

Fact-Checking Trends and Challenges in A Digital Age: The Case of the Ghanaian Media

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates fact-checking practices in selected Ghanaian media houses and among practicing journalists. Its objectives were to measure how frequently media organisations and journalists engage in fact-checking, to identify the methods and tools commonly used across different media formats, and to surface the main challenges that hinder effective verification. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from journalists across a range of newsrooms and media formats and analyzed to identify prevailing patterns and constraints. The findings show that while fact-checking has become an increasingly recognized response to misinformation, the level of engagement varies across media types and individuals. Journalists typically rely on basic verification techniques (cross-checking sources, online searches, and informal contacts), yet many are constrained by limited time, resources, institutional support, and training. The study concludes that strengthening fact-checking in Ghana requires targeted capacity building, investment in verification tools, clearer newsroom policies, and enhanced collaboration between media houses, fact-checking organizations, and regulators. These steps would help restore public trust and improve the quality and reliability of news reporting.

KEYWORDS: Factchecking; Journalism; Fake News; Misinformation; Disinformation; Ghanaian Media

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The traditional media used to be the epicenter of news and information worldwide, but according to Don & Kenzie, the landscape of news consumption has undergone a profound transformation with the rise of digital media, leading to a dramatic shift in how people access and engage with news [1]. However, this has changed with the proliferation of fake news on social media platforms emerging as a major concern in the digital age. Prior research has mostly concentrated on Western media systems, audience perceptions, or theoretical discussions [2,3,4], despite initiatives like the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) and fact-checking desks established by some Ghanaian media organizations showing increasing attention to verification practices [5,6]. The practical application of fact-checking in Ghanaian media outlets has not been the subject of much quantitative research. Therefore, by analyzing the frequency, techniques, and difficulties of fact-checking among particular Ghanaian media outlets and journalists, this study aims to close this gap.

To address these gaps, the study pursues three research objectives. First, the study seeks to quantify the extent to which selected Ghanaian media engage in fact-checking. Secondly, it seeks to analyze the most commonly used fact-checking methods and tools across different media formats. Finally, the study aims to identify the challenges journalists face in verifying news content. To better understand this study, some key terminologies have to be explained. The first term, *Misinformation*, defined by Wardle and Derakhshan, is an inaccurate or misleading information that is disseminated without malicious intent and usually arises from a misunderstanding or a lack of verification [7]. One real-world example is the viral claim during the COVID-19 pandemic that drinking alcohol could kill the virus, which led some Ghanaians to consume dangerous amounts of alcoholic beverages. Citing World Health Organization data, fact-checking websites such as Dubawa Ghana stepped in to dispute this assertion [8]. False information that is purposefully produced and spread to mislead people is known as *Disinformation* [9]. For example, during the 2020 elections, a phony statement claiming that former President John Dramani Mahama intended to reverse all Free SHS policies if elected was attributed to him. The quote was shown to be untrue by Fact-Check Ghana, which clarified that no such statement had been made and offered video proof from speeches given in public [10]. This is a clear case of voter manipulation through deceit. Also, Verdoliva defined *Deepfakes* as audio, video, or image distortions produced by artificial intelligence (AI) that depict humans saying or doing things they never did [11]. One notable case in West Africa was a doctored video allegedly depicting a government person supporting violence, which was eventually shown to be a manipulated compilation. Experts caution of the possible effects

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during upcoming elections or national crises, even if Ghana has not yet seen a publicly reported deepfake controversy [12]. Many Ghanaian newsrooms lack advanced digital forensics tools, making it difficult for journalists and fact-checkers to detect deepfakes. The public's confidence in institutions, especially the media, has been eroded by the proliferation of digital misinformation, which has prompted journalism to adopt methodical fact-checking procedures [13]. In the early 2000s, groups like FactCheck.org and PolitiFact helped modern journalistic fact-checking become well-known in the US, particularly during times of political campaigns and elections when false information spread rapidly [14]. Since then, the use of false information during elections, health emergencies, and conflicts has led to a considerable expansion of the global fact-checking movement. By 2023, there were more than 400 fact-checking firms operating in more than 100 countries, including Boom Live, Full Fact, Chequeado, and Africa Check in South Africa [15]. The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), which was founded in 2015 by the Poynter Institute to advance standards of impartiality, transparency, and verification, is connected to several of these organizations.

World Health Organization (WHO) data referenced by Luengo and García-Marín, referred to the COVID-19 pandemic as a "massive infodemic," underscoring the perils of false information [16]. Additionally, Acquaye and Ofosu-Boateng observe that consumers are discouraged from believing certain media sites due to the abundance of fake news on social media [17]. Fake news has become more common in Ghana's media landscape [18], especially during political events like the 2020 elections [19]. Kwode and Selekan also point out that internet information is rapidly being distorted by technologies like artificial intelligence [20]. Despite rising misinformation difficulties, [21] contend that worries about dwindling internal fact-checking resources and procedures within news organizations persist. Fact-checking within Ghanaian media houses is still in its infancy and needs more institutional support and resources, despite the fact that a number of Ghanaian media companies have implemented fact-checking procedures to counteract misinformation and disinformation.

The study is based on theories of agenda-setting, framing, and social responsibility, which collectively explain how fact-checking affects democratic participation, public discourse, and accountability in Ghanaian media.

The first theory which is agenda-setting, according to McCombs and Shaw says, the prominence and frequency of issues in media coverage have a significant impact on people's thoughts, even though the media may not control what people think [22, 23]. Because journalists, editors, and fact-checking groups determine which assertions and storylines merit public examination, fact-checking in Ghana reflects this agenda-setting function [18]. Fact-checkers influence public discourse, civic engagement, and political responsibility by revealing false information and validating claims [14]. Due to the quick dissemination of false information online, fact-checking has become more crucial as digital media has grown in Ghana [18].

Fact-checking serves as both framing and verification, influencing public perception of issues and the reliability of sources [24]. Because outlets like Joy News, Citi FM, and MyJoyOnline regularly depend on reports from GhanaFact and Dubawa Ghana, fact-checking organizations also influence mainstream media agendas [25]. This illustrates agenda-setting across media and emphasizes the growing impact of fact-checking on public opinion and reporting standards [26].

