

Debunking Election Misinformation: A Comparison of Fact-Checking Platforms

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Abstract

India is home to the world's largest democracy. The lynchpin of this vibrant democracy is free and fair elections. The year 2024 witnessed substantial political dynamism with General Elections in April, followed by Legislative Assembly Elections in the consequent months. As the election period gained momentum, the media started to brim with political news stories. Given this evolving landscape, it is crucial to examine how different media platforms circulated election-related news. Researchers emphasize that the election period brought a surge in fake news, misinformation, and disinformation. The Election Commission of India has launched the Myth vs Reality Register to combat this mounting challenge and to uphold electoral integrity. Against this backdrop, this research examines how ECI's Myth vs Reality Register and other leading Indian independent fact-checking agencies, such as Alt News, Boom, and Vishvas News combat the challenges posed by the fake news circulated by the ever-growing online media. Analysis of content has been performed to understand the manner in which fake news is tackled. It is identified that the news items that are presented on these sites are majorly presented as false news, fake news, and misleading news.

Keywords: *Fact check, Fake news, Elections, Model code of conduct, Myth vs Reality Register*

Introduction

The 18th Lok Sabha Elections or the General Elections 2024 were prodigious, it involved 96.8 crore total electors, 1.5 crore polling officials and 10.5 lakh polling stations spread across India (Kulkarni, 2024). In succession, came the Legislative Assemblies Elections in the seven Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Haryana, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and the Union Territories of Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir. All of this is parallel to a time when India is witnessing unprecedented levels of internet penetration.

According to the Reuters Institute's 2024 digital news survey, about 71% of Indians prefer online news sources. Additionally, it stated that 49% of Indians rely on social media, with 54% getting their news from YouTube, 48% from WhatsApp, and 35% from Facebook (TOI News Desk, 2024). With such political dynamism and the ever-increasing utilization of online platforms, it is crucial to notice how political activities are covered, especially because online platforms foster crowdsourced content. This upsurge of user-generated content and the increased competitiveness in news circulation have given birth to a wide range of informational risks. Additionally, the perils of misinformation and disinformation increase during the election season. The Hindu newspaper (2024) underlines the existence of knowledge gaps and the difficulty of distinguishing between AI and real, thereby making people vulnerable to deception and disenfranchisement.

Literature suggests that elections in 2024 have noticed a surge in misinformation and attract Indian voters with a level of cleverness that is difficult to detect and even more difficult to control. Added to this is the generative AI boom that brings Indian voters to a high level of risk of disinformation (Lakshané, 2024). The arrival of social media has transformed the manner of public communication, this includes the spread of fake news which now spreads rapidly with the click of a button (Rahmanian & Esfidani, 2023). Social media is a major factor in the fake news dilemma, as it provides a multitude of platforms and channels for the dissemination of material that is portrayed as news in order to profit financially and ideologically (Talukdar & Dutta, 2021).

Ortega-Fernández et al. (2021) highlight the paradox of current times that provides the greatest amount of information and yet doesn't ensure increased

knowledge and awareness among people. In many instances, the users of online information also lose the freedom to choose their sources of information because it is the algorithm that decides, filters and suggests the type of information for its users. This is almost like hacking of the human brain.

Fake news is a form of news fabrication and carries deception with the intention to mislead. Fake news refers to intentionally false or misleading information that is trying to appear like real news while being low in facticity and high in the immediate intention to deceive. A key difference between misinformation and disinformation is whether the false and misleading information is intended to mislead. Disinformation is false information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the express purpose to cause harm' whereas misinformation is information that is false, but not intended to cause harm. From that perspective, fake news should be conceptualized as one form of disinformation, but not as misinformation. (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024, p. 5)

Mishra (2025) differentiates between misinformation and disinformation as also defined by the American Psychological Association,

Misinformation is false or inaccurate information—getting the facts wrong. Disinformation is false information which is deliberately intended to mislead—intentionally misstating the facts. Fake news is misleading information intentionally published and presented as news which has the function of deliberately misleading its recipients about its status as news. (para. 6)

Indian Elections & Combating Fake News

The Model Code of Conduct as notified by the Election Commission of India-ECI, which remains in force during the election, clarifies that “the misuse of official mass media during the election period for partisan coverage of political news and publicity regarding achievements to further the prospects of the party in power shall be scrupulously avoided” (Press Council of India, 2024, p. 1). This way, ECI establishes the standard for media reporting in India. To strengthen the mechanism to counter misuse of media, ECI has launched a Myth vs Reality Register with the aim to combat the spread of misinformation and uphold the integrity of the electoral process. This register is available for the public on the Election Commission's official website (<https://mythvsreality.eci.gov.in/>).

