

A State-of-Knowledge Survey of Fact-Checking Research in Communication

Studies: A Systematic Review and Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis¹

Pratya Phothihang²

Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University, Pitsanulok, Thailand

Sermisiri Nindum

Chiang Rai Rajabhat University, Chiangrai, Thailand

Abstract

The rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation in digital media has become a critical challenge in contemporary communication, increasing the importance of fact-checking as a key mechanism within the digital information ecosystem. This study examines the state of knowledge on fact-checking research in communication studies, analyzes keyword co-occurrence patterns, and identifies research trends, knowledge gaps, and future research directions. This study adopts a state-of-knowledge survey approach that integrates a systematic literature review, qualitative content analysis, and keyword co-occurrence analysis. Following a PRISMA-informed process, 43 peer-reviewed journal articles from major communication and media databases were analyzed in terms of research themes, methods, units of analysis, study contexts, and keyword relationships. The findings show that fact-checking research can

¹ APA7th Citation: Phothihang, P & Nindum, S. (2026). A state-of-knowledge survey of fact-checking research in communication studies: A systematic review and keyword co-occurrence analysis. In *Proceedings of the ICA Regional Hub Thailand 2026: Official Concurrent Event of the 76th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association (ICA)* (pp. 548-). Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

² Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Pratya Phothihang at the Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University, Pitsanulok, Thailand or by email at: pipenaldo@gmail.com

be organized into six major themes: corrective mechanisms, journalistic practices, digital platforms, AI and technology, comparative and contextual studies, and audience and information ecosystems. The keyword co-occurrence analysis indicates that “fact-checking” functions as the central concept of the field and is closely connected with “disinformation,” “journalism,” and “audience engagement.” These patterns reflect a shift from journalism-centered approaches toward broader platform- and ecosystem-oriented perspectives. The study contributes to communication research by positioning fact-checking as a communicative mechanism embedded within the wider information ecosystem. It also highlights implications for media organizations, fact-checkers, digital platforms, policymakers, and media literacy initiatives. Future research should further examine audience effects, AI-assisted verification, platform governance, ethical issues, and Global South contexts.

Keywords: fact-checking; misinformation; disinformation; communication studies; keyword co-occurrence analysis

Introduction and Significance of the Study

Digital media and online platforms have transformed the production, circulation, and consumption of public information. Users increasingly act as both receivers and producers, while platform algorithms shape content visibility. These conditions have intensified the spread of false, misleading, and manipulative information across contemporary communication systems.

In communication studies, this problem is commonly understood through information disorder, which distinguishes misinformation from disinformation. Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information circulated without intent to deceive, whereas disinformation is

deliberately created or disseminated to mislead or distort public understanding (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Within this information ecosystem, fact-checking has evolved from a journalistic practice into a broader communicative mechanism for truth verification. It now operates across journalism, platform governance, AI-assisted verification, visual and multimodal misinformation, and audience engagement. AI-generated misinformation, deepfakes, and manipulated visual content further increase the urgency of systematic fact-checking research (Cazzamatta & Sarisakaloglu, 2025; Grut, 2026; Weikmann & Lecheler, 2024).

Although prior studies have examined correction effects, misinformation, platform governance, and fact-checking practices, the literature remains fragmented across themes, methods, and contexts. Walter et al. (2020) synthesized evidence on fact-checking effectiveness, but less attention has been given to the conceptual structure of fact-checking research within communication studies. Existing reviews rarely integrate thematic synthesis with keyword-relationship mapping to show the field's development. This study addresses that gap by combining systematic review, qualitative content analysis, and keyword co-occurrence analysis.

Therefore, this study aims to:

1. examine the state of knowledge on fact-checking research in communication studies;
2. analyze keyword co-occurrence patterns to understand the conceptual structure of the field; and
3. identify research trends, knowledge gaps, and future research directions in fact-checking research.

This study contributes by presenting a systematic overview of fact-checking research through content synthesis, keyword network analysis, and trend analysis. The findings provide a foundation for future research development, teaching and learning, and policy formulation aimed at addressing misinformation and disinformation in digital society.

Research Questions and Conceptual Framework

Based on the research objectives, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: What is the current state of knowledge on fact-checking research in communication studies in terms of major themes, research methods, units of analysis, and study contexts?
- RQ2: What keyword co-occurrence patterns can be identified in fact-checking research, and how do these patterns reflect the conceptual structure of the field?
- RQ3: What research trends, knowledge gaps, and future research directions can be identified from existing fact-checking literature in communication studies?

To address these questions, this study develops a conceptual framework that positions fact-checking within the broader contexts of information disorder and the digital information ecosystem. The framework begins with misinformation and disinformation, which reflect not only inaccurate content but also interactions among producers, media institutions, platforms, algorithms, and audiences. Fact-checking is understood as a communicative mechanism operating across corrective responses, journalistic verification, platform governance, AI-assisted verification, comparative contexts, and audience engagement.

