The Role of Fact-Checking Sites During the Israel-Palestine Conflict

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Abstract

As a result of the information explosion, a great amount of data has been created, including stuff that is deceptive, ethically problematic, tolerant, and hateful. The rapid and extensive circulation of false news, on the other hand, appears to show that many people either do not comprehend the concept of "fake news" or, if they do, share it nonetheless. False news has increased in Palestine in concert with the expansion of social media, maybe more than in other countries due to the ongoing Israeli occupation and the broader Arab-Israeli conflict. This research studied 147 news items from three important fact-checking websites—AP Fact Check, Reuters Fact Check, and AFP Fact Check—to detect trends in misinformation on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The results are going to help in understanding the influence of media coverage on peace initiatives and conflict settlement, and they have significant implications for the study of interpersonal disputes, past recollections, and political inaccuracies.

Keywords: misinformation, Israel-Palestine conflict, AFP Fact Check, AP Fact Check, Reuters Fact Check.

Introduction

The emergence of information and communication technology has presented individuals with several avenues to produce and distribute content across various platforms and services. Actors do not, however, always capitalize on this positive aspect of the Internet. In reality, they frequently produce and disseminate information of questionable authenticity or disputed origin, whether on purpose or not. Content of this kind is what is now often referred to as "fake news." A common definition of fake news is the distribution of erroneous data for political ends. On the other hand, rumors, gossip, and information that is not verified, biased, or worst of all, wholly false can all be considered fake news in a larger sense. The ability of false news to

affect how society as a whole or certain segments within it behave and see the world is its most contentious feature. This affects not just the caliber of material on the internet but also the consumers' confidence in the platforms, applications, and other users that produce and share content. Over the past 10 years, there has been an increase in interest in disinformation and misinformation in academic and institutional circles (Said-Hung et al., 2021). This is because the general public frequently shares controversial ideas on social media platforms without doing their research. Due to the widespread belief that news sources are more reliable than other types of online information, users seldom verify the information they get online. This makes using fact-checking services to verify the accuracy of news sources imperative. There are significant ramifications from hate speech and false information on social media. They may even physically hurt people and communities. They may also erode societal cohesiveness, and breed distrust and division. Growing worries regarding social media platforms' role in fostering peace and guaranteeing responsible online behavior have been brought on by the increase of hate speech and fake news on these platforms (Fernández, 2021).

A significant quantity of false news has emerged as a result of the massive information mass that has emerged, including user-generated material. This amount of fake news has risen since the advent of social media. An enormous amount of data, including material that is untruthful, fraudulent, morally dubious, tolerant, and hateful, has been produced by this surge in communication. Similar to other nations globally, false news has surged in Palestine in tandem with the growth of social media. Nonetheless, more false news is created regarding Palestine than other nations because of the continuous Israeli occupation and the wider Arab-Israeli conflict. Two categories of fake news affect the Palestinian people and the rest of the globe. The first type of news is called disinformation, or news that is based on false information and intends to harm people to further agenda items like defamation, political propaganda, sarcasm, bullying, hatred, excitement, scorn, amusement, pointless debate, and show. The second category consists of disinformation, or news that contains incorrect information without intending to harm. Today's civilizations are indeed engaged in front-line combat, but these conflicts are also waged at the level of manipulating impressions. To sway public opinion about the warring nations, both the governments involved in the conflict and those living outside of them engage in

information warfare. Fake news is the most fundamental tactic used here. Fake news has proven detrimental to our social and political life, and combating it is difficult. Facts have started to become less significant during this era, known as post-truth, which has made room for fake news to spread widely.

