users are more prone to share verified information than corrections (Aruguete et al., 2022) and fact-checking behaviour reduces vulnerability to misinformation (Chia et al., 2024), however scepticism continues regarding the utility of fact-checking services on social media (Brandtzaeg et al., 2017).

The false information on social media has contaminated the political discourse and augmented animosity against the media as well (Grimberg, 2023). Reporters without Borders also alludes to the spread of disinformation through artificial intelligence (AI) that deepfakes are in leading position during elections (Reporters Without Borders, 2024 para. 8), thus the popularity of fact-checking among the public owing to its unique format and efficacy in political sphere cannot be denied (Graves, 2013; Shin, Thorson, 2017).

Amazeen (Amazeen, 2013) refers to the fact-checkers as the umpires of democracy who extract untrue political claims from public discourse. Husu (Husu, 2020) refers to political fact-checking that how it can verify political advertisements or debates. The fact-checking sites mention in their mission statement that their main objective is to serve the society and hold political figures accountable for their words and actions (Graves et al., 2016). National news outlets adopt fact-checking features and carry out the process in newsroom or during a live political event (Graves, 2016). Fact-checking has been regarded as a strategic ritual of journalistic objectivity in which the journalist has to check political claims in an objective but strategic way since the vague statements of politicians may be overlooked by the fact-checkers, or they may show some partisan behaviour in media-political networks (Graves, 2013; Lim, 2018).

Nieminen et al. (Nieminen et al., 2017) have summarized the fact-checking practice as follows:

- Identification of checkable claims;
- Source for verification of the claim;
- Comparison of claim against the source,
- Analysing the truthfulness of the claim.

Another study by Rashkin et al. (Rashkin et al., 2017) also suggests that though fact-checking is a challenging task, yet several lexical features can give us awareness about various types of fake news like satire, propaganda and pranks. Some scholars link populism with disinformation and hate speech hence referring to develop a method of rhetoric-checking to mitigate division and discrimination in society (Kakar et al., 2023; Plug, Wagemans, 2020).

The researchers have contested arguments over the effectiveness of fact-checking (Nieminen, Rapeli, 2019). Some researchers (Hamleers, 2019; Lim, 2018; Nyhan, Reifler, 2012) opine that fact-checkers have a deterrent effect and they can expose and compel the politicians to change or correct their false claims. However, some scholars contend the idea of effectiveness of fact-checking. They argue that the latest technology, social media platforms and modern forms of journalism disseminate fake news at a fast pace while the process of fact-checking is either too late or reactive in a way that it cannot reverse the damage caused by fake news and truth must reach the society as early as possible (Hassan et al., 2015; Li, 2023; Ma et al., 2023; York et al., 2020).

Others researchers suggest that fact-checking can be made effective either by using audio-visual features in fact-checking videos (Lu, Shen, 2023) or by ensuring active involvement of key stakeholders i.e. editors, external and internal fact-checkers, researchers, social media managers, and advocates who promote policies for better information (Juneja, Mitra, 2022).

The reliability of fact-checking also remains debated particularly with respect to human vs automated tools. Human fact-checkers use traditional ways to review claims either individually or in groups (Amazeen, 2015), but this is a labour-intensive task (Micallef et al., 2022) in which statistical approach to counter fake news remains restricted due to the absence of categorized yardsticks (Wang, 2017). Studies reveal that progressive users consider AI fact-checkers more effective and reliable than human fact-checkers (Shan, 2024).

Since AI is revolutionizing journalism worldwide by automating news production, fact-checking and audience engagements (Graves, 2018), there must be trained experts who utilize deception detection algorithms (Allen et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023) and counter accelerated misinformation i.e. Large Language Models and deepfake images and videos (Augenstein et al., 2024; Conroy et al., 2015; Guess et al., 2020; Johnson, 2024; Lee et al., 2023; Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2023; Warren, Augenstein, 2025) with urgency and unbiasedness (Adair et al., 2017; Micallef et al., 2022).