In situations when misinformation is pervasive and media literacy is still low, fact-checking also fosters media accountability and truth [27]. However, in some Ghanaian communities, issues including restricted internet access, political polarization, and selective exposure make fact-checking less effective [28, 29, 30]. Despite these drawbacks, agenda-setting theory is nonetheless crucial for comprehending how fact-checkers affect conversations in Ghanaian media about public safety, health, elections, and governance [14, 22].

In contrast to agenda-setting, which focuses on issue salience, framing theory shows how the media influences the interpretation and meaning connected to events [31, 32]. Entman defined framing as the process of choosing and highlighting elements of reality in a way that supports particular interpretations, moral judgments, and solutions [32]. Fact-checkers in Ghanaian media impact the public's perception of truth, false information, and accountability through language, evidence, and narrative building [14, 24]. In addition to identifying lies, groups like GhanaFact, Dubawa Ghana, and Fact-Check Ghana also have an impact on how audiences understand misinformation and democratic duty [18].

In Ghana, where false information is frequently connected to social unrest, politics, and public health, this function is particularly crucial. Rather than being merely false, health misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic was presented as dangerous narratives that endangered public safety [33]. According to Nyarko and the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), political fact-checking also influences how people view leadership accountability when statements regarding economic performance or governance are deemed "false" or "misleading." By promoting verification and evidence-based journalism, framing also strengthens accountability and openness [34, 25]. However, audiences frequently reject fact-checks that contradict their partisan views, so political polarization and selective exposure continue to be significant obstacles [29, 30]. The reach of fact-checking narratives is further limited in many rural regions due to limited digital connectivity [35]. However, in Ghana's contested information environment, framing theory is still crucial to comprehending how fact-checkers influence public perceptions of truth, accountability, and false information [32].

The Social Responsibility Theory emphasizes that the media must serve society by reporting in a fair, impartial, and truthful manner while still being answerable to the general public [36]. The Hutchins Commission claimed that a responsible press should provide

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truthful reports of events, promote public debate, fairly portray social groups, and provide information important for daily life [37]. These ideas are in line with fact-checking's goals, which include dispelling false information, guaranteeing responsibility, and encouraging informed civic engagement [14]. Fact-checking has become an ethical and professional duty for journalists in Ghana's politically charged and technologically advanced media landscape, where false information travels quickly during elections and via social media [18]. With that, the Social Responsibility Theory advocates that media freedom must thus be used sensibly in line with social norms [38].

Through evidence-based reporting, tracking false information, and confirming statements made by public leaders, organizations like Dubawa Ghana, Fact-Check Ghana, and GhanaFact exemplify these values [39]. Their actions support democratic government and the media's function as a watchdog [40]. Additionally, fact-checking encourages transparency and accountability, particularly in politically charged settings where reporting may be impacted by media bias [34, 41]. However, the efficacy of fact-checking in Ghana is still constrained by low media literacy, political pressure, threats against journalists, and a lack of funding and personnel [18, 25]. Despite these obstacles, growing cooperation between newsrooms and fact-checking organizations shows a growing dedication to self-regulation and ethical journalism, as highlighted by Social Responsibility Theory [42].

A review of some studies provides insights into some of the works conducted in this area. Sánchez Gonzales, Sánchez González, and Martos Moreno in a study into the verification strategies used by top fact-checking established that that most fact-checkers use a systematic procedure that includes source triangulation, expert consultation, and transparent documentation of findings [3]. A major outcome was the consistency of technique across platforms, such as identifying a claim's originating source, contextualizing the statement, and assessing its intent. Additionally, the study noted that digital techniques such as reverse image searches, metadata analysis, and government databases were discovered to be commonly used in investigations. However, the authors discovered differences in transparency and depth, particularly between fact-checkers affiliated with media outlets and those who work independently [3].

Acquaye and Ofosu-Boateng's study provides useful insights into public trust in various media, but does not analyze journalists' fact-checking practices [4]. This quantitative research on fact-checking in Ghanaian media companies examines the supply side, including how often journalists verify assertions, the tools they use, and whether editorial structures encourage rigorous fact-checking. This is consistent with and complements the audience perspective, helping to connect public perceptions of credibility to actual journalistic techniques.

In a study, Fiaveh and Elorm investigated fact-checking practices of students of two universities to investigate how university students respond to misinformation and disinformation through fact-checking [43]. The study found that a sizable majority of students were aware of the dangers of fake news, particularly during national elections and health emergencies (e.g., COVID-19). Most respondents said they frequently double-check material with search engines, trusted news sources, and social media fact-checking tools. The survey did, however, indicate a lack of familiarity with formal fact-checking platforms such as Dubawa or Fact-Check Ghana, as well as a general lack of media verification training. Peer influence and personal intuition were frequently relied upon above institutional resources [43].

Links also conducted an exploratory study on the challenges and techniques of fact-checkers in conflict and authoritarian settings in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe [44]. Using a qualitative research design, the study noted that fact-checkers in diverse settings confront distinct dangers such as surveillance, coercion, legal limits, internet censorship, and planned smear campaigns. Despite these limits, practitioners continue to use both manual and digital verification procedures, emphasizing transparency, neutrality, and collaboration with civil society and international watchdogs. The study emphasizes that fact-checking is a political and ethical action that can challenge powerful interests in authoritarian societies. [44].

Tully and Singer studied fact-checking responses to the COVID-19 infodemic across sub-Saharan Africa, using qualitative and thematic textual analysis of hundreds of misinformation items indexed in the #CoronaVirusFacts Alliance database [45]. Although not empirical in the traditional quantitative sense, the study systematically examined the geographic distribution, themes, and sources of misinformation such as bogus "cures" and political conspiracy claims and closely analyzes specific fact-checking responses, particularly from Nigeria, to illustrate how African fact-checkers go beyond simple debunking by incorporating media literacy and public health education, aligning with inoculation theory principles.

