



POLICY TAKEAWAYS

DAY 2, SESSION 3.3. STATE GOVERNANCE IN DIGITAL INDIA

Fake News and Fact-Checking: Who is Winning?

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Fake news and misinformation are spread through online platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, yet their sources remain largely undisclosed. The United Nations has called on governments to take action, and on Big Tech to minimize the circulation of misinformation. India and Australia have engaged with fact-checking initiatives, however, misinformation and the decline of professional journalism present serious challenges to this goal. Finally, policymakers should consider that most fact-checking research is currently focused on the US and findings may be inapplicable in other jurisdictions and more research is urgently needed.



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Key Takeaways

1

The assumption that fact-checking counters misinformation is flawed.

There is a general assumption that fact-checking works to counter misinformation. Currently, about 342 fact-checking projects exist worldwide. Of these, 102 are members of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), a self-regulating body. In India, IFCAN membership is mandatory to work with some companies, such as Facebook.

2

Consumers' understanding of news subject to fact-checking is complex

Studies show that tagging a post as "false" instead of "disputed" is more effective to counter fake news. Yet adding a general warning of "false news" will reduce consumer trust overall, including accurate news. People may agree on fact-checking results and still not change their mindset. This suggests that more research is needed to explain the underlying factors that explain these responses, particularly in the Global South where there is little research on this topic.

3

Fact-checkers have pessimistic views about fact-checking

India has a number of IFCN fact-checkers and, in Australia, RMTI-ABC and AAP fact-check are the main players. Professionals fact-checkers in India have a pessimistic perception that their efforts are not supported and feel that much of the fake news is state-sponsored. In Australia, where the number of newsrooms has decreased and journalism expertise has declined, fact-checkers believe that misinformation is a big problem and that media organisations need to adhere to their codes of ethics and publish corrections.

4

More research is needed to develop an effective plan to counter misinformation.

More research on fact-checking, particularly focused on the Global South, is needed. Platforms that fail to prevent the distribution of fake news must be held accountable. A more effective way of communicating what news has been fact-checked and the outcome of this process is needed. Lastly, the relationship between journalism and fact-checking needs to be strengthened and media literacy improved.

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