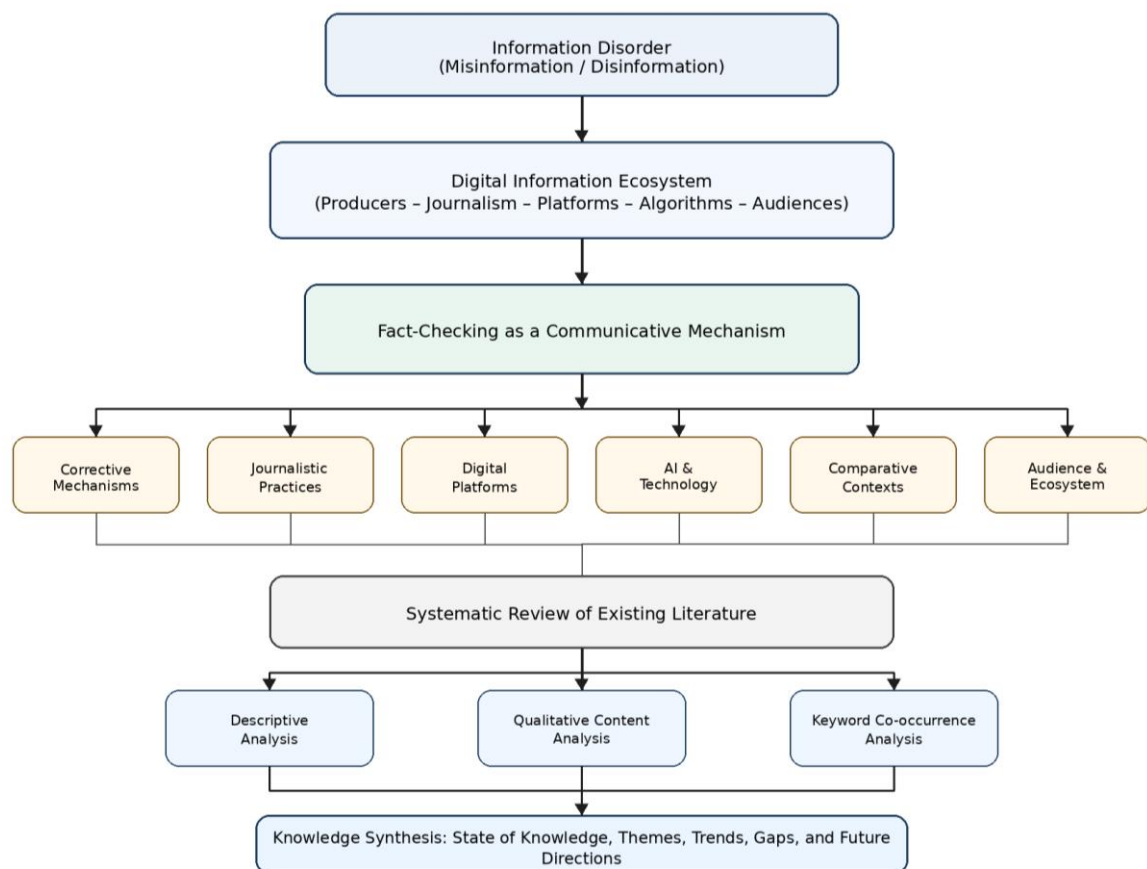
The framework also informs the analytical structure of the study. Existing fact-checking literature is systematically reviewed through three complementary approaches: descriptive

analysis, qualitative content analysis, and keyword co-occurrence analysis. Descriptive analysis identifies publication patterns, methods, and units of analysis. Qualitative content analysis synthesizes major research themes. Keyword co-occurrence analysis maps conceptual relationships among key terms.

Through this process, the study traces the development of fact-checking research from journalism-centered approaches toward broader platform- and ecosystem-oriented perspectives. The framework connects the research problem, questions, methods, and findings to identify the state of knowledge, trends, gaps, and future directions in communication studies.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of Fact-Checking Research in Communication Studies



Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Fact-checking research has developed in response to concerns about misinformation, disinformation, and changing public communication in digital environments. In communication studies, these problems are often examined through information disorder, which shifts attention from content accuracy alone to the wider communicative conditions under which false information is produced, circulated, amplified, and contested (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Within this perspective, misinformation and disinformation are embedded in a digital information ecosystem involving news organizations, fact-checking institutions, political actors, platforms, algorithms, and audiences. The decline of traditional gatekeeping and the growing role of platform-based visibility have changed how public information is filtered, circulated, and corrected. Fact-checking has therefore become important not only as journalism, but also as a communicative response to information disorder.

Fact-checking as journalistic verification and corrective practice

Early fact-checking research was closely connected to journalism studies. It was often examined as an extension of verification, professional accountability, and public-service reporting. Studies in this area focus on how journalists and fact-checking organizations verify public claims, evaluate evidence, and communicate corrections to the public (Amazeen, 2015; Himma-Kadakas & Ojamets, 2022).

Fact-checking has also been studied as a corrective mechanism against misinformation and disinformation. This research examines how corrections reduce false beliefs, how debunking works in digital environments, and when audiences accept or resist corrective messages. Studies of rumor debunking on social media show that timing, source authority, and

circulation structures influence whether false information continues to spread (Jung et al., 2020). Overall, correction effects are limited when misinformation is tied to political identity, emotion, prior beliefs, or distrust of institutions (Boukes & Hameleers, 2023; Walter et al., 2020).