The data show that, while political misinformation and cure myths were common, fact-checkers actively attempted to build audience resilience by explaining verification reasoning and promoting critical thinking. This dual approach views fact-checking not just as a remedial process, but also as a preventative and instructive instrument for increasing public media resilience in crisis situations. Moreno-Gil, Ramon-Vegas, and Mauri-Ríos undertook a mixed-methodologies study to explore fact-checking habits, methods, and problems in the Mediterranean media environment, specifically in Spain, Italy, and Greece. The research included both quantitative content analysis and qualitative interviews with fact-checkers and journalists associated with verification activities [47]. The study sought to investigate how traditional media values such as objectivity, transparency, and accountability are maintained or transformed by fact-checking activity.

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The findings revealed that fact-checking organizations in the Mediterranean region use hybrid strategies that combine journalistic integrity and activist-style activities. While established routines such as claim selection, evidence verification, and source were prevalent, other obstacles arose. These included institutional limits, a scarcity of technology resources, political pressure, and limited public participation. Importantly, the study found that fact-checking efforts frequently worked to reaffirm journalism's position as a public benefit, rather than simply correcting errors.

Most studies accessed and reviewed examined fact-checking from the perspective of media, consumers or other users of accessed information. But primarily, very little has been done to understand journalistic practices and motivations in a fact-checking paradigm. Beyond wanting to inform and educate the public, what are the primary fact-checking cultures, practices and motivations of the primary movers of news and information – the media – and for that matter journalists? This study explores this area in a burgeoning African economy with commendable democratic credentials as well as a free plural and vibrant media. It can provide insights into fact-checking culture, practices and motivations of the media and journalists in African countries with similar democratic, media and economic attributes, although, it suggests in no way an exact replication of the Ghanaian case. This be important for shaping media policies and improving journalistic practices.

The findings of this study can offer potentially valuable insights into the practices of fact-checking in a developing country's context, providing a comparative perspective that can be valuable to the international media community. It contributes to the ongoing global conversation about dis/misinformation and the role of journalism in ensuring the accuracy of the news.

2.0 METHOD

2.1 Research Approach

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design with a quantitative methodology. Because the study used numerical data and statistical analysis to investigate and quantify fact-checking methods among journalists in particular Ghanaian media companies, quantitative research was deemed appropriate. While Omair states that descriptive studies aid in describing the features of a population or phenomenon under inquiry, Siedlecki claims that descriptive research is used to methodically describe people, events, or conditions as they naturally occur [48, 49]

Data collection from respondents at a single point in time was made possible by the cross-sectional survey methodology. Because it enabled the researchers to evaluate the frequency of fact-checking, the techniques employed, and the difficulties faced within particular media companies, this approach was appropriate. According to Omair, cross-sectional surveys are helpful in gathering information from a representative sample in order to extrapolate results to the entire research population [48].

2.2 Population

Journalists, editors, and reporters from specific media outlets in Accra and Kumasi, like as Multimedia Group, Media General, Hello FM, Angel FM, and Metro TV, were the target population. While Creswell defines a target population as a particular subset of the larger population pertinent to the study's goals, Burns and Grove define a population as all elements that satisfy the requirements for inclusion in a study [50, 51]. Due to their direct involvement in news generation, verification, and distribution procedures, the chosen responders were deemed suitable.

2.3 Sampling

The study included both basic random sampling and selective sampling. The media outlets and responders with pertinent professional expertise and experience in news verification and fact-checking were chosen through the use of purposeful sampling. Purposive sampling, according to Rai and Thapa, enables researchers to choose participants based on their applicability and capacity to supply data pertaining to the research issue [52]. By using this approach, the study was guaranteed to concentrate on media workers who were actively engaged in fact-checking procedures.

After that, respondents from the selected media organizations were picked using simple random sampling. Random sampling reduces selection bias and improves representativeness by giving every member of the population an equal chance of being chosen, claim [53, 54]. The study's credibility and relevance were strengthened through the combined use of purposive and random sampling techniques, which aligned with the research objectives and ensured that participant selection was both appropriate and equitable. Although the study's target sample size was set at 380 respondents, only 151 complete questionnaires were obtained and used in the analysis.

2.4 Data Collection and Instrument Validation

The study collected primary data from journalists, editors, and reporters in the chosen media organizations using a standardized questionnaire that mostly consisted of closed-ended questions. [55] assert that data collecting techniques are crucial since they dictate how information is acquired and analyzed in a study. The demographics of the respondents, the frequency of fact-checking, verification techniques, instruments employed, organizational support, and difficulties faced throughout the verification process were all covered in the questionnaire.

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The questionnaire items were meticulously crafted in accordance with the study factors and research aims to guarantee validity. Ambiguous items were altered to increase accuracy and comprehension, and the instrument was examined to make sure the questions were clear, pertinent, and consistent. Standardized closed-ended questions ensured consistent answers and made statistical analysis easier, which improved the instrument's reliability.

To increase accessibility and response rates among respondents in the chosen media organizations, the surveys were distributed electronically.

2.5 Data Analysis

Primary and secondary data were both employed in the study. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to code, clean, and analyze primary data collected from the surveys. Prior to analysis, data cleaning was done to address inconsistencies, missing replies, and entry errors.

The demographic traits and fact-checking procedures of the respondents were summarized using descriptive statistics. For factors including age group, gender, professional role, years of experience, fact-checking frequency, instruments utilized, and difficulties faced, frequencies and percentages were computed.

To assess the extent of fact-checking practices, responses were categorized into “adequate” and “inadequate” fact-checking practices based on reported frequency and organizational support. Relevant questionnaire items were numerically coded, and respondents’ scores were summed to produce a maximum obtainable score of 8. A score of 5 and above represented “adequate” fact-checking practices, while scores below 5 were classified as “inadequate.” For binary logistic regression analysis, “adequate” was coded as 1 and “inadequate” as 0.

