

## **FACT-CHECKING POLITICAL INFORMATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL FACT-CHECKING BY DUBAWA GHANA AND GHANA FACT DURING GHANA'S 2020 GENERAL ELECTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Fact-checking media content has gained prominence for its role in mitigating the raging effects of fake news. Using a qualitative methodology, specifically, semi-structured interviews, the study examines the conduct of political fact-checking by two organizations namely, Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact during Ghana's 2020 general election. The study realized that the political fact-checking activities of these organizations during the elections included; capacity building of journalists and media organizations, searching for political claims on the various social media platforms, determining fact-check worthiness, using digital tools as well as desktop research, accessing information from available and reliable sources, preparing the fact-check report and determining the verdict. The study recommends that Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Skills should be incorporated into the country's various educational curricula. In addition, measures to criminalize creators of misinformation should be advocated for by individuals and organizations who envision a healthy political and media ecosystem for Ghana. However, what constitutes criminalization for the creation of misinformation should be carefully stated in a way that will not mean stifling freedom of speech.

**Keywords:** Political Fact-Checking, Echo Chamber Theory, Media Literacy Education, Fake News, Elections

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Sanny and Selormey (2020) assert that fake news is as old as the concept of news itself but has come into intense focus through the emergence of social media. In underlying the cause of the rapid spread of fake news, Bounegru et al. (2017) observe that the rise in circulation of fake news is because of the rise in the use of social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, YouTube, alternative media, and blogs.

Ghana's 2020 Presidential and Parliamentary elections held on December 7 marked the country's 8th general election since the birth of the fourth republic. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated safety protocols, political parties and politicians in Ghana leveraged social media like never before to engage in political communication during

the 2020 general election. During these media encounters, some claims were made by politicians to convince the electorates about which political party or candidate was best suited to political office.

To ensure credibility and integrity in the art of information warfare, most of these claims were subjected to the truth test by independent fact-checking organizations such as Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact. Similarly, the Media Foundation for West Africa (2016) found that more than half of the ninety-eight (98) political claims made during Ghana's 2016 general election campaign were false, half-truths, or misleading after being fact-checked.

As indicated early on, the rise in appreciation and usage of the internet and social media has contributed to the rise in political misinformation. Politicians, political parties, political pundits, and political sympathizers, as well as pro-political media organizations and journalists, have a presence across all the various social media platforms with a huge following. Independent media organizations in Ghana such as Media General Ltd, Multimedia Ltd, Despite Media, Omni Media, and Excellence in Broadcasting (EIB), also engage in the use of social media and are not just limited to conveying information to the public using radio and television.

During election campaigns, politicians and political parties purchase time and space on these media platforms to convey their political messages to the electorates and the entire public and also leverage their digital literacy to engage social media users through the live broadcasts of their events on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Their presence and activities online are aimed at complementing their offline campaigns.

Almost all stakeholders in a general election have a presence on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter among others. In many instances, their offline and online campaign activities occur simultaneously due to technological advancements in social media. The 'live' option available on platforms like Twitter and Facebook makes this simultaneousness possible. For instance, a manifesto launch ceremony by the National Democratic Party (NDP) organized on-ground can be broadcast live on Facebook either on the social media page of the NDP or the page of a party sympathizer, pro media house, or an independent media organization.

This study provides empirical data on political fact-checking during Ghana's 2020 general election. This research answers the question of how political claims were fact-checked to maximize media and information literacy and minimize false news. In unearthing the processes of the truth test, this study explores the styles and procedures of fact-checking practiced by Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact during Ghana's 2020 general election. After exploring the fact-checking of these two organizations, this study further conducts a comparative analysis, to find out the similarities and differences in their fact-checks of similar political claims.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 The Internet, Social Media, and Political Misinformation**