The majority of people are aware of what false news is. The quick and widespread dissemination of false news, however, seems to indicate that many individuals are either unable to understand the notion of "fake news" or, if they can, distribute it anyway. Combating "fake news" as a single, cohesive phenomenon is like attempting to combat all diseases simultaneously and with the same medicines. Without identifying the exact illness you are treating, it is impossible to combat and treat it; different kinds of treatment are required. One of the many new kinds and practices of journalism in the Internet age, fact-checking websites have flourished in the wake of recent political elections. Processes and procedures for confirming the veracity of particular information that spreads via social media, rumors, or remarks made by prominent figures are collectively referred to as fact-checking or verification. Misinformation and deceptive content are extensively disseminated in today's digital environment. Because of this, many journalists now consider verification to be their main duty; because it requires the use of sophisticated tools and techniques, it has even become a specialty. According to Gillespie (2018), social media does not formally state or acknowledge the content that is moderated on its platforms, but it is known that this occurs. Fact-checking initiatives are the exclusive focus of certain media groups. Along with following a verification procedure that entails confirming the accuracy of the material they receive, journalists working for major media sites also follow this standard. Fake news has been the subject of several initiatives lately to flag, fact-check, and tag it with relation to content control. Fact Checkers from the Washington Post, FlackCheck, FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, and Duke Reporters' Lab are a few examples. In a world ripped apart by conflict, the importance of these websites in promoting the truth cannot be overstated.

The corpus of information about facts, truth, and falsity has grown significantly in the last several years, with a noteworthy uptick in production after the 2016 US presidential election. Many studies have looked at how the phrase "fake news" has been used to attack political opponents or negatively portray reporting (Al-Rawi, 2019; Brummette et al., 2018; Schulz et al., 2020; Smith, 2019; van der Linden

et al., 2020). According to Krause et al. (2020), fact-checkers attempt to define the threat of misleading information and present themselves as trustworthy risk mitigators. However, journalists have maintained that fact-checking and activism should be distinguished by clear boundaries, with the former being objective (Mena, 2019). Official fact-checking has received significantly less attention from academics, maybe as a result of the perception that it lacks independence. However, in Asia, government fact-checks remain a useful source of information, and the Western trend towards decentralized fact-checking is noticeably less pronounced. Chinese research, however, found that people were more inclined to accept independent fact checks than official news corrections if they were presented (Zeng et al., 2019).

A large chunk of human history was fought in the "First Wave" conflicts, which were waged for the conquest and annexation of land. At the end of the 19th and 20th centuries, there were wars known as the "Second Wave" that were centered on achieving global economic prosperity. Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, the purpose of warfare has been to control the flow of information (Stein, 1995, p. 32). Unlike earlier battles, the goal of information warfare is to seize control of a country's whole computer infrastructure to dominate government and civic networks of information. As per the findings of Sopilko, Swintsytsky, Padalka, and Lyseiuk (2022), the internet is a mass communication tool that has made information warfare, sometimes referred to as "dirt spill," simpler to employ. Because fake news is meant to garner attention, it occasionally presents an extremely inflated picture of reality (Derman, 2021, p. 168). In modern warfare, or "hybrid war," the media has emerged as a crucial tool. Modern media technologies are used to achieve strategic goals against a hostile state, claims Mitrovic (2018). Media warfare is the preferred military strategy employed by many countries in the modern period. Galeotti (2015) and Hoskins & O'Loughlin (2015) claim that social media platforms have been used for propaganda in military operations by the US, China, Russia, Israel, India, and other nations. Scholars claim that differences in historical wrongdoings contribute to the longevity of intergroup conflict; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one example of this tendency (Bar-Tal, 2000).

According to a well-known theoretical paradigm, those who spread false information do so either because they are "lazy, not biased" or because they are incapable of using critical thinking (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). According to a