The study initially applied Fisher’s Exact Test to assess the relationship between demographic factors and fact-checking behaviors. Variables with p-values less than 0.05 in the bivariate analysis were included in the multivariate logistic regression model. Multivariate logistic regression was then employed to identify independent predictors of effective fact-checking practices while controlling for confounding variables. Adjusted Odds Ratios (aOR) and 95% Confidence Intervals (CI) were calculated to determine the strength and significance of associations. The Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test was used to assess the suitability and predictive accuracy of the regression model. Statistical significance was determined at $p < 0.05$.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, the goal of the study was explained to respondents, and they were reassured that participation was completely voluntary and participants’ identities were going to be anonymized, data was going to be safely preserved, and it was only to be utilized for academic research in order to preserve anonymity. The research consciously and strictly obeyed the principles of informed consent, which gave participants insightful information about the research methods, objectives, potential risks, and benefits, allowing them to make voluntary and informed decisions [56, 50].

Also, the study sought to ensure that the strategies for collecting data were responsible; that at all times, the research attended to a professional code of conduct that ensured the safety of all the participants involved [57]. Moreover, our research used the four themes which, according to Cacciattolo, are informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality and cross-cultural representation to make sure the research followed the ethical principles and guidelines and safeguarded our respondents’ data [57]. Ethical considerations and standards should be adhered to ensure that the studies are successful and assist in completing the work in a timely and efficient manner [58].

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 RESULTS

3.1.1 Respondents demographic characteristics

Among the 151 media professionals surveyed, (45.0%) were under 25 years old, (34.4%) were for ages 25-34, (14.6%) were under the age group 35-44, (5.3%) were 45-54 age group and finally (0.7%) were under the age group 55years and above. Looking at the statistics, nearly half (45.0%) were under 25 years old, with the majority (79.4%) being under 35 years old. Most participants were journalists (41.1%) or reporters (24.5%), while editors were (9.9%), and news producers were 7.9%) respectively.

Also, fact checkers and freelance journalists account for (6.6%); student journalists (3.3%). An estimated 17.9% of the respondents had less than one year of journalism experience. An estimated 19.9% of respondents had four to six years of experience; 15.9% had seven years or more experience in journalism, and nearly half (46.4%) of the respondents had one to three years of professional experience. (Table 1)

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percent
Under 25	68	45.0

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25-34	52	34.4
35-44	22	14.6
45-54	8	5.3
55 and Above	1	0.7
Position/Role		
Freelancer journalist	10	6.6
Student journalist	5	3.3
News Producer	12	7.9
Editor	15	9.9
Reporter	37	24.5
Journalist	62	41.1
Fact-checker	10	6.6
Years of professional journalism experience		
<1yr	27	17.9
1-3 years	70	46.4
4-6 years	30	19.9
7 years or more	24	15.9

3.1.2 RQ1&2: Extent of Fact-Checking Practices

Respondents indicated various levels of fact-checking; organisational, personal and the institution of dedicated units for fact-checking

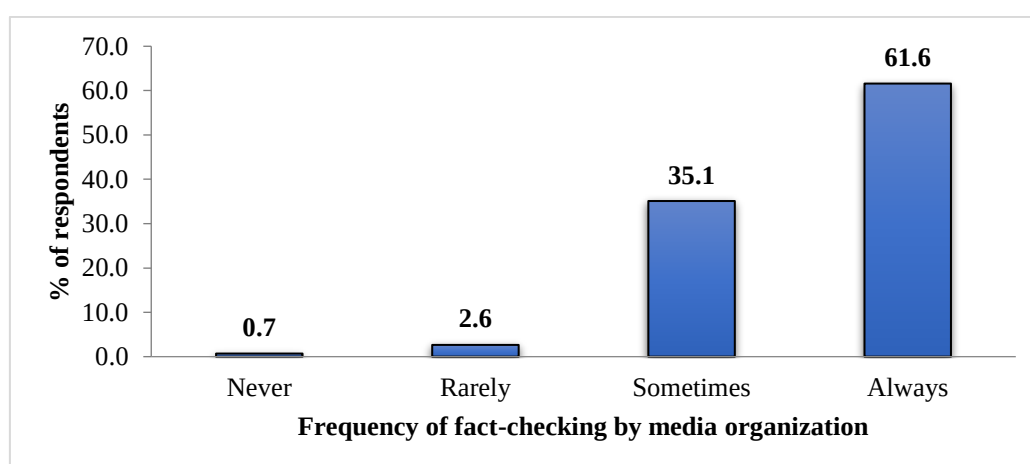


Figure 1: Frequency of Fact-Checking Before Publication by Media Organizations.

Percentage of respondents who indicated that their media organisations always factchecked information before dissemination was the highest while percentage who never factchecked was lowest.

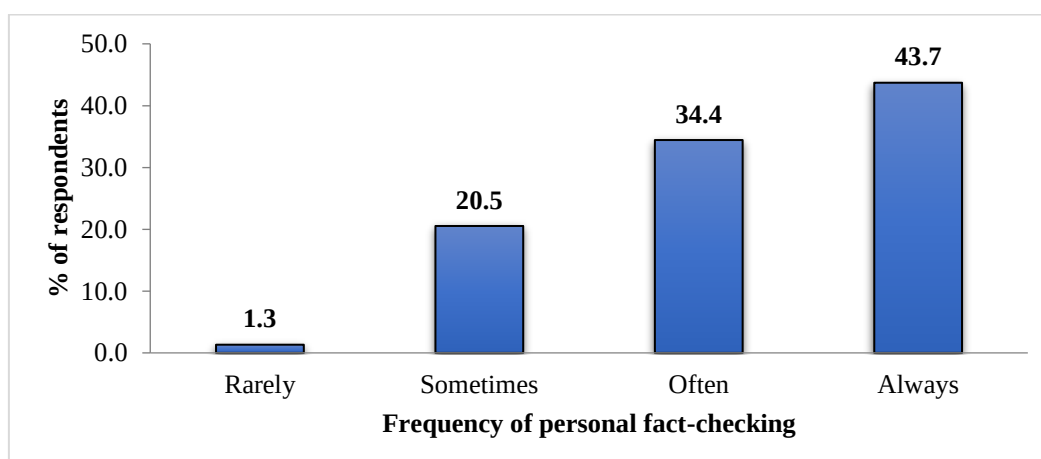


Figure 2: Frequency of Personal Fact-Checking by Respondents.