Scholars argue that though AI has the potential to improve the efficiency and autonomy of journalists, yet the social acceptance of AI tools is still not clear (Xue, 2021) because of the absence of digital literacy, misuse of AI tools (Vincent, Shahwar, 2025), regulatory gaps, data privacy concerns, algorithmic bias and accountability of AI generated content (Raza et al., 2025) to counter the menace of fake news.

Nieminen and Rapeli (Nieminen, Rapeli, 2019) argue that people doubt the reliability of fact-checks considering it a commentary instead of objective reporting (Garrett, Diep, 2022; Markowitz, 2023; Nyhan, Reifler, 2010), however it can be addressed through adoption of transparency in news production processes, utilize reliable and authentic sources such as experts' statements, external supporting documents, graphics and other types of information which may provide the context of a particular story (Humprecht, 2020; Kumar, 2024; Nyhan, Reifler, 2012; Rabby et al., 2023).

There exist some fringe fact-checkers too who work independently and can either exploit fact-checking for propaganda (Montaña-Niño et al., 2024) or scrutinize facts from false claims to bridge the gap between public and authorities (Luengo, García-Marin, 2020).

Research into the psychological factors influencing individuals' engagement with fact-checking reveals that media consumers engage in "selective exposure" on the basis of their pre-existing beliefs (Hamleers, Van der Meer, 2019; Moon, Kahlor, 2025), hence affecting the rating of some fact-checks (Allen et al., 2022; Walter et al., 2021).

Mattes and Redlawsk (Mattes, Redlawsk, 2020) analyze that voters often tend to engage in fact-checking for negative campaigns and scrutinize the statements of less preferred candidates more rigorously. Martel and Rand (Martel, Rand, 2024) opine that despite having less trust in fact-

checkers, people often tend to share fact-checker labeled misinformation. Graham and Porter (Graham, Porter 2025) explore three strategies to enhance willingness of public to engage with fact-checking. First of all, using an expression “people like you” to urge people to read fact-checks. Secondly, the expression of “civic duty” to remind people of their obligations as a responsible citizen. Thirdly, motivating people through a micro-payment to read fact-checks. Şencan and Soydal (Şencan, Soydal, 2023) suggest that inclusion of fact-checking module in students’ curriculum may improve news literacy. Researchers argue that fact-checking practices vary from protocols and message authenticity (Murphy, 2019; Xue, 2021) to the digital tools capacity in improving access (Yang, Christensen, 2024), however, the public shows less trust towards fact-checkers in comparison with the physicians (Moon et al., 2023).

Journalists used to gather information verbally in old times from primary sources (Chinn, 2001) as ‘epistemic workers’ assessing knowledge claims of others and then make their own knowledge claims (Örnebring, 2016) and remain in public eye (Schudson, 2001).

Fact-checking is majorly done by the journalists (Nieminen, Rapeli, 2019) who shape various narratives about the world (Oladokun et al., 2024) and serve the society by sharing factual data with the masses (Primig, 2024).

Nonetheless, journalists as fact-checkers are often suspected of being an extended arm of the elites. In fact, they have to walk on a double-edged sword while checking and publicizing the false claims of politicians (Graves, 2016) and get the agreement of their audiences by acting fairly (Graves, 2012) and sometimes neutrally during conflicts (Pingree et al., 2014). Scholars argue that journalists come across various challenges in fighting fake news on social media platforms. They endeavor to save watchdog role of media (Ferracioli et al., 2022) but fall a victim to time constraints, inaccurate information (Garrison, 1999; Himm-Kadakas, Ojajets, 2022), deepfake videos or pictures generated by AI, lack of proper staff training and verification tools; information overload and shortage of manpower in media department (Kulundu, 2021; Rodríguez-Pérez et al., 2023), online threats and harassment from users and conspiracy theorists, mental health issues (Juneja, Mitra, 2022) and inaccessibility of public information, scarcity of resources and increased competition between the media outlets (Moreno-Gil et al., 2022).