Privately-owned/ Independent Fact-checking Platforms

However, in the non-government domain, there are several agencies working towards ending the menace of fake news. While many television channels run programmes which examine the day's 'viral videos', there are others who carry out the job in a more focused manner. Three such agencies working in this area have been taken up here for discussion. Alt News is a fact-checking platform that claims to have no political affiliations. The legal entity behind Alt News is a not-for-profit company called Pravda Media Foundation. It fact-checks news largely from the political spectrum. Depending on the nature of the fact-check required, the platform uses internet tools like reverse image search or source data from official sources (Alt News, 2025).

BOOM Fact Check is an independent digital media venture aimed at eliminating disinformation, clarifying issues and promoting internet safety through verified facts. As one of India's first fact-checking websites, it is certified by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). BOOM, which operates in English, Hindi, and Bengali, is present in India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh and it also administers the Mediabuddhi media literacy campaign (Boom, 2025). Vishvas News is a fact-checking and verification portal operated by MMI Online, the digital branch of Jagran Prakashan Limited. It refutes fake news and misinformation in Hindi, English, and ten other Indian languages. Certified by the IFCN, it uses a qualified team of fact-checkers who verify viral claims across text, images and videos. It also conducts fact-checking awareness workshops through its flagship effort, Sach Ke Sathi, which uses Dainik Jagran's network to combat disinformation among digitally vulnerable communities (Vishvas News, 2025).

Theoretical Underpinnings of Media Literacy

We are living in a world of information overload and media saturation which has its own newer forms of demands, especially when fake news, misinformation, manipulation, and misrepresentation are developing as a global threat. Media literacy has three-dimensional purposes: preventative, creative, and interactive. The preventative function focuses on preventing and protecting the user from the threats online, the vulnerabilities to be misdirected by some

false information or any loss thereto. The creative aspect brings in the user as a creator and contributor to the communication process. The interactive aspects of media literacy focus on enabling the user to interact responsibly as well as to add to knowledge generation and to be able to use constructive dialogue. (Chandola, 2020, p. 26)

“Media literacy is the ability of the citizen to access, analyse, and produce information for specific outcomes” (Aufderheide, 1993, p. 1). “Media literacy is defined as an augmented literacy skill that responds to the culture of multimodal information, ideas and communication media that people experience” (Talukdar & Dutta, 2021, p. 74). The dimensions of communications have been transformed in the present time. People are communicating, taking information, learning and getting influenced by the variety of online platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and X. This advancement in technology has provided a fresh perspective to media literacy and most now prefer to use the term New Media Literacy.

James Anderson highlighted how media literacy is connected with communication. His article published in 1980, “The Theoretical Lineage of Critical Viewing Curricula”, talked about the theoretical foundations of media literacy education related to critically viewing television. He argues that the theoretical foundations of this process most closely align with mass media research, such as behavioural effect research that involves studying how media influences people’s actions, uses and gratification research that includes understanding why people consume media and what they get from it and research on cultural understanding concerned with examining how people interpret media messages based on their culture and background. Different theories have influenced media literacy education. Earlier, media literacy was taught in a protectionist way—meaning it focused on protecting people from the bad effects of media. But now, the approach has changed to a more democratic method. This new method is more student-centred and promotes open and equitable learning, reflecting and thinking carefully, and gaining proficiency in critical thinking (Schilder, 2013).

Objectives and Methodology

This research aims:

- To examine the presence and type of political fake news that gets circulated over the internet during the election period.
- To identify the frequency of debunked news by fact-checking platforms during the election period.
- To identify the platforms on which fake news generally gets amplified.
- To study the process of debunking fake news by different fact-checking platforms.

This study analyses four fact-checking organizations, namely Myth vs Reality, Alt News, Boom and Vishvas News English. The researchers analysed their political fact-checking articles from April 1, 2024, to Jan 31, 2025.

Tabulation and Analysis

The 18th Lok Sabha elections took place from April 19 to June 1. This is followed by Assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and Delhi. The Model Code of Conduct is a set of codes that attempts to ensure free and fair elections across the country. It provides guidelines for political parties, politicians and media must adhere to throughout the election period. The Code remains in effect until the completion of the entire election process.