number of research, a lesser inclination to analyze analytically is linked to a worse ability to determine the accuracy of news headlines (Pennycook et al., 2020). Caprolu et al. (2022) used a mixed-methods technique to analyze over 5 million tweets on the war and found no evidence of disinformation attempts on Twitter, despite popular belief. Park et al. (2022) presented the VoynaSlov dataset to help researchers analyze attempts to manipulate information on VKontakte and Twitter during the war. Over 38 million items shared on the two platforms by Russian media organizations are part of the material that the researchers are examining to look at the influence of agenda-setting and framing. Fact-checking organizations started to appear in the early 2000s due to the internet's rapid expansion and the dissatisfaction with conventional journalism's inability to independently verify the veracity of political assertions (Nieminen and Rapeli 2019). Graves (2016) undertakes in-depth fieldwork on the workings of well-known American fact-checking organizations including PolitiFact, FactCheck.org, and the Washington Post's Fact Checker in preparation for his book Deciding What's True: The Rise of Political Fact-checking in American Journalism. According to Graves (2016), there are three primary processes in the verification process: selecting which claims to validate, acquiring pertinent data, and drawing conclusions. Graves (2017) further described these activities as "selecting claims to verify, getting in touch with the speaker, tracking down fraudulent claims, interacting with experts, and showcasing your work" in a follow-up study. After a thorough review of the relevant literature, the authors found a serious gap in the coverage of inaccurate information on the Israel-Palestine conflict. The role of fact checkers during conflicts is extremely vital.Unfortuately ,there is not sufficient literature even on the role of fact checking sites during conflicts .When the writers saw this discrepancy, they made an effort to investigate news reports from three fact-checking websites to identify patterns in the ongoing controversy.

We have also seen of a rise of misinformation during the ongoing Israel Palestine war. There has not been too many previous studies on the fact checking of conflict related fake news , more precisely on the role of fact checking sites during Israel =Palestine conflict This article will examine news stories from three influential fact-checking websites—AP Fact Check, Reuters Fact Check, and AFP Fact Check—to identify trends in false information on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Methodology

To find out how false information about Israel and Palestine is portrayed in the media, a quantitative content analysis of a variety of news stories about the conflict was conducted. For the study, three fact-checking websites were selected. The news items were gathered from the following sources: Reuters Fact Check (https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/), AFP Fact Check (https://factcheck.afp.com/), and AP Fact Check (https://apnews.com/ap-fact-check). To find pertinent news articles from the websites, a thorough search was done using the terms "Israel-Palestine," "Israel-Palestine conflict," and "Israel-Palestine misinformation." A total of forty-seven news articles were selected from these websites and classified as either Fake or Misrepresentative. A series of coordinated strikes from the Gaza Strip against neighboring regions in Israel by the Palestinian Islamist terrorist group Hamas began on Saturday, October 7, 2023, hence the authors gathered news stories from the months of October and November 2023. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Data Analysis

71 news items were obtained from Reuters Fact Check, 59 from AFP Fact Check, and 17 from AP Fact Check (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of news items collected from the sites

Data was obtained between October 7 and November 10. Table 2 displays the overall frequency of the articles.
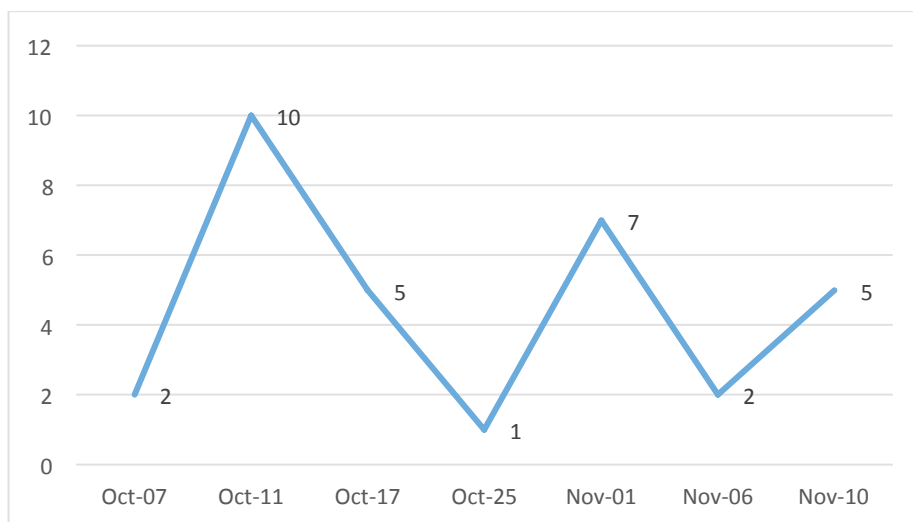

Figure 2: A summary of the frequency of news items

The contents of the 17 AP Fact Check news pieces were divided into four categories: Israeli violence, Conflict zone, pro-Palestine activism, and Politics. The news was presented in text, picture, or video format. Misrepresentation of the conflict zone and pro-Palestine activism were the two most common sources of disinformation (Table 1).