However, it is argued by few researchers that journalists must adhere to trust mechanism as well as transparency while undergoing fact-checking process (Kumar, 2024), though Dierickx and Lindén (Dierickx, Lindén, 2024) argue that transparent reporting may also cause criticism and harassment from the authorities. Reporters Without Borders in its Press Freedom Index Report (2023) indicates that the global scenario for press freedom has been facing severe unsteadiness since last decade as the authorities have become very aggressive and hostile towards the journalists not only on social media but in the physical world as well.

Pakistan’s media landscape happens to be linguistically diverse, however there are only 6 major media tycoons which not only cover mainstream media platforms (print and broadcast) but also own digital outlets now-a-days. Since the fake news has plagued information environment globally (Butt et al., 2023), it is mandatory for the journalists to speed up fact-checking practices (Ejaz et al., 2025), however, combating misinformation in developing countries is particularly challenging because of limited resources, inadequate technology, and political pressures (Haque et al., 2018), conspiracy theories, false narratives of politicians, violence against public health workers, rumors against minority groups engaged in blasphemy and political turmoil (Ahmad et al., 2022; Mir, Siddiqui, 2022).

The journalist working in chained media landscape like Pakistan can counter misinformation only when their safety is guaranteed and their right to information is recognised. The hierarchy of influences model is well applicable to Pakistani journalists which indicates how the journalists get affected by their own attitudes and behaviours while dealing with news content, later the media routines influence their decisions. The pressures from media organizations, external elite and social/cultural values also hinder their fact-checking practices (Reese, 2019; Shoemaker, Reese, 2014). Studies also reveal that Pakistani journalists lag behind in the field of science journalism and cannot pursue fact-checking in science related information (Jamil, Appiah-Adjei, 2020).

Jamil (Jamil, 2020) also opines that journalists have an effective role in sustainable development of the country through promoting good governance, societal interconnection, peace, public participation and empowerment, however, due to lack of subject knowledge, freedom of expression and their less access to information, Pakistani journalists have limited or no role in sustainable development of the country. Scholars argue that since the information is spreading all

of misinformation, organizational and external pressures, lack of training and the race of breaking news which puts them under time constraints etc.



Fig. 2. Tree Map of Most Frequently Used Words

Furthermore, the detailed dissection of these Auto coded themes can be seen in [Figure 3](#), which highlights the prominent discussion points, issues pointed out and solutions generated by the sampled experts.