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Percentage of respondents who Indicated that they personally always factchecked information was the highest while percentage who indicated that they rarely factchecked information was the lowest.

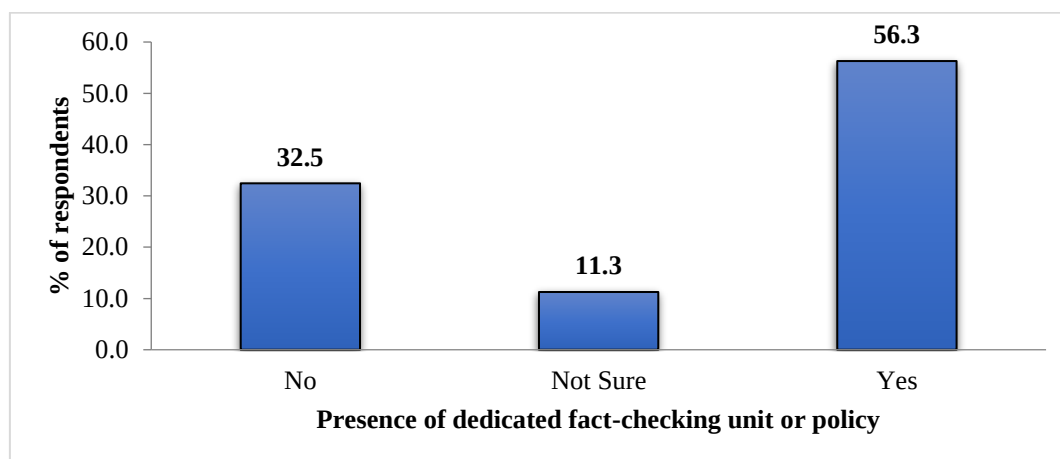


Figure 3: Presence of Dedicated Fact-Checking Unit or Policy in Respondents' Organizations.

Most indicated that their organisations had dedicated units for fact-checking, while a signification percentage indicated that they were not sure whether their organisations had any such unit.

3.1.2.1 Factors Associated with Adequate Fact-Checking Practices

To assess the extent of fact-checking practices, responses were categorized into “adequate” and “inadequate” based on the reported frequency and organizational support for fact-checking. Each relevant question was coded numerically: for how often the media organization engages in fact-checking before publishing or broadcasting news, responses ranged from never (0), rarely (1), sometimes (2), to always (3); for personal engagement in fact-checking, rarely and sometimes were coded as 1, often as 2, and always as 3; for the presence of a dedicated fact-checking unit or policy, no was coded as 0, not sure as 1, and yes as 2. These scores were summed for each respondent, with a maximum total score of 8. Although the midpoint of this total was 4, a more conservative cutoff of 5 and above was used to indicate “adequate” fact-checking practices, reflecting stronger evidence of routine fact-checking. Scores below 5 were classified as “inadequate.” For the binary logistic regression analysis, “adequate” was assigned a value of 1, while “inadequate” was assigned 0. The proportion of respondents exhibiting adequate fact-checking practices was then computed. About 74% of the respondents demonstrated adequate fact-checking practices, while 26.5% exhibited inadequate practices.

3.1.2.2 Distribution of Fact-Checking Practice Levels Among Respondents.

The Fisher’s exact test as indicated in Table 2 below, examined the relationship between demographic variables and the level of fact-checking practices (adequate vs. inadequate) among respondents. The test results revealed no significant association between fact-checking practices and age ($\chi^2 = 5.43$, $p = 0.231$), gender ($\chi^2 = 0.05$, $p = 0.855$), or location ($\chi^2 = 0.54$, $p = 0.466$). However, position/role was significantly associated with fact-checking practices ($\chi^2 = 17.96$, $p = 0.003$), with student journalists showing the highest rate of inadequate practice (100%). Years of professional experience also showed a significant relationship ($\chi^2 = 11.51$, $p = 0.008$), with respondents having 7 or more years demonstrating the highest rate of adequate practice (95.8%). Additionally, the type of media organization was significantly related to fact-checking practices ($\chi^2 = 12.22$, $p = 0.006$), with print media having the highest rate of adequate practice (93.8%) and online/digital media the highest rate of inadequate practice (43.8%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Association Between Demographic Factors and Fact-Checking Practices Among Respondents

Categories	Adequate	Inadequate	Fisher’s	Fisher’s Exact X ²	Exact P-Value
Age					
Under 25	22(32.4)	46(67.6)	5.43		0.231
25-34	11(21.1)	41(78.8)			
35-44	7(31.8)	15(68.2)			
45-54	0(0.0)	8(100.0)			
55 and Above	0(0.0)	1(100.0)			

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Gender

Female	21(27.3)	56(72.7)	0.05	0.855
Male	19(25.7)	55(74.3)		
Location				
Accra	20(29.4)	48(70.6)	0.54	0.466
Kumasi	20(24.1)	63(75.9)		

Position/Role

Freelancer journalist	4(40.0)	6(60.0)	17.96	0.003*
Student journalist	5(100.0)	0(0.0)		
News Producer	1(8.3)	11(91.7)		
Editor	2(13.3)	13(86.7)		
Reporter	13(35.1)	24(64.9)		
Journalist	13(21.0)	49(79.0)		
Fact-checker	2(20.0)	8(80.0)		

Years of professional journalism experience

<1yr	8(29.6)	19(70.4)	11.51	0.008*
1-3 years	18(25.7)	52(74.3)		
4-6 years	13(43.3)	17(56.7)		
7 years or more	1(4.2)	23(95.8)		

Type of media organization

Online/ Digital	14(43.8)	18(56.3)	12.22	0.006*
Print	1(6.3)	15(93.8)		
Radio	20(30.8)	45(69.2)		
Television	5(13.2)	33(86.8)		

* Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$; X^2 = Chi-square test

Logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which demographic and professional characteristics influenced the likelihood of engaging in adequate fact-checking. After controlling for potential confounding variables in the multivariate logistics regression analysis, years of professional journalism experience and type of media organisation remained significantly associated with fact-checking practices. Journalists with seven or more years of experience had substantially higher odds of engaging in adequate fact-checking compared to those with less than one year of experience (aOR = 8.21, 95% CI: 0.90–74.69, $p = 0.062$), indicating a marginally significant effect. Respondents working in print media were the most likely to engage in adequate fact-checking over fourteen times more likely compared to those in online/digital media (aOR = 14.32, 95% CI: 1.63–125.95, $p = 0.017$). Those in television outlets followed, being more than six times as likely to practice adequate fact-checking (aOR = 6.56, 95% CI: 1.82–23.60, $p = 0.004$), relative to their counterparts in online/digital media. These associations remained significant even after adjusting for other variables in the model. In contrast, the position or role of respondents was not a statistically significant predictor after adjustment ($p = 0.382$) (Table 3).

Table 2: Multivariate Analysis of Predictors of Fact-Checking Practices

Variables/Categories	Facts Practices Checking Among Respondents		cOR(95%CI)	P-value	aOR(95%CI)	P-value
	Inadequate Practice	Adequate Practice				
Position/Role				0.382		
Freelancer journalist	4(40.0)	6(60.0)	Ref			
Student journalist	5(100.0)	0(0.0)	0.00(0.00-0.00)	0.999		
News Producer	1(8.3)	11(91.7)	7.33(0.66-81.37)	0.105		
Editor	2(13.3)	13(86.7)	4.33(0.61-30.57)	0.141		
Reporter	13(35.1)	24(64.9)	1.23(0.293-5.16)	0.777		
Journalist	13(21.0)	49(79.0)	2.51(0.62-10.24)	0.199		

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Fact-checker	2(20.0)	8(80.0)	2.67(0.36-19.71)	0.337		
Years of professional journalism experience						
				0.018*		0.018*
<1yr	8(29.6)	19(70.4)	Ref		Ref	
1-3 years	18(25.7)	52(74.3)	1.22(0.45-3.26)	0.697	0.90(0.32-2.56)	0.848
4-6 years	13(43.3)	17(56.7)	0.55(0.18-1.65)	0.286	0.33(0.10-1.12)	0.075
7 years or more	1(4.2)	23(95.8)	9.68(1.11-84.47)	0.040	8.21(0.90-74.69)	0.062
Type of media organization				0.013*		0.007*
Online/ Digital	14(43.8)	18(56.3)	Ref		Ref	
Print	1(6.3)	15(93.8)	0.02(1.37-99.29)	0.025	14.32(1.63-125.95)	0.017
Radio	20(30.8)	45(69.2)	1.75(0.73-4.20)	0.21	1.69(0.66-4.35)	0.275
Television	5(13.2)	33(86.8)	5.13(1.59-16.57)	0.006	6.56(1.82-23.60)	0.004

* Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, Ref = Reference category, cOR = Crude Odds Ratio, aOR = Adjusted Odds Ratio

3.1.3 RQ3. Common Fact-Checking Methods and Tools

According to the analysis of the data concerning the methods in verifying information, (16.6%) chose Contacting source, (11.9%) chose Expert interviews, (37.7%) selected Fact checking websites, (19.2%) indicated that they use Google Search while (2.6%) and (11.9%) affirm that they use Internal editorial review and Official documents or reports respectively. (Figure 8)

Also, concerning the tools or platforms used in fact-checking, Dubawa receive (24.5%) usage, Fact check Ghana (35.8%), Google (0.7%), Official website (4.0%), PolitiFact (6.6%) and Social media monitoring tools (like Facebook, X./Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok, etc.) also got (28.5%) usage. (Figure 9). Under the type of information frequently fact-checked, (3.3%) of the respondent selected Crime report, 19.9% chose Economic data, (3.3%) opted for Health Information, (23.2%) and (19.2%) of the participants chose Political statements and Social Media Claims respectively while (31.1%) picked All the type of information. (Figure 10)

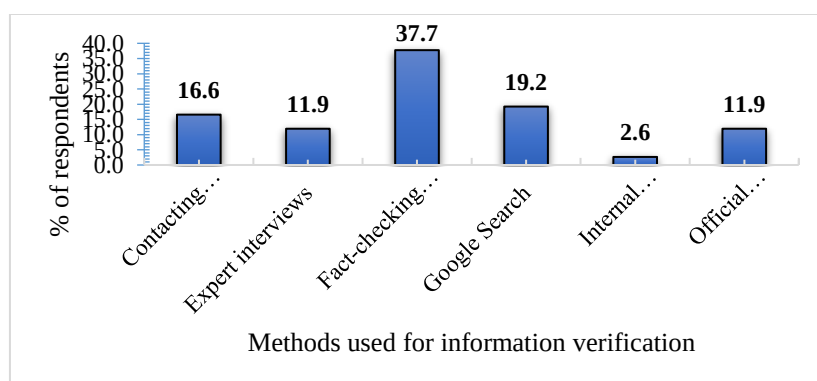


Figure 4: Methods Used for Information Verification During Fact-Checking.

The most commonly used fact-checking methods were fact-checking websites (37.7%), Google Search (19.2%), and contacting the source (16.6%).