Platformization and the changing structure of fact-checking

Recent scholarship has expanded fact-checking research beyond newsroom practices and correction effects. Digital platforms now shape the visibility, circulation, and correction of misinformation. Platform infrastructures influence which claims become visible, how misinformation spreads, how fact-checking labels are attached, and how users encounter corrections. This has increased attention to platform governance, third-party fact-checking, algorithmic moderation, content labeling, data access, and accountability (Cotter et al., 2022).

This platform-oriented perspective complicates journalism-centered views. In platform environments, fact-checking involves not only journalists and fact-checkers, but also technology companies, platform policies, algorithms, users, civil society organizations, and state institutions.

AI, automation, and multimodal misinformation

Another development concerns artificial intelligence, automated verification, deepfakes, and multimodal misinformation. Generative AI and synthetic media create new challenges because misleading information can appear in convincing textual, visual, audio, and video forms. Research shows that fact-checkers face increasing difficulty in detecting manipulated content, verifying digital evidence, and communicating uncertainty to audiences (Cazzamatta & Sarisakaloğlu, 2025; Weikmann & Lecheler, 2024).

AI-assisted tools may support claim detection, information monitoring, manipulated-media identification, and evidence retrieval. However, the literature also notes limitations

involving data quality, algorithmic opacity, bias, weak contextual understanding, and the difficulty of reducing complex truth claims to binary true/false classifications (Kavtaradze, 2024).

Audiences, engagement, and trust

Audience research is another important but less developed area. Although fact-checking aims to inform publics and reduce misinformation, many studies still focus on journalists, organizations, content, or platforms. Existing audience studies examine engagement with fact-checking content, credibility assessment, and the influence of corrections on attitudes, beliefs, or sharing behavior (Kim et al., 2022).

Audience response is shaped by more than factual accuracy. Political identity, media trust, emotional framing, platform habits, and social relationships can affect whether audiences accept or reject fact-checking messages.

Comparative contexts and Global South gaps

Fact-checking research has also become increasingly comparative. Studies examine differences across countries, media systems, political contexts, and institutional environments. These studies show that fact-checking is shaped by press freedom, political polarization, platform use, media trust, regulation, and civil society capacity (Cazzamatta & Santos, 2024; Cheruiyot & Ferrer-Conill, 2018).

However, much of the literature remains concentrated in Western or highly visible media systems. Research in Global South, non-Western, and smaller media contexts remains limited, even though misinformation often operates differently across political, cultural, linguistic, and technological settings.

From literature to analytical categories

The reviewed literature informed the analytical framework and thematic classification used in this study. Information disorder provided the problem context, while the digital information ecosystem organized the analysis around content, journalists, platforms, technologies, institutions, and audiences.

Based on this grounding, the study classified the selected literature into six themes: corrective mechanisms, journalistic practices, digital platforms, AI and technology, comparative and contextual studies, and audience and information ecosystems. These categories reflect the field's movement from a journalism-centered understanding toward a broader platform- and ecosystem-oriented perspective.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a state-of-knowledge survey approach by integrating a systematic literature review, qualitative content analysis, and keyword co-occurrence analysis. This design examines the general characteristics, thematic development, and conceptual structure of fact-checking research in communication studies. The systematic review supports transparent article selection, qualitative content analysis synthesizes themes, and keyword co-occurrence analysis maps relationships among key terms.

Search Strategy and Database Selection

The data were collected from SAGE Journals and Taylor & Francis Online, two major databases in communication, media, and journalism studies. These databases were selected because they provide strong coverage of peer-reviewed scholarship in communication studies,

digital journalism, media studies, political communication, platform research, and related interdisciplinary areas.

The search terms were defined as “fact-checking” OR “fact checking” OR “debunking.” The search was conducted within the abstract field in order to identify studies in which fact-checking was a central focus rather than a peripheral topic. The search was conducted in March 2026 without limiting the publication period.

The database selection was appropriate for a communication-oriented state-of-knowledge survey. However, using only two databases may exclude relevant studies indexed in broader multidisciplinary databases such as Scopus or Web of Science. This limitation is acknowledged in the discussion.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included in the review if they met the following criteria:

1. they were peer-reviewed journal articles;
2. fact-checking was a central focus of the study;
3. they were situated within communication studies, journalism studies, media studies, or related fields; and
4. the full text was accessible for analysis.

Articles were excluded if they:

1. mentioned factchecking only as a contextual or secondary issue;
2. focused primarily on computer engineering, artificial intelligence, or technical system design without a clear communication-related dimension;
3. examined psychological or behavioral effects at the individual level without linking the analysis to media, platforms, journalism, or communication systems;