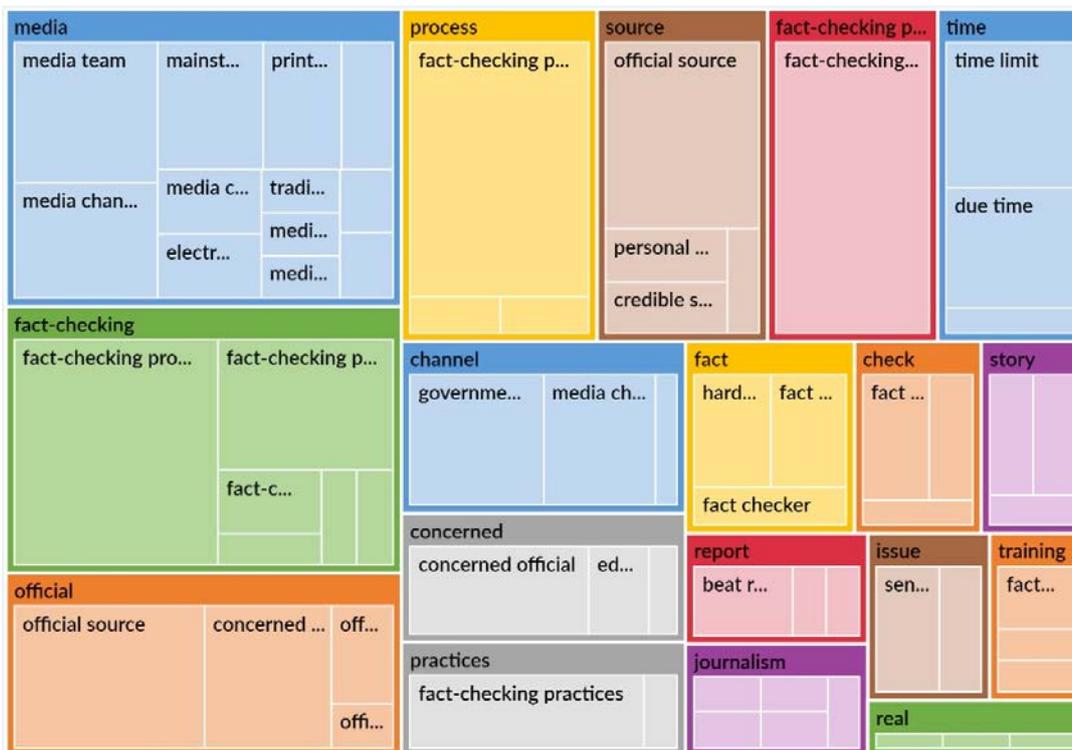


Fig. 3. Auto coded themes and subsequent discussions

[Figure 3](#) are the auto coded themes and the subsequent discussions which followed, a clear emphasis on media channels, fact-checking process, concerned official source, personal and credible source, training and time limit. This figure illustrates that fact-checking is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. The most dominant themes in this figure revolve around media, fact-checking processes and sources to get verification coming together to make information more accurate and credible. The first major theme highlights media-related aspects including mainstream media (print and electronic). The second major theme highlights structured fact-checking practices in verification process. These practices vary across different media types. The third theme refers to the importance of sources, particularly official, personal and credible ones which play fundamental role in fact-checking. Time-related factors including deadlines and

time limits reflect the pressure from organizations which obstruct the verification process and influence the quality of fact-checking. Additional but smaller themes include training, reports, story and journalism which refer to certain challenges on the way to fact-checking and suggestions to improve the quality of journalism. Overall, this visualization depicts that fact-checking is a complex process which depends on media type, sources, time management and professional journalistic practices.

Figure 4 depicts the most frequently used words and the phrases which were associated with them. Here, fact-checking has been discussed in detail exploring predominant methodologies employed by respondents and challenges they come across during the process and strategies adopted to counter those challenges. Pakistan's scenario has been extensively discussed and the practices employed by various media types have been analyzed.

In Figure 4, we can get an in-depth look of how journalists view and experience fact-checking, by throwing light on the realities of its practice within their media organizations. On one side, it depicts the challenges they face including the lack of training, insufficient organizational support and the pressure to meet given deadlines. Journalists report that fact-checking is often reduced to mere proof-reading instead of thorough verification especially while dealing with controversial content. Many highlighted that there are no watch dog bodies and they have to rely on official versions which affects independence and credibility of journalists. The other side of the figure emphasizes the significance of fact-checking in building journalistic integrity, reliability and credibility especially in the context of combating misinformation and disinformation. Few channels are seen as improving quality while others lag behind due to limited training and inconsistent practices. The respondents view that fact-checking is nothing beyond journalism but an essential part of routine journalism, though it takes time and faces organizational and external pressures. Overall, the figure depicts the ideal role of fact-checking as the cornerstone of responsible journalism vis-à-vis the constraints hindering its implementation in newsrooms pointing towards urgent need for training, institutional mechanism and improvement in journalistic practices.

Pakistani journalists consider fact-checking to be a professional skill as well as an ethical responsibility. This description aligns with the global perceptions which place factual accuracy at the heart of journalistic integrity (Cavaliere, 2020; Coddington et al., 2014; Graves, 2016; Graves, Amazeen, 2019; Himma-Kadakas, Ojamets, 2022; Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Murphy, 2019; Schudson, 2001; Smith, Seitz, 2019).

However, several journalists reported that the execution of fact-checking is often neglected owing to government and organizational policies, lack of professional development training in respective field, external pressures from government institutions and corporate sector and the race for breaking news to be the first in reporting. The role of social media as the biggest source fake news impeding fact-checking process was emphasized by majority of the interviewees. They acknowledged the pressure to act hurriedly on viral content, often before verification is possible – a finding that resonates with contemporary concerns about "post-truth" media environments (Gelfert, 2021).