Table 1

States and Date of Elections

State	Election Date
Delhi	February 5, 2025
Maharashtra	November 20, 2024
Jharkhand	November 13 and 20, 2024
Haryana	October 5, 2024

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Jammu and Kashmir (UT)	September 18 to October 1, 2024
Odisha	May 13 to June 1, 2024
Andhra Pradesh	May 13, 2024
Sikkim	April 19, 2024
Arunachal Pradesh	April 19, 2024
General Elections	April 19 to June 1, 2024

Understanding the Frequency of Updates

Table 2

Fake/ False News Debunked

Month	Myth vs Reality	Alt News	Boom	Vishvas News English
Jan	0	6	1	01
Dec	0	4	10	09
Nov	0	4	22	10
Oct	0	8	10	06
Sept	0	14	7	07
Aug	1	4	7	03
July	1	8	12	07
June	0	14	15	08
May	5	16	16	13
April	13	18	12	12
Total Stories	20	96	112	76

The above analysis is done from April 1, 2024, considering the time of announcement of the Myth vs Reality register. On careful noting, it is identified that ECI's register debunked only 20 fake news during the selected time. On the contrary other privately owned fact-checking agencies exposed the falseness in a higher number of stories being circulated online. Alt News debunked 96, Boom debunked 112 and Vishvas News debunked 76 election-related stories in

the selected time duration. The register provides a reliable resource to verify the authenticity of information. However, the platform is only debunking such fake news which relates to its functioning. Since the political campaign is very much part of the election process, the register fails to cover a major process of false opinion building on the digital media platforms through fake news.

Verification of Fact-Checking News Items

It is identified that out of the total 304 fact check news items, a total of 293 news items verified information from multiple sources, 3 news items verified information from at least two sources and 8 news items verified information from 1 source. It is further identified that all 304 facts check news items are transparent, they explain, they expose the morphed or manipulated and bring to light the fake and incorrect claims. These items take a neutral stand, simply presenting facts and figures after clearly highlighting the information that is incorrect. In attempting to understand the platforms where the misinformation was spread, the researchers identified that the misinformation has spread on several platforms including WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, X, Instagram, WhatsApp and Threads. Among these, it is identified that the maximum number of misinformation has been spread on Facebook and X (90.46%). And these stories were shared least on Instagram and Threads.

Figure 1

Explaining how fact-checking is performed



image prepared with <https://www.wordclouds.com/> (Wordclouds, 2025)

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In an attempt to understand what verification methods were used to clarify the news and fact-check the viral claim, each debunking report has been carefully studied. It is identified that a wide variety of techniques have been utilized to cross-check the misleading information. Some of the common techniques include reverse image search which is performed by uploading the viral image on a search engine, official statements including statements from company representatives or police, official documents, and official YouTube Channels including that of political figures like the President, Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition, news reports from newspapers, news agencies, news channel video, news website, magazines.

Framing of Information on Fact-checking Platforms

The method by which news outlets organize and present information to influence public opinion is known as media framing. It may emphasize some parts of the topic covered while moderating others. This provides a lens to the audience and guides them to understand the story in a certain manner. Dhasmana and Raj (2024) pointed out,

Frames are continuously presented to news media audiences. All forms of media, including social networking sites, newspapers, OTT platforms and news channels, offer frames to their audience. Once the media establishes frames, the audience can further socially develop them. Therefore, it is possible that people's behaviour towards disseminated information can result from the frames constructed by the media. (p. 5)

It is identified that none of the fact-checking stories in the Myth vs Reality register utilized quotes of any political figure/ journalist to clarify the debunked news. On the other hand, 98.68% stories of Vishvas News utilize quotes. Alt News and Boom made use of quotes by 48.95% and 46.42% respectively. For instance, Vishvas News states that it,

contacted Congress national spokesperson Akhilesh Pratap Singh regarding one of the viral videos. He called it BJP's propaganda and said, In the video clip that BJP leaders are sharing, Rahul Gandhi can be heard talking about the scuffle with Mallikarjun Kharge. The claim of the BJP leader who is currently hospitalised should be investigated. (Parashar, 2024, para. 14)

Table 3

Framing Frequency

Alt News

Alt News	N
Unrelated	2
Scripted Video	1
AI-Generated	1
Misreport	1
Old Video	7
False News	40
Fake News	11
Morphed	5
Fact Checked	5
D o c t o r e d Video	3
Misleading	15
Clipped	4
Edited	1