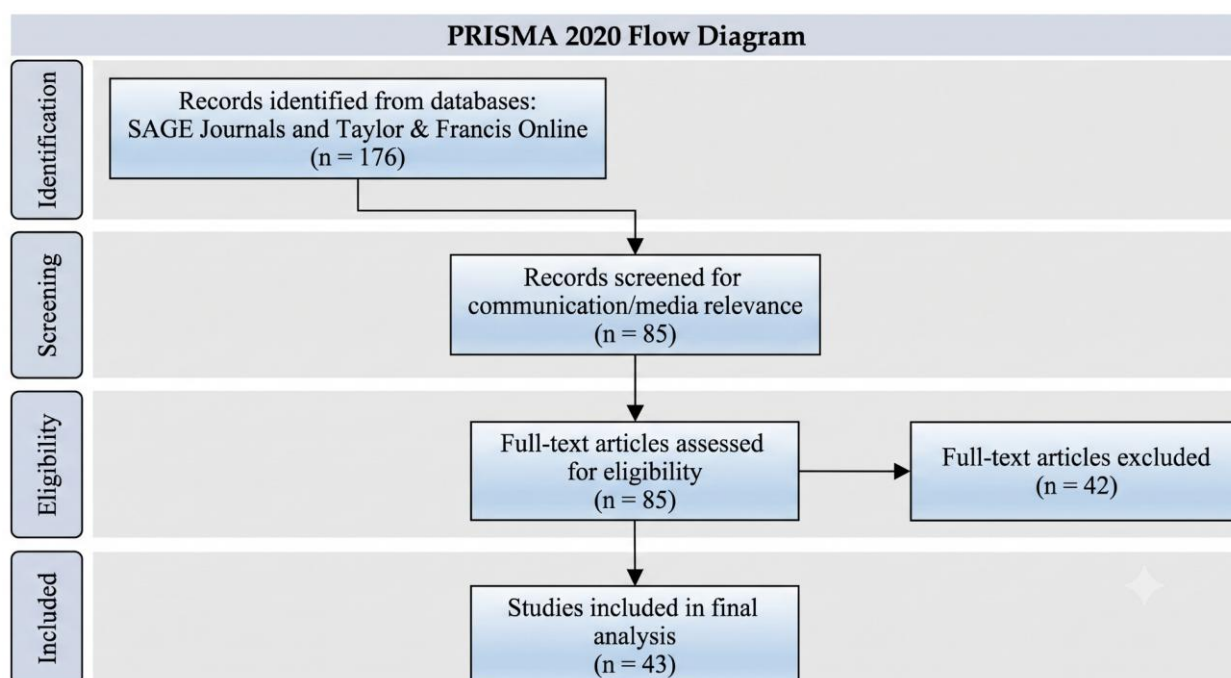
4. were conceptual articles without empirical data; or
5. were not journal research articles, such as editorials, book reviews, or conference proceedings.

Article Selection Process

The article selection process followed the logic of the PRISMA approach to ensure transparency and replicability (Moher et al., 2009). The search produced 176 articles. After screening for disciplinary relevance and communication-related scope, 85 articles remained. Full texts were then reviewed against the criteria, resulting in 43 peer-reviewed journal articles for final analysis.

Figure 2

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Article Selection



Data Extraction

Data were extracted from each selected article using a structured coding form. The extracted information included year of publication, author(s), journal, research objectives,

theoretical or conceptual focus, methods, unit of analysis, study context, key findings, keywords, and implications. These data supported descriptive analysis, thematic classification, and keyword co-occurrence analysis.

Thematic Coding and Theme Development

The thematic analysis followed a multi-stage coding process. First, the selected articles were read in full to identify their central focus, methods, units of analysis, and key findings. Second, initial descriptive codes were assigned to recurring topics, including corrective mechanisms, journalistic practice, platform governance, technological development, comparative contexts, and audience engagement. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader analytical themes.

The six themes were developed iteratively through comparison across articles. They were not imposed solely in advance, but emerged from repeated reading and refinement in relation to the study's conceptual framework. Information disorder and the digital information ecosystem guided interpretation.

Coding reliability was strengthened through iterative validation. Because this study used qualitative thematic synthesis rather than quantitative coding, no inter-coder reliability coefficient was calculated. Instead, the coding scheme and theme definitions were repeatedly checked against the extracted data, discussed by the authors, and refined until consistently applicable across the selected articles.

The final thematic categories were corrective mechanisms, journalistic practices, digital platforms, AI and technology, comparative and contextual studies, and audience and information ecosystems.

Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

Keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted using VOSviewer to examine the conceptual structure of fact-checking research. Keywords were extracted from the selected articles and standardized by checking spelling variations, merging similar terms, and treating equivalent terms consistently, such as “fact checking” and “fact-checking.”

The analysis identified frequently occurring keywords and their relationships. VOSviewer generated network and density visualizations showing whether fact-checking research remained centered on journalism and corrective practices or had expanded toward disinformation, platform governance, AI, and audience engagement.

Because the underlying bibliographic dataset did not include author-assigned keyword fields, keyword co-occurrence was computed from the title and abstract fields of the 43 selected articles using binary counting in VOSviewer's text-data mode, in which each term was counted once per document regardless of within-document frequency. The analysis therefore combined network and density visualizations with core bibliometric indicators. Table 8 reports the occurrence, number of links, and total link strength for the core terms identified in the network and density visualizations.

Ethical Considerations

This study analyzed only peer-reviewed journal articles that had already been published and made available through academic databases. It did not involve human participants, private personal data, interviews, experiments, or unpublished materials. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required.

Findings

The findings are organized according to the three research questions. First, the study examines the state of knowledge by analyzing themes, methods, units of analysis, and contexts. Second, it examines keyword co-occurrence patterns and the conceptual structure of the field. Third, it synthesizes trends, gaps, and future directions.