The interviewees views about making common people a part of disinformation campaign through social media align with the deductions of previous studies (Abels, 2022; Ahmad et al., 2022; Bronstein, 2019; Butt et al., 2023; Garrison, 1999; Haque et al., 2018; Hassan et al., 2015; Li, 2023; Mir, Siddiqui, 2022; Park et al., 2021; Şencan, Soydal, 2023; Shan, 2024; York et al., 2020). This tension leads to a key challenge: while digital democratization has extended access to information, it has also blurred the boundary between professional and amateur content creation (Jamil, Appiah-Adjei, 2019). Pakistani journalists work in an unsafe and restricted environment where they face physical, psychological, financial, digital, gender and topic-specific risks that encroach on their routine work (Jamil, 2020; Butt et al., 2023). They work with inadequate resources under political pressures (Haque et al., 2018). Media outlets owned by pressure groups and elites promote their agendas through biased reporting leading to polarization (Arshad et al., 2023).

Journalists' lives become more challenging in Pakistan because of the existence of stringent laws (such as Pakistan Penal Code 1860, Official Secrecy Act 1923, Defamation Ordinance 2002, Investigation for Fair Trial Act 2013, and Prevention for Electronic Crimes Act 2016) and recurrent government's restriction to access information (Jamil, Appiah-Adjei, 2020). The state's averseness to provide data under the Right to Information (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2021) and bureaucratic red tape were highlighted as major impediments in fact-checking process.