Table 4

Framing Frequency Boom

Boom	N
False News	71
Fake News	28
Misleading News	13

Table 5

Framing Frequency Vishvas News

Vishvas News	N
Fake News	59
Misleading News	17

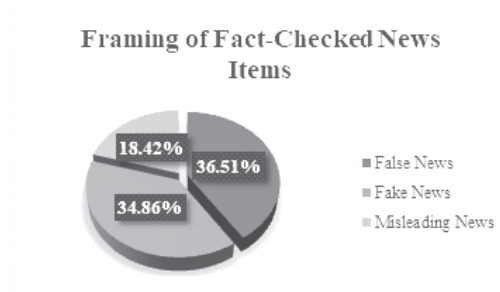
Table 6

Framing Frequency: Myth vs Reality

Myth vs Reality	N
Fake	8
Fake & Misleading	8
False & Misleading	3
Incorrect & Baseless	1

Figure 2

Overall Framing Proportion of Fact-Checked News Items



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Upon analysis of the four fact-checking platforms, it is identified that these presented the videos in a variety of ways which are false, fake, misleading, AI-generated, edited, scripted, unrelated, misreported, clipped, and morphed. It is highlighted that false news, fake news (39%) and misleading news are the most common framing of news.

Table 7

Manner of Information Presentation on Fact-checking Platforms

Features	Myth vs Reality	Alt News	Boom	Vishvas News
Debunking of misinformation by clarification	Yes, correct news is provided immediately after the mention of disinformation	Yes, the headline itself quashes the misinformation.	Yes, the headline itself quashes the misinformation.	Yes, the headline itself quashes the misinformation.
Information was provided on how the fact-checking was conducted	No information provided	Yes, enough clarity on the process	Yes, enough clarity on the process	Yes, enough clarity on the process
Hyperlinks of the photo/video where the misinformation is viral	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Comparison of Original/Fake	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Presence of Content with Value-Added Information	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Quotes of person concerned	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Presence of Tipline Number	No	Yes, in the Contact Us Section	Yes, at the end of each news item.	Yes, at the end of each news item.

Findings

It is identified that, in Myth vs Reality Register; a lot of emphasis is placed on providing clarification regarding the misinformation. These are provided through the official fake news busting X posts of ECI, ECI spokesperson or electoral officers. In a maximum number of news items published on the page of the Myth vs Reality register, information or learning is provided only through reposting and a very minuscule percentage contributes by providing additional information with written/photo/audio or video content. It is only at two instances where a little effort was made to educate the users regarding matters of election. In the first case, the news item explains the process of counting votes and in the second instance, the news item educates about the importance of the voter's name in the voting list and that the voter is eligible to vote with a voter ID or any of the 12 documents specified by the ECI. However, this explanation is not much in detail and is presented through just two to three lines only. Further, bits of information are provided through three other news items, informing the readers that ECI EVM cannot be hacked or manipulated, government officials on election duty can cast their vote through postal ballot and the election schedule is announced by ECI through a press conference. It is identified that out of the total 20 posts by Myth vs Reality register, it is only 5 times that some attempt has been made to provide additional information or education related to the election process. However, it can't be overlooked that debunking information shared through handles does subtly inform and educate the users on election-related information.

Alt News shares a simple format, it explains what the viral photo or video is all about. Elucidation is done by uploading the original photograph or through the

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screenshots from actual footage. If required, it doesn't hesitate to showcase a comparison of the original photograph with the viral one. For instance, in one of its investigations, the Alt News fact-checking team cross-checked a deceptive viral video by carefully examining the official YouTube channel of the President of India. Another investigation presented a comparative proof of fake notice that had gone viral with the original notice. Alt News also translates content, if required, for clarification of hoax information. It also refers to reports of news websites for cross-checking purposes. It does its investigations and reaches out to concerned authorities or police officials. Overall, the Alt News approach is more on providing the clarification of the disinformation and less on providing value-added information. Alt News also has a WhatsApp helpline number which it shares on its contact page where readers can send viral content that needs to be fact-checked.

It is analysed that Boom actively does fact-checking on the basis of information shared by the users. Boom utilizes a variety of ways to enhance the understanding of the users on the subject matter, it provides background information- for instance "Feast of Tabernacles – also called as 'Gudarala Panduga,' in local parlance at Gorantla village in Andhra Pradesh is an annual Christian festival that is organised by Hosanna Ministries in March" (Alphonso, 2024, para. 7). It explains in detail the process of verification of misinformation and clearly explains how the fact-checking was conducted. Whenever required, Boom publishes political information like the total number of seats in a constituency, election phases, election date and result date. Boom claims to do its investigation through processes like reverse image search and keyword search. In case it is unable to conduct an independent investigation, then it also takes the initiative of interviewing the concerned person. The platform openly invites the general public to join them in their mission to fight misinformation and shares its Tipline Number (+917700906588) where the users can send their misinformation messages.