There is convincing literature on the use of social media like Facebook and Twitter by politicians, political parties, party sympathizers, and pro-party media houses, to create and share misinformation during elections. Examining the widespread political misinformation on social media in Italy's 2012 general election, Mocanu et al. (2015) found that political untruths were highly shared by members of the public. They attributed the rationale behind the high circulation of political misinformation to the rising distrust the citizens of Italy had for mainstream media. This high circulation of political misinformation on social media is not limited to European and Italian politics but is evident in the politics of the United States of America, specifically the 2016 presidential race between the Republicans Donald Trump and the Democrats Hilary Clinton (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) estimated that false political claims in support of the candidacy of Donald Trump were shared thirty (30) million times within three months on Facebook, whereas false political claims in favor of the candidacy of Barack Obama's former Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, were shared eight (8) million times on Facebook. It was further indicated that, in all, one hundred and fifteen (115) false stories and forty-one (41) false stories in support of Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton respectively, were circulated on Facebook during the 2016 Presidential election campaign. Other researchers like Guess et al. (2019) and Grinberg et al. (2019) have written on the circulation of political misinformation on social media during the election campaign of the 2016 US Presidential election. Notably, the 2016 U.S. Presidential election is arguably the most talked about in the literature on political misinformation on social media.

All these assertions of the creation and sharing of misinformation on the internet, especially on social media platforms can be traced to the notion by Donati (2019) that the rise in internet and social media has substantially increased the accessibility to political information. Digital devices such as smartphones and laptops were used to circulate political information via text message in the 2007-8 general election in Kenya (Goldstein & Rotich, 2010). Madrid-Morales et al. (2021) explored the desire and motivation for the sharing of misinformation on social media in some select African countries including Ghana and found out that humor could be the rationale behind the sharing of political misinformation. The study was however limited to the perspectives of university students and not an actual study of a particular Presidential election campaign (Madrid-Morales et al., 2021).

## **2.2 Understanding Political Fact-checking**

Political fact-checking is the journalistic process that keeps false political statements out of the sight and consumption of the public (Amazeen, 2013). Political fact-checking filters statements from political figures in mass media. Fact-checkers are the watchdogs that minimize falsehood from politicians and political parties. Europe and North America have independent political fact-checking organizations working to minimize false news from politicians. They include Politifact, Le Monde, and Pagella Politica in the United States of America, France, and Italy respectively (Henry et al., 2021). Conversely, Code for Africa, Open Up and Africa Check are leading major data and fact-checking operations in sub-Saharan Africa (Cheruiyot & Conill, 2018). Nigeria can boast of Dubawa Nigeria, which has a branch, Dubawa Ghana whiles Ghana can make mention of Ghana Fact and Fact Check Ghana.

This journalistic practice of fact-checking has proven to be a worrying phenomenon to some politicians and political parties simply because it prevents them from telling more lies, exposes they're already told lies, and places them on the radar for false news. Fact-checking does more than separate false news from credible news. It can also damage the reputation of politicians and political parties, hence the more reason it does not sit well with politicians. Nyhan and Reifler (2014) are of the view that fact-checking can be a monitoring tool for politicians to demotivate them from making untrue claims.

Notable among politicians that have expressed disgust at fact-checking is Donald Trump, Former President of the United States of America. Kessler (2016, p. 1) highlights Trump's disregard for fact-checking, saying "Trump does not bother to respond to fact-checking inquiries". In recent years, Donald Trump has become the popular choice for the discussion of fact-checking. On May 26, 2020, Twitter labeled a tweet from Donald Trump as one that has either been fact-checked or needs fact-checking. This was part of Twitter's policy to minimize the spread of false news on its platform (Conger & Alba, 2020).

### **2.3 Fake News and the Echo Chamber Theory**

According to Hart et al. (2009), the Theory of the Echo Chamber relies on selective exposure to online media content. People are inclined to favor political information that confirms and reinforces already existing political viewpoints and beliefs while ignoring information that is incongruent with already existing viewpoints. Sunstein (2009) also posits that Echo Chamber in politics is a metaphorical situation where only similar political news media content is shared amongst online political groups to support existing political beliefs. However, Iyengar and Hann (2009) have examined selective exposure to online media content and concluded that individuals within an Echo Chamber tend to favor information that aligns with their existing beliefs and does not entirely avoid opposing views as highlighted by Hart et al. (2009).

The Theory of Echo Chamber was first used to describe right-wing American media talk radio, specifically fox news (Jamieson & Capella, 2008). Within the field of politics, when there is a tendency for a group of online political sympathizers of a political party to be privy to only a one-sided debate of political news due to their common interests even though that political news might not be necessarily factual, that social group of political sympathizers can be said to be in an Echo Chamber.