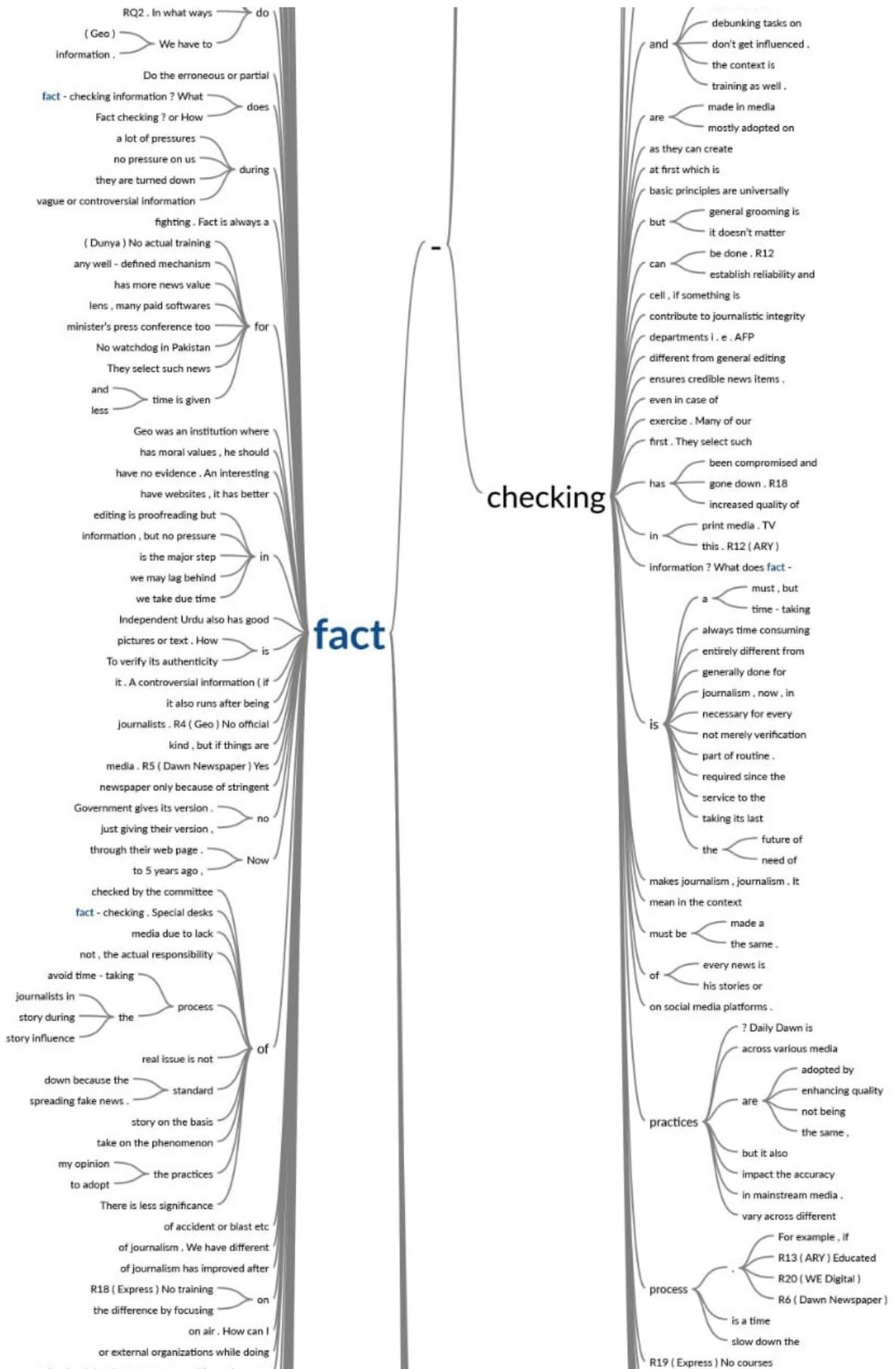


Fig. 4. Word Tree of Frequently Used Terms by Sampled Experts

The current study offers valuable contribution to literature on fact-checking by linking global scholarship with the mostly overlooked realities of Pakistani journalism. The global research has expansively analyzed the rise of fact-checking platforms (Amazeen et al., 2017; Amazeen, 2020; Graves, 2016; Graves, Amazeen, 2019; Graves, Cherubini, 2016; Nminen, Sankari, 2021; Singer, 2019), their role in combating misinformation and disinformation (Aruguete, 2022; Graham, Porter, 2025; Johnson, 2024; Kumar, 2024; Micallef et al., 2022; Miguel, 2022; Nanhekhan, 2024; Nyhan et al., 2019; Primig, 2024; York et al., 2020), their significance in political sphere (Amazeen, 2013; Graves, 2013; Graves, 2016; Husu, 2020; Shin, Thorson, 2017) and their well-structured protocols and professional verification systems (Graves, 2018; Micallef et al., 2022).

However, a very little attention has been given to how such practices translate in developing countries like Pakistan. Building on the above insights, the current study tends to bridge the contextual gap by exploring how Pakistani journalists – working in politically polarized media landscape, with limited resources and restricted freedom of speech – interpret, acclimatize or deviate from these international standards of fact-checking. Using a qualitative, journalist-focused approach, the study offers empirical evidence that how global fact-checking practices interrelate with socio-political realities of Pakistan. This perspective augments comparative scholarship by presenting fact-checking as not only a technical and ethical practice but also a democratic need of the hour.

5. Conclusion

In an era demarcated by the widespread misinformation and growing distrust in media, this study sets out to explore the fact-checking practices among Pakistani journalists – an area that has been critically under-researched within the context of Pakistan’s media landscape. The study offers a distinct comprehension of how journalists carry out the complicated process of fact-checking in the face of political polarization, organizational and institutional pressures and technological limitations. The current research also reveals that though the journalists acknowledge that fact-checking is ethically inevitable, yet they fail to implement it due to lack of any specific mechanism in their media organizations. As a result, the journalist often become a part of misinformation and disinformation unintentionally. By offering empirical insights from field reporters/working journalists instead of fact-checkers, the study fills a critical gap in local scholarship. It also highlights the need for policy reforms, organizational support and professional training to improve journalistic credibility and public trust in Pakistani media landscape.

In conclusion, this study suggests that fact-checking is not just a technical or ethical tool in journalism but a democratic requirement. It serves as a counter measure against misinformation, improves journalistic credibility and reliability, and ensures truthful information for the society. For Pakistan, adopting this practice expansively will not only reinforce the media’s role as a watchdog but also help to mitigate polarization in social and political spheres by making people informed citizens. A collaborative commitment from journalists, media organizations, academia, civil society and policymakers is required to institutionalize and standardize fact-checking practices as an integral part of responsible journalism.

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