Overall, the 43 articles indicate that fact-checking research has evolved from a journalism-centered field into a broader area concerned with platforms, technological infrastructures, audience engagement, and information ecosystems. Recent studies increasingly examine platforms, AI-assisted verification, multimodal misinformation, and cross-national contexts.

The synthesis of the selected literature identified six major research themes: corrective mechanisms, journalistic practices, digital platforms, AI and technology, comparative and contextual studies, and audience and information ecosystems.

Research Themes

Table 1

Classification of Research Articles by Research Theme (n = 43)

Research Themes	Number of Articles
Journalistic practices	9
Corrective mechanisms	8
Digital platforms	7
Comparative / contextual studies	7
AI & technology	6
Audience & information ecosystems	6
Total	43

The distribution of themes suggests three important patterns. First, the relatively high number of studies on journalistic practices and corrective mechanisms indicates that fact-

checking research remains rooted in journalism studies and the normative concern with truth verification. Second, the emergence of studies on digital platforms, AI, and technology shows that the field has expanded beyond newsroom-centered perspectives. Third, the smaller number of studies on audiences and information ecosystems indicates an important research gap.

Research Methodologies

Table 2

Classification of Research Articles by Research Methodology (n = 43)

Research Methodology	Number of Articles
Qualitative research / qualitative content analysis	14
Quantitative research	10
Mixed-methods research	7
Computational / bibliometric analysis	6
Case study research	6
Total	43

The classification indicates that a diverse range of research methods has been employed in fact-checking research. Qualitative studies remain dominant, suggesting strong interest in interpretive analysis, institutional practice, and context-specific investigation. At the same time, the presence of computational and bibliometric approaches reflects growing attention to digital tools and large-scale data structures.

Units of Analysis

Table 3

Classification of Research Articles by Unit of Analysis (n = 43)

Unit of Analysis	Description	Number of Articles
News content / fact-check content	Text/article analysis	12
Journalists / fact-checkers	Work processes/profession	8
Platforms / algorithms	Facebook, Google, policy	7

Table 3

Classification of Research Articles by Unit of Analysis (n = 43) (Contd.)

Unit of Analysis	Description	Number of Articles
Audiences / users	Perception / engagement	6
Media systems / countries	Comparative / context	5
Institutions / organizations	Policy / governance	5
Total		43

Most studies focused on news content or fact-check content, followed by journalists or fact-checking practitioners and platforms/algorithms. Studies focusing on audiences or users remain fewer, reinforcing the argument that audience-centered fact-checking research remains underdeveloped.

Study Periods and Research Development

Table 4.

Classification of Research Articles by Study Period (n = 43)

Period	Key Characteristics	Number of Articles
Before 2016	Foundational concepts in journalism studies	5
2016–2020	Fake news / social media	15
2021–present	Systems / platforms / AI	23
Total		43

The temporal distribution shows that fact-checking research has expanded significantly since 2020. Earlier studies focused mainly on journalism and verification, while later studies shifted toward broader concerns involving social media, platform governance, AI-assisted verification, and ecosystem-level analysis.

Study Contexts

Table 5

Classification of Research Articles by Study Context (n = 43)

Study Context	Number of Articles
Global / cross-national	10
Developed countries	9
Developing / Global South contexts	7
Specific political contexts	6
Digital platforms	6
Unspecified	5
Total	43

The distribution of study contexts shows that fact-checking research has increasingly included cross-national and platform-based perspectives. However, research in developing and Global South contexts remains less visible than research situated in developed media systems.

Themes Across Study Periods

Table 6

Cross-Tabulation of Study Period and Research Theme (n = 43)

Research Theme	Before 2016	2016–2020	2021–present	Total
Corrective mechanisms	2	3	3	8
Journalistic practices	3	4	2	9
Digital platforms	0	2	5	7
AI & technology	0	1	5	6
Comparative / contextual studies	0	3	4	7
Audience & information ecosystems	0	2	4	6
Total	5	15	23	43

The cross-tabulation shows a clear shift in the field. Earlier studies were concentrated in journalistic practices and corrective mechanisms, whereas research after 2020 increasingly focused on platforms, AI and technology, comparative contexts, and audience-related questions.

Analytical Summary of Major Research Themes

Table 7

Analytical Summary of Major Research Themes in Fact-Checking Research

Research Theme	Main Characteristics	Contribution to the Field	Remaining Research Gaps
Corrective mechanisms	Examines fact-checking as a response to misinformation and disinformation.	Explains how fact-checking functions as a corrective intervention.	Limited understanding of long-term correction effects.
Journalistic practices	Focuses on journalistic routines, norms, and verification work.	Shows how fact-checking extends journalistic authority.	More research is needed on newsroom constraints and collaboration.
Digital platforms	Examines platforms, algorithms, and platform governance.	Highlights the platformization of fact-checking.	Limited cross-platform analysis.
AI and technology	Studies automated fact-checking, deepfakes, and synthetic media.	Expands fact-checking research toward technological and epistemic questions.	Ethical issues and human-AI collaboration need further study.
Comparative and contextual studies	Compares fact-checking across countries and media systems.	Demonstrates the influence of local context.	Global South remains underrepresented.
Audience and information ecosystems	Focuses on engagement, credibility, and user behavior.	Connects fact-checking to audience studies and the wider ecosystem.	Audience-centered studies remain limited.