Table 1: Breakdown of news items from AP Fact Check

Topics	Type of Misinformation	Form	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Israeli violence	Fake	text	2	11.76
Conflict zone	Misrepresentation	video	5	29.41
Conflict zone	Misrepresentation	image	2	11.76
Conflict zone	Misrepresentation	text	2	11.76
Pro-Palestine activism	Misrepresentation	video	4	23.53
Politics	Misrepresentation	video	2	11.76
Total			17	

The 71 Reuters Fact Check news stories were classified into five categories: Hamas attack, Israeli violence, Conflict zone, pro-Palestine activism, and Politics. The news was delivered in text, image, or video media. The most common misrepresentation in these stories was videos that misrepresented the combat zone. Fake images of Israeli brutality and pro-Palestine activity had the lowest frequency (Table 2).

Table 2: Breakdown of news items from Reuters Fact Check

Topics	Type of Misinformation	Form	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Hamas attack	Misrepresentation	video	9	12.68
Israeli violence	Misrepresentation	video	7	9.86
Israeli violence	Misrepresentation	image	4	5.63
Israeli violence	Fake	image	1	1.41
Israeli violence	Fake	text	2	2.82
Conflict zone	Misrepresentation	video	23	32.39
Conflict zone	Misrepresentation	image	2	2.82
Conflict zone	Fake	image	1	1.41
Pro-Palestine activism	Misrepresentation	video	13	18.31
Pro-Palestine activism	Fake	image	1	1.41
Politics	Misrepresentation	video	4	5.63
Politics	Fake	text	2	2.82
Politics	Fake	image	2	2.82
Total			71	100

The 59 AFP Fact Check news articles were divided into five categories: Hamas attack, Israeli violence, Conflict zone, Pro-Palestine activism, and Politics. The information was presented via text, picture, or video. The most prevalent inaccuracy in these stories was videos that portrayed pro-Palestine activity incorrectly. Fake writings, movies, and photographs depicting Hamas attacks and political aspects were the least common (Table 3).

Table 3: Breakdown of news items from AFP Fact Check

Topics	Type of Misinformation	Form	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Hamas attack	Misrepresentation	video	8	13.56
Hamas attack	Misrepresentation	image	1	1.69
Hamas attack	Fake	video	1	1.69
Israeli violence	Misrepresentation	image	8	13.56
Israeli violence	Misrepresentation	video	6	10.17
Pro-Palestine activism	Misrepresentation	video	13	22.03
Pro-Palestine activism	Fake	text	1	1.7
Pro-Palestine activism	Fake	video	1	1.69
Pro-Palestine activism	Fake	image	1	1.69
Conflict zone	Misrepresentation	video	7	11.86
Conflict zone	Misrepresentation	image	8	13.56
Politics	Misrepresentation	video	1	1.69
Politics	Misrepresentation	image	2	3.39
Politics	Fake	text	1	1.69
Total			59	

Findings and Discussion

The results serve as a reminder that forces and environmental factors tend towards stability and homogeneity, even in the face of journalistic change and the prevailing narrative surrounding it. Media companies do adjust to changing institutional structures as well as their immediate external environments. The media narrative is being challenged by a growing number of actors that are willing to spread misinformation and present "alternative facts" (Ekström et al., 2020), hence journalists' duties need to be adjusted to fit this new environment. Examining how news content is ranked and sold online can also help combat misinformation (Grey et al., 2020). The results indicate that a great deal of misinformation has been disseminated about the conflict zone, leading to the misidentification of previous attacks or assaults on other parts of the globe as Israeli or Hamas actions. With so few ways to identify one war-torn area from another, this is a clear cause of political unrest. The number of strikes by Hamas and Israeli forces has been exaggerated, which has inflamed popular sentiment. Most misleading information has been disseminated through social media sites like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. If