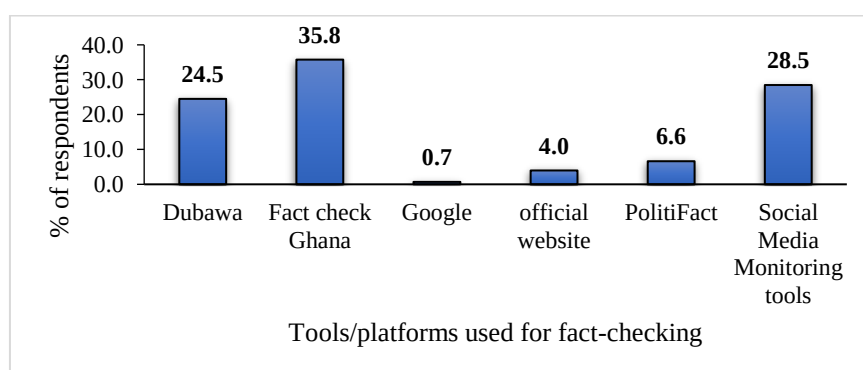


Figure 5: Tools and Platforms Used for Fact-Checking by Respondents

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The primary tools used included Fact Check Ghana (35.8%), Dubawa (24.5%), and social media monitoring tools (28.5%).

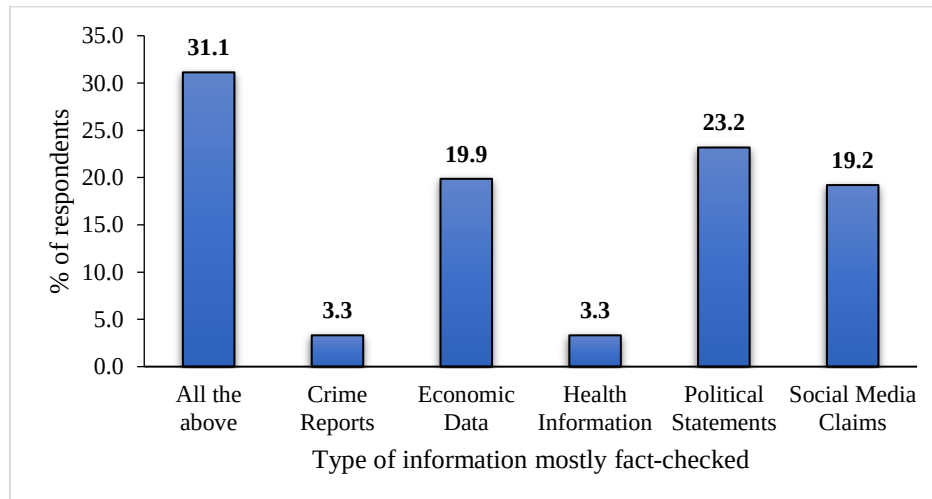


Figure 6: Types of Information Mostly Fact-Checked by Respondents.

The types of information most frequently fact-checked were political statements (23.2%), economic data (19.9%), and social media claims (19.2%).

3.1.4 RQ4. Challenges Journalists Face in Verifying News Content

The main challenges faced by journalists in verifying news content included pressure to publish quickly/limited time (57.6%), and lack of reliable sources (24.5%). (Figure 11) Nearly half (47%) agreed or strongly agreed that fact-checking exposes them to political or legal risks.

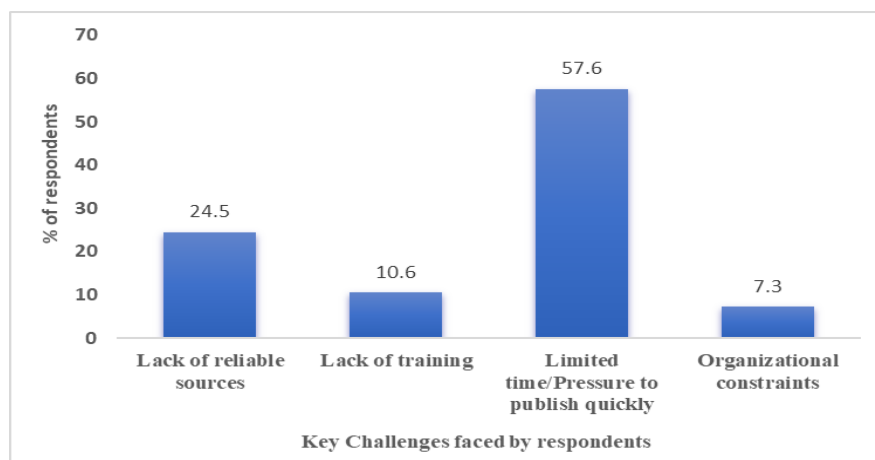


Figure 7: Key Challenges Faced by Respondents in Fact-Checking.

The major challenge most journalists cited was the pressure or limited time to publish with the organizational Constraints being the challenge that was least cited.

Table 3: Challenges Faced by Journalists in Verifying News Content

Variables/Categories	Frequency	Percent
Some sources intentionally withhold or manipulate information?		
No	12	7.9
Yes	139	92.1
Fact-checking is difficult due to the unavailability of credible public data in Ghana.		
Agree	101	66.9
Disagree	17	11.3

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Neutral	13	8.6
Strongly agree	11	7.3
Strongly disagree	9	6.0
In your opinion, how important is fact-checking in journalism?		
Extremely Important	135	89.4
Important	13	8.6
Neutral	3	2.0
How would you rate your organization's commitment to accurate reporting?		
1	8	5.3
2	8	5.3
3	38	25.2
4	60	39.7
5	37	24.5

A significant majority (92.1%) reported that some sources intentionally withhold or manipulate information. Additionally, most respondents (66.9%) indicated that the unavailability of credible public data in Ghana complicates fact-checking. Fact-checking was regarded as extremely important by 89.4% of participants, and over 64% rated their organization's commitment to accurate reporting positively, giving it a score of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. (Table 4)

3.2 Discussion

The study highlights the significant role that fact-checking plays in enhancing journalistic credibility and fighting against misinformation. With media organizations increasingly recognizing the essence of fact-checking, there is the potential for improved journalism standards across the country, thereby promoting trust in media outlets. One important finding is that almost all respondents agree that fact-checking is an imperative requirement for contemporary journalism. The study highlights that, like in the cases cited by Tully and Singer, Ghanaian journalists consider fact-checking as not only a remedial activity but also a preventive strategy that helps to address the threat of mis/disinformation [46].