Taken together, these findings address RQ1 by mapping the current state of knowledge across research themes, methods, units of analysis, and contexts.

Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

To address RQ2, keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted to examine the conceptual structure of fact-checking research. The analysis shows that “fact-checking” functions as the central concept linking misinformation, disinformation, journalism, digital platforms, and audience engagement. This pattern indicates that the field has developed around false and misleading information while expanding toward communication systems, platform governance, technological change, and user participation.

The keyword network shows several interconnected clusters. One cluster centers on fact-checking, misinformation, disinformation, and corrective responses. A second cluster relates to journalism, media, and professional verification. A third cluster involves digital platforms, social media, algorithms, and governance. An emerging cluster concerns AI, automation, deepfakes, and visual misinformation, indicating the growing importance of technological challenges in verification work.

The density visualization further supports this interpretation. Terms such as “fact-checking,” “disinformation,” “misinformation,” “journalism,” and “audience engagement” appear as conceptually dense areas of the map. This indicates that these concepts are not isolated topics but recurring points of connection across the selected literature.

The network also reveals uneven development. Journalism, misinformation, and disinformation are strongly represented, whereas AI ethics, multimodal misinformation, Global South contexts, and long-term audience effects remain less visible. This imbalance supports

the finding that the field is shifting toward platform- and ecosystem-oriented perspectives while leaving several areas underdeveloped.

Figure 3

Keyword Co-occurrence Network on Fact-Checking Research

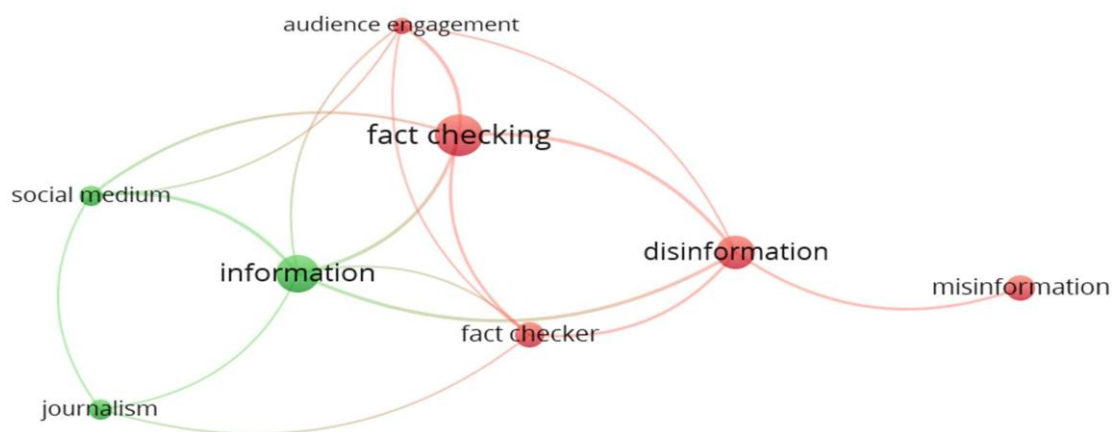


Figure 4

Keyword Density in Fact-Checking Research

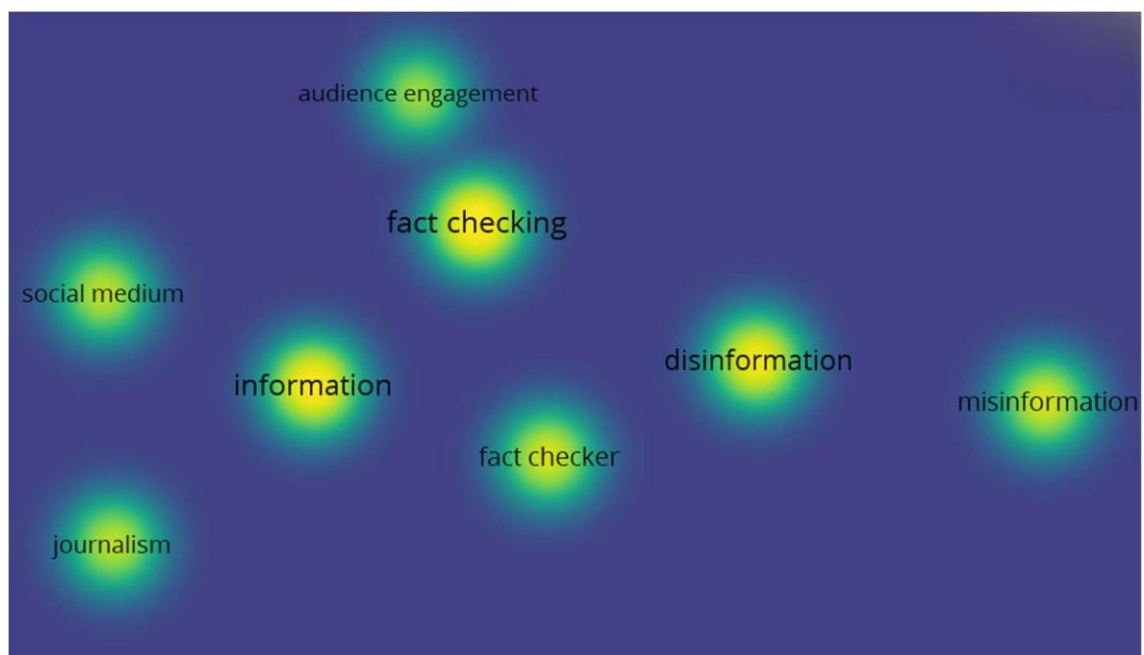


Table 8

Bibliometric Indicators of Core Keywords in Fact-Checking Research (n = 43)