This study seeks to premise the conduct of political fact-checking employed by Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact during the 2020 general election within the Theory of Echo Chamber in online political communication. The theory describes how the online political community also referred to as social media users, selectively and deliberately regard and accept political information that is consistent with their political beliefs and avoid counter online political information that is contrary to their political viewpoints. This situation can lead to the reinforcement of political polarization (Brundidge, 2010). Political polarization and extremism associated with news media on social media have been evidenced in studies including Lawrence et al. (2010) and Conover et al. (2011).

Additionally, Bücher (2012) states that due to the notion of selective exposure to online political information, persons within the Echo Chamber face little resistance since they are a

community of like-minded individuals. Therefore, this study explores how the likely political polarization and extremism associated with the Echo Chamber effect was minimized by Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact during Ghana's 2020 general election since digital media literacy which includes fact-checking has been noted by researchers including Dubois and Blank (2018) to be the best way to avoid the Echo Chamber effect in online political news.

## 2.4 Media Literacy Education and Fact-Checking

Martens (2010) states that media literacy education is a multifaceted and contested phenomenon thus, there exist various definitions of media literacy education as a concept. For instance, Lim and Nekmat (2008) define media literacy education as the ability to appreciate and have control over media content including text, videos, audio, and images. Also, Tyner (2003) considers media literacy education to mean the competencies to fully grasp and act on the purpose and effect of media content. It can be deduced that the foremost underlying principle in the definitions is the ability of media consumers to be active and not passive. In essence, media literate individuals are active media consumers since they critically subject media content to various forms of scrutiny and examination before consuming and redistributing, especially on social media. According to Silverstone (2004), media literacy ensures active citizenship therefore, it is considered a pre-requisite for full participation in modern societies.

Within the context of this study, the researchers argue that fact-checking and media literacy education are inextricably connected, and that fact-checking is a major component of the curricula for media literacy education since the main aim of fact-checking is to filter media messages and establish the truthfulness or otherwise of any given media content to ensure a well-informed media society devoid of the dangers of misinformation. This means that the significant presence of media literature will minimize the excesses of media content and promote the trustworthiness of the media. This study again considers the concept of media literacy education as relevant to this study due to its ability to counter extremism caused by misinformation in societies as evidenced in Ramasubramanian (2007).

Based on the review of available literature about fact-checking political news, the researchers settled on the following objective:

1. Examine the political fact-checking activities of Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact during Ghana's 2020 general election.
2. Identify what made a political claim worth a fact-check during Ghana's 2020 general election.
3. Examine the source, topic, and verdicts of political claims fact-checked during Ghana's 2020 general election.

## 3.0 METHOD

This study adopted the qualitative method in data collection and analysis, premised on the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. This study's choice of qualitative methodology, particularly in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis is a replication of the methodology of Cheruiyot and Conill (2018), who explored the operations



of three fact-checking organizations in Africa namely, Code for Africa, Africa Check, and Open Up.

Sampling for this study was selectively done to ascertain relevant data that would successfully answer the study's questions, hence purposive/judgment sampling technique was used for this study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that occurs when the sample agreed upon for the study is solely based on the researcher's sound judgment (Ken, 2010). The sample size agreed upon by the researchers for the conduct of this study was six (6) fact-checkers with relevant information for the study — three (3) each from Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact. These organizations arguably represent the most active organizations during Ghana's 2020 general election while the sample size was influenced by the time frame for the study.

To enable the researchers to analyze the in-depth interviews conducted, all interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of all interviewees and transcribed accordingly. These transcripts were thoroughly read and subjected to thematic analysis to understand and compare the political fact-checking activities employed by both fact-checking organizations during Ghana's 2020 general election. Kondracki and Wellman (2002) posit that thematic analysis can be the most suitable analytic tool when dealing with responses and narratives from in-depth interviews. Furthermore, Downe-Wamboldt (1992) opined that for a researcher to comprehensively grasp a situation or phenomenon under study, thematic analysis should be used in data analysis.