authorities wish to effectively combat fake news, they should take note of this warning. Efficiency is a poor indicator of the project's overall impact, even if it can help analyze the functioning and operation of the fact-checking instruments utilized. To look at impact-related problems, further analysis of fact-checking programs' efficacy is required. 'Public interest in the content' is the most common criterion used by all three organizations to select their target sources and media. Additionally, they evaluate information sources using certain processes (credibility, independence, trustworthiness, etc.), mostly to determine how independent their sources are (news stories, political speeches, tweets, etc.); some do not. Even those who do focus on source independence do it with the help of human judgment and human talent alone. The workplace is another setting where technology may be extremely helpful and crucial to boosting fact-checkers effectiveness and efficiency. More importantly, this kind of approach would increase the organizations' perceived reliability and transparency.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study's main conclusion is that media has become into a potent tool for digital warfare. Over the last 20 years, there has been a rise in the use of media in hybrid wars; the internet in particular has become an essential weapon in this modern warfare. Thanks to the Internet and technical improvements, it is now simpler to propagate misleading information and erroneous narratives through mainstream media outlets, especially social media, in order to accomplish the intended effects. The media has become a powerful instrument for competing nations and non-governmental organizations seeking to undermine a country's social cohesiveness through the spread of misleading information and fake news. These disinformation strategies and false news articles aim to erode a nation's cohesiveness and foster enmity among its people. Media warfare is becoming a common tactic used by enemies. Our research indicates that the growing division over political issues like Israel-Palestine has also exposed the polarizing power of social media. According to Wolfsfeld (2018), the fact that new media would lessen their reliance on highly centralized and easily manipulated traditional media made Palestinian leaders more enthusiastic about it. Their excitement makes sense considering that they are against a powerful opponent with the ability to falsify information on established news

platforms. The advantages of social media for parties involved in disputes can also increase polarization and animosity, which lowers the likelihood of a peaceful settlement.

Given the digitization of disputes, this study recommends that future research on the effects of media should focus on quantitative examination of established news organizations' reporting of the Palestine-Israel dispute on social media. New aspects of the media's influence will be revealed by studying how social and traditional media are covering the Palestine-Israel conflict together. Studies of this nature will also help to clarify how media coverage affects efforts for peace and conflict settlement. The outcomes of our research provide significant insight into the perpetuation of historical misperceptions and conspiracies in intergroup disputes. These findings will have a major influence on the studies regarding political misperceptions, past recollections, and interpersonal disputes. According to our research, intergroup conflicts may increase people's susceptibility to false beliefs by creating a sense of helplessness stemming from oppression or violence. Under some conditions, people could be more likely to accept false information they read or hear or to attribute past in-group behavior to outsiders.

The study is the first attempt to know the role of fact checking sites during Israel -Palestine conflict. The findings of the study attempted to study the forms and themes of misinformation during the ongoing conflict .The findings of the study will certainly benefit all the studies related to the subject in the near future.

Of course, there are certain limitations to this study that need to be looked at more in the future. Firstly, our data was only collected from three of the many more popular websites exist. We could only study two groups of people (Israelis and Palestinians) and one set of stories (about the flight of the Palestinians). It would be intriguing to investigate if our findings hold true for other intergroup disputes as well as for historical myths and communities related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Though more research is necessary, given the length of the conflict and the seeming encroaching of attitudes towards it, opinions of earlier Israeli acts improved as a result of feelings of control and correcting information, suggesting that our findings may be extended to other conflicts. Researchers are also interested in determining if it is more effective to change perceptions of our communities in different conditions, such post-conflict settings, to debunk historical myths or correct

core ideas about them. Second, replication is necessary because, similar to any other study, the social and political context at the time the data were collected may have had an influence on our findings.

Leading nations' emphasis on the dangers of allegedly widespread fake news is expected to give rise to new justifications for limiting free speech, including national security, public order, and preventing public anxiety. Surprisingly, the goal of fact-checking, which is to reduce factual misunderstandings, may only be partially accomplished based on the research that has been done on the subject (Nyhan et al., 2020). Concentrated fact checks, according to Barker et al. (2019), would yield better outcomes in this area, but they would significantly reduce the quantity of weekly or daily pieces, which would mitigate the effect of the false news issue. As more and more falsehoods on the internet are deemed hazardous, the truth may eventually become independent of other protected interests.

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