Researchers identified that Vishvas News doesn't hesitate to provide value-added information in detail. For instance, while debunking a news article it published,

A postal ballot allows individuals who are unable to vote in person at their constituency due to job commitments to cast their vote via mail. The Lok

Sabha elections (Lok Sabha Election, 2024) are scheduled in seven phases, commencing on April 19, 2024, with results announced on June 4, 2024. (Mishra, 2024, para. 8)

It educates its readers about the process of verification, for example, Vishvas News initially utilized the Google Open Search tool to verify the authenticity of the viral post (Maharishi, 2024, para. 4).

The platform conducts its investigation and whenever required, interviews the person concerned including journalists, political leaders or police officials. Background information is provided on the election,

It is noteworthy that Mahua Moitra is contesting from the Krishnanagar Lok Sabha seat of West Bengal, where voting is scheduled for May 13, 2024, in the fourth phase. According to the Election Commission's notification (archive link), voting is to be held in seven phases for a total of 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal. The first phase of voting began on April 19, 2024, for a total of 102 seats. (Parashar, 2024, para. 8)

Like Alt News, Vishvas News also does comparative analysis wherever required and shows the difference between real and fake. Vishvas News invites its readers to participate in the fact-checking process. It shares its WhatsApp No i.e. 9205270923, and email-id, contact@vishvasnews.com where the readers can share the doubtful information. It is examined that the misinformation related to elections spread on a number of platforms including WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, X, Instagram, WhatsApp and Threads. Out of these, Facebook and X are the most exploited platforms (90.46%). However, in comparison, such misinformation is less on Instagram and Threads.

The researchers identified that a variety of methods are being utilized by fact-checking platforms to cross-check the misleading information. Some of these include reverse image searches, official statements, official documents, official YouTube channels, and news reports.

It is identified that Vishvas News supported their articles with quotations with at least 98.68% of stories providing quotes that aimed at providing correct information. It is brought to light that false news, fake news and misleading

news are the most common framing of news.

The frequency of debunking posts in Myth vs Reality is very low in comparison to the fake news that is being generated on various social media platforms. It is difficult for a user to completely trust the platform for pinpointing all or maximum possible fake news related to elections. Additionally, the Myth vs Reality register does not get regularly updated, bringing its utility to an extremely low level. Random posts are identified during the election period and it is only during general elections that the Myth vs Reality register focuses on updating readers. Updates of fake news circulating during Assembly elections are not provided on the Myth vs Reality register. Press Note by PIB calls the Myth vs Reality register a “comprehensive repository of factual information to dispel myths and falsehoods circulating during the election period and thereby empowering them to make informed decisions” (Press Information Bureau, 2024, para. 3). Researchers however identified the contrary.

Conclusion

Myth vs reality register thus fails to debunk all circulated disinformation, especially during the election period. Its limited approach in debunking news items makes information seekers yearn for other platforms which could match up with the speed of misinformation spread during election season.

The citizens can't be empowered by providing limited information and a notable percentage of fake news related to politics is still not covered in the register. This endeavour by the Election Commission of India to protect the electoral process against misinformation is yet to bloom.

Overall, it is evaluated that Alt News, Boom, and Vishvas News fit well into the three-dimensional purposes of media literacy as also pointed out by Chandola (2020) which includes preventative, creative, and interactive features. These fake news debunking items help the reader (who also may be a voter) to stay informed about the online misinformation which may lead to dangers like incorrect knowledge, hate spread, and social divide.

The creative dimension is met as all three fact-check platforms provide links to the social network page where the reader can actively participate and present their opinions on the matter. All three fact-check platforms also provide a phone

number where the readers share information regarding any viral video which appears to be false or fake. The interactive aspect is met because all three of these platforms focus on explaining the background context along with providing value-added information on the news item being clarified. This in a way teaches readers to communicate responsibly, contribute to knowledge, and engage in meaningful discussions. However, news items in the case of the Myth vs reality register display the presence of only one dimension that is preventative.

This research is limited to the understanding of four fact-checking platforms, however, future research can be conducted on more fact-checking platforms especially, if any, working in specific geographical regions.

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