In obtaining data for this study, the researchers adopted generally accepted ethical attitudes including transparency, confidentiality, consent, and respect for authority. Throughout the study, consents were duly sought for and granted by all participants. According to Cropley (2021), "participants have a right to expect that data obtained with them will not be published or otherwise revealed in a way that makes it possible to identify individual respondents." (p. 79). Therefore, the ethical principle of confidentiality and anonymity was essential to this research. Furthermore, the researcher conducted all interviews online, using Zoom Cloud Meetings to prevent physical contact since physical contact might expose both participants and the researchers to possible risks of contracting COVID-19.

#### **4.0 RESULTS**

This section presents the findings in the following thematic areas; political fact-checking during Ghana's 2020 general election, equitable media and information literacy skills, political fact-check worthiness, political claims on social media, automated fact-checking, human fact-checking, verdicts off political fact-checks, writing of political fact-check reports and media partnership. In fulfillment of the principle of anonymity indicated in the previous section, this study identifies all interviewees using the following codes: INDUB1 (Interviewee 1 from Dubawa Ghana), INDUB2 (Interviewee 2 from Dubawa Ghana), INDUB3 (Interviewee 3 from Dubawa Ghana), INGF1 (Interviewee 1 from Ghana Fact), INGF2 (Interviewee 2 from Ghana Fact) and INGF3 (Interviewee 3 from Ghana Fact).

#### **4.1 Political Fact-checking During Ghana's 2020 General Election**

The political fact-checking activities employed by Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact during Ghana's 2020 general election included chronologically; the capacity building of journalists and media organizations across the country, searching for political claims by being active on the various social media platforms, mainly WhatsApp and Facebook, determining fact-check worthiness, using digital tools as well as desktop research and or contacting and accessing information from available, multiple and reliable sources, preparing the fact-check report and determining the verdict/rating (INDUB3 & INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021). The aforementioned activities were applied during the election campaign, on the day of the election (December 7, 2021) and the day of the declaration of the results (December 9, 2021).

#### **4.2 Equitable Media and Information Literacy Skills (Regional Balance)**

Findings from INGF3 (personal communication, October 04, 2021) and INDUB3 (personal communication, October 27, 2021) indicated that political fact-checking began with media literacy education hence, building the capacity of select journalists and media organizations across all the sixteen (16) regions of Ghana to equip them with the requisite skills needed to confirm or debunk political claims during Ghana's 2020 general election. This meant that the capacity building was all-inclusive since it included all the 16 regions of Ghana hence, there was no geographic discrimination in media literacy education. Both fact-checking organizations ensured equitable distribution of essential fact-checking skills to all regions (INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

For both organizations, providing media literacy education to media organizations and the general public appeared to be the solid foundation upon which they conducted political fact-checking during Ghana's election in 2020. The impact of their trained media personnel in the sixteen (16) regions proved to be beneficial to their output because mobility, although possible, would not have ensured timely fact-checks. According to INDUB1 (personal communication, September 29, 2021), Dubawa Ghana conducted training for several media organizations, bloggers, and some members of the election-related bodies to train them on how to spot fake news, and how to cross-check and verify or debunk it. They also engaged in some media literacy activities to equip the general public with the needed skills and knowledge to stop the spread of misinformation and disinformation (INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

Furthermore, INGF2 (personal communication, October 02, 2021), noted that three (3) months before elections, Ghana Fact went round the sixteen (16) regions and trained newsrooms on how to conduct fact-check(ing). Additionally, Ghana Fact created the 'Fact-Checking Network' which was made up of more than 100 journalists spread across the country, drawn from more than 30 media organizations. Through this network, Ghana Fact helped set up fact-checking desks in the newsrooms of these media organizations (INGF3, personal communication, October 04, 2021).

These statements also indicate the level of nationwide collaboration and partnership the fact-checking organizations engaged in during Ghana's 2020 general election as well as the awareness creation on media and information literacy. A typical awareness creation dubbed 'Seven Ways to Spot Fake News' was published by Ghana Fact on December 1, 2021, a few days before Election Day. Additionally, 'Pay Attention! Don't Fall for Cloned Websites' was

published by Ghana Fact on December 3, 2021. Dunaway Ghana also published 'Beginner Tips for Fact-Checking Videos: A Case of Study of EC's Purported Verdict Declaration Video'. All these are aimed at equipping the citizenry with the basic media and information literacy skills needed in Ghana's election in 2020.