Keyword	Occurrences	Links	Total Link Strength
fact checking	35	7	79
information	18	7	45
journalism	18	6	37
fact checker	15	7	44
social media	14	7	36
disinformation	12	7	33
misinformation	12	7	28
audience engagement	4	6	12

Table 8 shows that “fact checking” recorded the highest occurrence (n = 35) and total link strength (79), confirming its role as the network’s central node. “Information” and “journalism” functioned as secondary hubs. “Audience engagement,” despite fewer occurrences (n = 4), maintained strong connectivity, suggesting an emerging but still concentrated research area.

These keyword patterns support the conceptual framework by showing that fact-checking research is structured around information disorder, journalistic verification, platform infrastructures, technological change, and audience engagement. The network therefore supports understanding fact-checking as a communicative mechanism within the wider digital information ecosystem.

Taken together, these findings address RQ2 by explaining the conceptual structure of the field through the relationships among core keywords and thematic clusters.

Discussion

The findings show that fact-checking research in communication studies has moved from a primarily journalism-centered field toward a broader area concerned with platforms, technologies, audiences, and information ecosystems. Fact-checking is now examined not only as professional verification, but also as a communicative mechanism embedded in platform infrastructures, algorithmic visibility, AI-assisted verification, and audience engagement.

Theoretical Contribution

The study's theoretical contribution lies in repositioning fact-checking within the digital information ecosystem. Rather than treating misinformation and disinformation as isolated problems of false content, this study conceptualizes them as communication problems shaped by relationships among content producers, media institutions, platforms, algorithms, technologies, and audiences.

The synthesis also extends discussions in digital journalism and information disorder research. It demonstrates that fact-checking has moved beyond the traditional gatekeeping model. In platform-mediated environments, verification becomes more complex because the circulation, visibility, and correction of false information are shaped by platform logic, user engagement, technological affordances, and cross-platform flows of content.

This contribution also differs from prior syntheses. Whereas Walter et al. (2020) focused mainly on fact-checking effectiveness and the conditions under which corrections work, this study maps a broader communication structure connecting correction, journalism, platforms, AI-assisted verification, comparative contexts, and audience engagement.

Practical Implications

The findings also have practical implications for media organizations, fact-checkers, platforms, educators, and policymakers. For journalists and fact-checking organizations, the study suggests that fact-checking should move beyond the simple correction of false claims. Effective fact-checking increasingly requires contextual explanation, source transparency, visual verification skills, and attention to how corrective information circulates across platforms.

For digital platforms, the findings highlight the importance of transparency in content moderation, algorithmic ranking, and third-party fact-checking partnerships. Because platforms shape the visibility and circulation of both misinformation and corrections, fact-checking cannot be separated from platform governance.

For educators and media literacy initiatives, the study suggests that fact-checking should be integrated into broader communication and digital literacy education. For policymakers, the findings suggest that responses to misinformation should combine fact-checking, media literacy, platform accountability, and protection of freedom of expression.

Integration of AI, Media Literacy, and Platform Governance

Future strategies for addressing information disorder should integrate AI-assisted fact-checking, media literacy, and platform governance. AI tools may support monitoring, claim detection, image verification, and large-scale analysis. However, concerns about accuracy, transparency, bias, and automated truth verification mean that AI should support rather than replace human judgment.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the review was based on articles retrieved from SAGE Journals and Taylor & Francis Online. Although these databases provide strong coverage of communication, media, journalism, and digital platform research, the exclusion of broader multidisciplinary databases may have limited the scope of the review.

Second, the search strategy focused on the terms “fact-checking,” “fact checking,” and “debunking” in the abstract field. This approach may have excluded relevant studies that used alternative terms such as verification, rumor correction, content moderation, or misinformation intervention.

Third, this study focused on peer-reviewed journal articles and excluded conference proceedings, policy reports, professional documents, and purely conceptual articles. While this decision improved the academic consistency of the dataset, it may have excluded important practitioner knowledge and policy-oriented discussions.

Fourth, keyword co-occurrence analysis was used to support thematic synthesis. Although this revision reports occurrences, links, and total link strength, the analysis used terms from titles and abstracts rather than author-assigned keywords. The findings should therefore be interpreted as conceptual mapping rather than a comprehensive bibliometric evaluation.

Future Research Directions

Future research should give greater attention to four areas: audience-centered studies on trust, resistance, and action; AI-assisted and multimodal fact-checking related to deepfakes, synthetic media, and visual misinformation; Global South and non-Western contexts; and cross-platform misinformation flows and governance.