The study's three main objectives were to examine how Ghanaian media engage in fact-checking, analyze the most commonly used fact-checking method(s) and tools in different media formats, and identify the challenges faced by journalists in verifying news content. The findings shed more light and understanding on the tools used by Ghanaian media houses and journalists in verifying information, the frequency with which journalists and media organizations engage in fact-checking, and the relationship between roles, experience, and media format in relation to fact-checking practices. The trends in verification approach and tools recorded in the Ghanaian case were quite similar to trends in some other jurisdictions reviewed. For instance, as in the study conducted by Links [45], the Ghanaian example also demonstrates the use of both manual and electronic verification strategies and emphasizes collaboration with civil society organisations such as Dubawa and Fact Check Ghana (See Figures 4 & 5).

Age, gender, and location did not significantly influence the extent or frequency of fact-checking practices among journalists. Years of experience and the type of media organization, on the other hand, significantly impacted fact-checking practices. Role or position at a point had an impact on fact-checking, but later, when the effect of the association was tested, the results turned out not to be significantly influenced by fact-checking as compared to the years of experience and the type of media.

3.2.1 Relationship Between Role/Experience and Fact-Checking

The study revealed that the position or the role of the media personnel played a significant role in fact-checking practices, with student journalists showing the highest rate of inadequate practice (100%) after using Fisher's exact test in finding the factors that were associated with adequate fact-checking. But when the strength of this relationship or association was tested under Multivariate Logistic regression under the adjusted odds ratio, the result showed the role or position wasn't a strong enough factor for journalists to engage in adequate fact-checking. Years of professional experience, on the other hand, showed a significant relationship with adequate (Frequent) fact-checking practices, where even after the strength of the relationship was tested in the Multivariate logistic regression, the p-value still proved statistically significant, with respondents having 7 or more years of experience in the media practicing fact-checking more frequently (95.8% adequate).

Overall, the study affirms that the years of professional experience in the media landscape highly influence one's consistency in implementing fact-checking procedures while they work.

This finding, perhaps, enforces the view that profound professional and ethical awareness for many journalists is a product of continuous practice and provides ample justification for long-held newsroom cultures that reward experience with editorial appointments. In essence, it also provides some basis for conceptualizing Socially Responsible journalism expressed in the Social Responsibility Theory as one that is driven by experience in which journalists are highly conscious of the ethical imperative to report accurately and objectively. Perhaps, that raises questions on journalism training both in-house at media houses and in

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journalism institutions. Is fact-checking a priority right from the onset of journalism training? Additionally, it brings to the fore the issue of in-house news writing and publishing policies. Are there deliberately instituted policies on fact-checking in media organisations? Indeed, the evidence from data gathered indicates that fact-checking policies may be institutionalized among the top echelons of the newsroom, in many cases where there are such policies. That could explain why 11.3 percent of respondents indicated that they were not sure of the existence of dedicated fact-checking units in their organisations. Also, 32.5 percent of respondents stated that there were no dedicated fact-checking units in their media organisations, supporting the view that in-house journalistic training for new reporters may not emphasize fact-checking. This has very significant implications for the ethical and professional standards of journalism as fact-checking in a digital age of media plurality is central to journalistic practice and should be considered as a prime culture embedded in responsible journalism in a digital age [34, 40, 41]

3.2.2 Influence of Media-Type on Fact-Checking

In this area of the research, the study also found a significant connection between the type of media organization and the quality or frequency of fact-checking practices. Print media showed the highest rate of adequate fact-checking practices, with a (93.8%) rate. Television ranked next in terms of adequate fact-checking, at 86.8%. In contrast, online or digital media had a higher rate of inadequate fact-checking (43.8%), suggesting that traditional media were more likely to implement consistent fact-checking practices or procedures than their digital counterparts. This affirms our finding that the high rate of misinformation and disinformation in the media landscape can be attributed to the rise of online media, a claim that is also supported in the study by Moreno-Gil, Ramon-Vegas, and Mauri-Ríos, who noted that traditional media tended to emphasize values such as objectivity, transparency, and accountability [47].

A plausible cause of the online media failures at fact-checking may be the quest to be the first to break the news and the quest to set the agenda; to determine the issues that should engage the minds of the people [22, 23], and how the people should conceptualise the issues that engage their minds [31, 32]. There is very intense competition online. Shareability of online news and information on social media platforms and online news portals has driven many media organisations to adopt digital-first policies. As noted by Nkrumah and Hassan, online news media in Ghana are unlocking the gates and setting the news agenda [59]. The digital-first policy tends to put pressure on journalists, particularly to break the news, and it aligns with the findings as expressed in Figure 7, which notes that most of the respondents (about 58 percent) identified limited time or pressure to publish as being the main challenge they face.

For print media in Ghana, there has been some level of restraint in terms of a wholesale adoption of a digital-first policy, as virtually no online news portal of any newspaper has been monetized, thus, such a policy will expose the print versions to unhealthy competition from their online versions and affect profitability. Generally, the established newspapers that also run online news portals are not necessarily the dominant players in online news dissemination in Ghana. Print media giants such as the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times*, both state-owned, have high ethical and professional standards that ensure that adequate fact-checking is embedded in their culture. Evidently, the print media remains a major anchor in terms of promoting news accuracy and credibility with the aid of stringent fact-checking practices [18].

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study provides a thorough understanding of fact-checking in Ghanaian media. The study reveals that generally, most media organisations in Ghana do not have dedicated units for fact-checking and even if they do, some journalists may not be aware of such units or systems. The data show that the majority of respondents (61.6%) are of the view that their media organizations always conduct fact-checking prior to publishing news. Furthermore, 74% of the respondents demonstrated competent fact-checking procedures, and there were notable correlations between the degree of fact-checking and years of experience as well as the type of media company. The survey also showed that fact-checking websites, Google searches, and contacting original sources are frequent fact-checking techniques employed by journalists. Social media monitoring platforms, Factcheck Ghana, and Dubawa were also commonly utilized. Despite these efforts, there are still many obstacles that journalists must overcome in order to verify news material, especially the lack of trustworthy resources and the pressure to publish immediately. Effective fact-checking was also found to be hampered by political and legal issues, as well as the lack of reliable public data.

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