#### 4.3 Political Fact-Check Worthiness

The fact-check worthiness of a political claim was what determined if a political claim should be subjected to scrutiny by a fact-checker or not. Both fact-checking organizations considered similar factors before confirming the fact-check worthiness of a claim. The factors which dominated the fact-check worthiness of political claims across both fact-checking organizations included in no particular order; virality, national interest such as security, and the prominence of the claimant. This study realized that when a political claim was being widely circulated on social media by the citizenry, it was considered fact-check worthy. If the claim tended to influence the favorable/unfavorable image of a politician or political party and influence the outcome of the election, it was considered fact-check worthy. If a political claim came from a prominent person with a large following, i.e., most individuals in the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC), it was considered fact-check worthy and if a political claim had the potential to cause insecurity, it was considered fact-check worthy (INDUB1 & INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

When interviewed, INGF3 (personal communication, October 03, 2021) and INDUB2 (personal communication, September 29, 2021) indicated that political claims by and or against the two leading contenders in Ghana's 2020 presidential election namely, incumbent President Nana Addo Dankwah Akufo-Addo of the NPP and former President John Dramani Mahama of the NDC, were fact-check worthy and were given significant attention due to the virality and prominence of their personalities. Also, political claims on Election Day, particularly at the various election polling stations and the electoral regulatory body thus, the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana, gained the needed attention from both fact-checking organizations due to virality, national interests, and the potential to disrupt national security as well as the ability to influence the outcome of the election (INGF1, INDUB1 & INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021). This did not mean that a claim from a person or group with somewhat little prominence was not fact-check worthy. Various fact-checkers described what constituted political fact-check worthiness:

We will not say because that person is not prominent or the proximity is not there so we will not fact-check. As far as the content has to do with the public and has the tendency to misinform and disinform the public and it falls within our editorial policy, we will not hesitate to fact-check. (INGF2, personal communication, October 02, 2021)

Furthermore, both organizations confessed that some political fact-check worthy claims were not fact-checked due to understaffing and the overwhelming nature of claims they encountered during Ghana's 2020 general election (INDUB1 & INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021). Admittedly, both fact-checking organizations hardly missed viral claims, particularly those which involved leading political candidates and political parties and the Electoral Commission as well as political claims that bothered national security (INGF2, personal communication, October 02 & INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021).



Additionally, both organizations questioned the virality as well as the personality of the claimant. They tried to fact-check as wide claims as possible and did not pick based on whims. Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact tried not to miss political claims that went viral and bothered national security, but the issue of understaffing appeared to be the major setback they encountered in fact-checking political claims about Ghana's election 2020 (INDUB1 & INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

#### 4.4 Political Claims on Social Media

According to INDUB3 (personal communication, September 27, 2021) and INGF1 (personal communication, September 29, 2021), both fact-checking organizations picked most of the political claims fact-checked in Ghana's 2020 general election from social media platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp political pages and Twitter as well as blogs and some known media websites. This study realized that Facebook, followed by Whatsapp and Twitter users led in the dissemination of political and election-related claims which were largely made against and or by the two main contending flag bearers and political parties namely, incumbent President Nana Addo Dankwah Akufo-Addo of the NPP and former President John Dramani Mahama of the NDC. Aside from these two leading Presidential contenders, claims were also by and or against Members of Parliament. A typical one involved the then Hon. Member of Parliament for Awutu Senya Constituency cum Deputy Minister for Communications and Digitalization, George Andah (INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021). The most fact-checked topics included but were not limited to, education, economy, vote-buying, bribery and corruption, and Covid-19 (INGF2, personal communication, October 02, 2021).

In addition, INDUB2 (personal communication, September 29, 2021), reiterated that most of the claims fact-checked were from social media. For example, the viral video that Akufo Addo had received a bribe of 40,000 Ghana cedis or dollars in 2017 while he was still President was taken from social media. Facebook was predominant because of its online groups made up of NDC and NPP members to whom people can just push misinformation (INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021). Facebook and Whatsapp were monitored since they are the leading social media platform in the country. Also, Twitter is a platform that generates lots of attention and engagement (INGF3, personal communication, October 4, 2021).