Taken together, these directions suggest that fact-checking research is moving toward a more interdisciplinary and system-oriented agenda. For communication studies, this means that fact-checking should be studied not only as a correction practice, but also as a field through which broader questions of truth, trust, platform power, technological mediation, and public communication can be examined.

Taken together, these findings address RQ3 by identifying the major research trends, remaining knowledge gaps, and future research directions that characterize the development of fact-checking research in communication studies.

Conclusion

This study examined the state of knowledge on fact-checking research in communication studies by integrating a systematic literature review, qualitative content analysis, and keyword co-occurrence analysis. Based on 43 peer-reviewed journal articles, the study mapped the major research themes, methodological approaches, units of analysis, keyword relationships, research trends, and remaining knowledge gaps in the field.

The findings show that fact-checking research has developed from a journalism-centered area into a broader system-oriented field. The literature can be organized into six themes: corrective mechanisms, journalistic practices, digital platforms, AI and technology, comparative and contextual studies, and audience and information ecosystems.

Keyword co-occurrence analysis confirms this shift. The central position of “fact-checking” and its connections with “disinformation,” “journalism,” and “audience engagement” show that the field is organized around both institutional and audience-centered

concerns. Platform- and technology-related terms further reflect the growing importance of AI-assisted verification, multimodal misinformation, deepfakes, and platform infrastructures.

The main conceptual contribution of this study is to position fact-checking as a communicative mechanism within the wider information ecosystem. Fact-checking should therefore be examined as a process connecting journalists, fact-checking organizations, platforms, algorithms, technologies, audiences, educators, and policymakers.

Practically, the study suggests that responses to misinformation and disinformation should not rely on fact-checking alone. More effective strategies require the integration of professional verification, transparent platform governance, AI-assisted tools, audience engagement, and media literacy education.

Despite these contributions, the study has limitations. The review was limited to articles retrieved from SAGE Journals and Taylor & Francis Online, and the search strategy focused on specific terms. In addition, the study focused on peer-reviewed journal articles and did not include policy reports, professional documents, conference proceedings, or practitioner-based knowledge.

Future research should expand databases, keywords, and document types for a more comprehensive mapping of fact-checking research. More attention should also be given to audience effects, long-term correction outcomes, AI-assisted verification, visual and multimodal misinformation, platform accountability, and Global South and non-Western contexts.

References

- Amazeen, M. A. (2015). Revisiting the epistemology of fact-checking journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 16(4), 534–550. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.945543>
- Boukes, M., & Hameleers, M. (2023). Fighting lies with facts or humor: Comparing the effectiveness of satirical and regular fact-checks in response to misinformation and disinformation. *Communication Monographs*, 90(1), 69–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2022.2097284>
- Cazzamatta, R., & Santos, A. (2024). Checking verifications during the 2022 Brazilian run-off election: How fact-checking organizations exposed falsehoods and contributed to the accuracy of the public debate. *Journalism*, 25(10), 2022–2043. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849231196080>
- Cazzamatta, R., & Sarısakaloğlu, A. (2025). AI-generated misinformation: A case study on emerging trends in fact-checking practices across Brazil, Germany, and the United Kingdom. *Emerging Media*, 3(2), 214–251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27523543251344971>
- Cheruiyot, D., & Ferrer-Conill, R. (2018). “Fact-checking Africa”: Epistemologies, data and the expansion of journalistic discourse. *Digital Journalism*, 6(8), 964–975. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1493940>
- Cotter, K., DeCook, J. R., & Kanthawala, S. (2022). Fact-checking the crisis: COVID-19, infodemics, and the platformization of truth. *Social Media + Society*, 8(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211069048>
- Grut, S. (2026). Convergent epistemic practices in visual fact-checking. *Digital Journalism*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2026.2638939>
- Himma-Kadakas, M., & Ojamets, I. (2022). Debunking false information: Investigating journalists’ fact-checking skills. *Digital Journalism*, 10(5), 866–887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2022.2043173>
- Jung, A.-K., Ross, B., & Stieglitz, S. (2020). Caution: Rumors ahead—A case study on the debunking of false information on Twitter. *Big Data & Society*, 7(2), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720980127>
- Kavtaradze, L. (2024). Challenges of automating fact-checking: A technographic case study. *Emerging Media*, 2(2), 236–258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27523543241280195>
- Kim, H. S., Suh, Y. J., Kim, E., Chong, E., Hong, H., Song, B., Ko, Y., & Choi, J. S. (2022). Fact-checking and audience engagement: A study of content analysis and audience behavioral data of fact-checking coverage from news media. *Digital Journalism*, 10(5), 781–800. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.2006073>

- Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., & Altman, D. G. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement. *PLoS Medicine*, 6(7), Article e1000097. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097>
- Petticrew, M., & Roberts, H. (2006). *Systematic reviews in the social sciences: A practical guide*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Walter, N., Cohen, J., Holbert, R. L., & Morag, Y. (2020). Fact-checking: A meta-analysis of what works and for whom. *Political Communication*, 37(3), 350–375. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1723741>
- Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Council of Europe.
- Weikmann, T., & Lecheler, S. (2024). Cutting through the hype: Understanding the implications of deepfakes for the fact-checking actor-network. *Digital Journalism*, 12(10), 1505–1522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2023.2194665>