Moreover, this study found out that political and electoral claims did not necessarily refer to claims made by and or against politicians and political parties but included all kinds of claims that could influence not just the decision-making of electorates, but the entire political climate of the country. For example, this fact-check report 'Four heavily built men arrested for impersonating security officers' by Ghana Fact with an unknown source. The wording of this claim suggests that this is not a claim made by and or against a politician or political party. However, what qualified as a political and electoral claim was not limited to the mention of politicians and political parties, but rather the mention of all electoral related information including polling stations, ballot boxes, voters, security, and electoral logistics among others, hence qualified as a claim which was fact-checked in Ghana's 2020 general election (INDUB1, INGF1 & INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

#### **4.5 Automated Fact-Checking, Human Fact-Checking, and Verdicts of Political Fact-checks**

This study also gathered information on the processes which led to the verdicts or ratings of political fact-checks. INGF2 (personal communication, October 02, 2021), INGF3 (personal communication, October 04, 2021), and INDUB3 (personal communication, September 27, 2021) stated the two main processes included the use of digital tools and contacting sources of information, thus automated fact-checking and human fact-checking, respectively. According to INDUB3, the choice of the process used in political fact-checking by both fact-checking organizations was claim-dependent. This meant that no particular process was applied to all political claims, but rather the choice in process was dependent on claim typology, that is the nature of the claim. Fact-checkers used either digital tools, desktop research or contacted readily available, multiple, and reliable sources of information to either debunk or confirm a political claim.

The use of digital tools appeared to be the simplest and quickest way that provided political fact-check reports for public consumption since it did not need any form of contacting individuals to access information about claims (INGF3, personal communication, October 04, 2021). This use of digital tools to debunk or confirm political claims during Ghana's 2020 general election is a testament to the notion indicated by researchers including Graves (2018), that automated fact-checking best cures the rapid spread of fake news on the internet. Digital tools used in fact-checking political claims during the election included but were not limited to Google reverse image search, Google map, forensically and video verification (INDUB1 & INGF1, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

INGF3 (personal communication, October 04, 2021) noted that whiles relying on automated fact-checking were simple and quick, the other process which included fact-checkers contacting sources of information proved challenging to both fact-checking organizations, hence resulting in fact-checkers spending close to days debunking or confirming a political claim. Sources of information, mostly government officials were not forthcoming with the needed information and were not also reliable. According to INGF2 (personal communication, October 02, 2021), one can be contacting the source and they might not be forthcoming with information. Therefore, Asak and Molale (2020) have argued that the unavailability of sources and the time-consuming nature of fact-checking can lead to publication pressure from competing organizations. Also, Zhang and Li (2020) posit that relying on sources such as government officials and public institutions can result in fact-checkers distributing disinformation. However, it is noteworthy to indicate that this study reflected only the time-consuming component of fact-checking and did not reflect instances of fact-checkers distributing disinformation and falling for publication pressure.

#### **4.6 Verdicts of Political Fact-checks**

INGF3 (personal communication, October 03, 2021) described verdicts, also known as ratings in the context of political fact-checking, as the outcome of a claim, after thorough scrutiny which included the use of digital tools and human sources of information. Verdicts used by both fact-checking organizations included true, false, mostly true, mostly false, partly true, partly false, unproven, misleading, insufficient evidence, and more context needed among others. None of the fact-checking organizations had a definitive set of verdicts, but

rather verdicts were arrived at based on the analysis of fact-checking processes but most political claims that were fact-checked appeared to be false and misleading (INGF2, personal communication, 2021 & INDUB3, personal communication, September 27, 2021). Other opinions from the interviewees on their verdicts/ratings of their various fact-check reports included;

Some could be misrepresented, some can be not entirely true, some can be inaccurate, and some can be nearly true, and hence they varied (INGF1, personal communication, September 29)

The common ones were either false or misleading. It was not just false or misleading. If the information that we had at that time was not enough to establish a very conclusive verdict to say whether it was true or false, we said more context was needed. (INDUB3, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

#### **4.7 Writing of Political Fact-check Reports**

The study also realized from the interviewees, the various stages that political fact-check reports passed through before they got published on the various websites. Starting from the fact-checker who worked on the claim, the report passed through two additional persons before getting published (INGF2, personal communication, October 02, 2021). In all, three stages and persons and sometimes more than three individuals edited and approved the report before it got published. INDUB2 (personal communication, September 29, 2021) confirmed that the fact-checkers appreciated teamwork throughout all stages of the fact-checking process and were never quick to debunk or confirm a political claim because of their level of professionalism. Also, the fact-checkers made available in their responses all sources they relied on to ascertain the level of truth or otherwise of political claims.

#### **4.8 Media Partnership**

Both fact-checking organizations did not only rely on their platforms to disseminate their political fact-check reports. They partnered with other media organizations to further engage the public on the findings in their political fact-check reports. During one interview, INGF3 (personal communication, October 04, 2021) noted that Ghana Fact made available, their political fact-check reports on the radio and television platforms as well as an online platform, which included Ghanaweb and Eyewitness News on Citi FM. Also, Dubawa Ghana had media partners that helped spread the word. For instance, Starr FM and Dubawa collaborated on a program called Star fact-checker which was reading out fact-checks that have been done (INDUB2, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

### **5.0 CONCLUSION**

The Theory of Echo Chamber in politics and social media posts that when people online are confronted with a variety of political information, they tend to agree with the information that is in line with their political viewpoints and avoid information that does not reflect their political viewpoints. This tendency to agree with the information that aligns with one's political ideologies leaves little chance for the authenticity of the information, hence the likelihood of the circulation of fake news (Jamieson & Capella, 2008). This study highlighted

that during Ghana's 2020 general election, political misinformation was thriving amongst the identified Echo Chamber platforms namely, WhatsApp and Facebook groups made up of members and sympathizers of the NDC and NPP. Both fact-checking organizations came across political news and subjected them to the truth test and usually concluded that they were false and misleading. A typical political claim was President Akufo Addo's alleged bribery scandal which Dubawa Ghana fact-checked and concluded that it was false. The concept of Media Literacy Education was leveraged by both fact-checking organizations through their nationwide capacity-building programs that sought to ensure more passive media consumers.

The political fact-checking activities of Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact considerably ensured that citizens were exposed to only factual information. It was also established that the conduct of political fact-checking by Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact were similar. For instance, in the run-up to Ghana's 2020 general election, both fact-checking organizations engaged journalists and the public on the basic skills of fact-checking political claims. Also, both fact-checking organizations had similar criteria for what constituted fact-check worthiness which mainly included virality and national interest. Understaffing also appeared to be the challenge both fact-checking organizations encountered during Ghana's 2020 general election.

Evidence collected shows that fact-checking in Ghana's 2020 general election was laborious because the number of fact-checking organizations and fact-checkers was undeniably insignificant. The status of fact-checking organizations cannot satisfy the numerous claims from the public. Besides, fact-checking applies to all forms of information and not just politics. The respective fields of communication that demand fact-checking are overwhelming and as such, some political fact-check worthy claims were not fact-checked due to issues such as accessing sources and limited staff.

In conclusion, political fact-checking in Ghana's 2020 general election by Ghana Fact and Dubawa Ghana sought to enlighten and empower the citizenry on consuming accurate political and electoral information to enhance Ghana's democracy, promote, and protect the general interest of the country. Political fact-checking in Ghana is relatively new and gradually emerging despite having, in most cases, difficulties accessing information as well as an inadequate number of fact-checking organizations.

## 5.1 Recommendations

The study recommends the establishment of political fact-checking organizations and or the creation of political fact-checking units within fact-checking organizations that will mainly focus on political claims because of the critical nature of political claims, particularly in an election year.

Additionally, Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Skills should be incorporated into the country's various educational curricula. It should not be limited to fellowships, seminars, and workshops because almost all humans are audiences of the various media of communication. Students are consumers of all kinds of information including political information and are active users of social media, hence must be equipped with the basic skills in media and information literacy to be discerning audiences.

Finally, measures to criminalize creators of misinformation regardless of the personality involved can as well be advocated for by individuals and organizations who envision a healthy political and media ecosystem for Ghana. However, what constitutes criminalization for the creation of misinformation should be carefully stated in a way that will not mean the stifling freedom of speech.

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