

Fact-checking Initiatives in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal: A Study of User Engagement and Challenges

Authors

Naeemul Hassan, Md Main Uddin Rony

Dept. of Computer and Information Science, University of Mississippi

Mohammad Yousuf

Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Oklahoma

Md Mahfuzul Haque, Ahmed Shatil Alam, Kazi Mehedi Hasan

School of Journalism and New Media, University of Mississippi

Zahedur Arman

College of Mass Communication and Media Arts, Southern Illinois University

Md Khadimul Islam

Dept. of Political Science, University of Mississippi

Fact-checking is more urgent than ever due to the spate of disinformation

Fact-checkers in developed countries employ automation in verification process

Fact-checkers in developing nation do not enjoy the same facilities due to various constraints



Objective

- To understand the types of challenges hindering growth of fact-checkers in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal

[This paper is a part of an ongoing project that focuses on the drawbacks of sustainable fact-checking organizations in the Global South]

Literature review

- Political pressure has been impeding the growth of fact-checking in the countries where press freedom is curtailed (Funke, 2018).
- Fact-checkers have been facing challenges in reaching partisan and disinterested audiences (Greenblatt, 2018).
- Fact-checkers often come under attack on social media by supporters and opponents of the governments, leading many fact-checkers not to cover political issues (Kessler, 2018).

Research questions

RQ1: To what extent do Facebook users engage with the fact-checking organizations in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal?

RQ2: What challenges do fact-checking organizations in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal face?

Fact-checkers in three nations

- Bangladesh – BD Fact Check, Jaachai, and Fact Watch
- India -- Fact Checker, Boom, Factly, Alt News, FactCrescendo, and NewsMobile [Duke Reporter's Lab and IFCN]
- Nepal – South Asia Check

Method

- In-depth interviews with seven senior editors (Bangladesh: 5, India: 1, and Nepal: 1) of five fact-checking initiatives in three countries
- A descriptive analysis of user engagement data on official Facebook pages of the organizations

In-depth interviews

- IRB approval
- Piloting of the questionnaire
- Finalizing questionnaire
- Interviews via skype

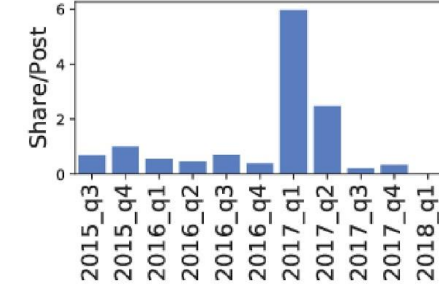
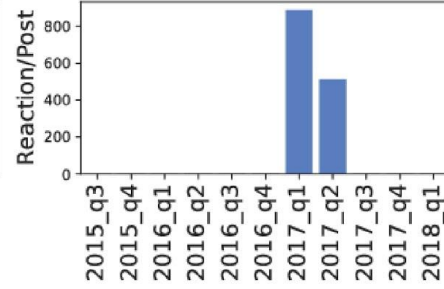
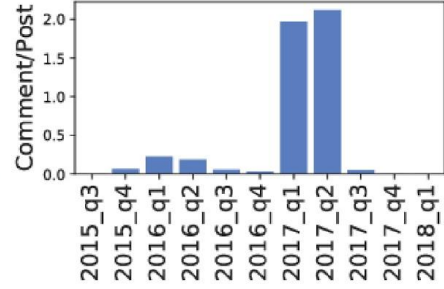
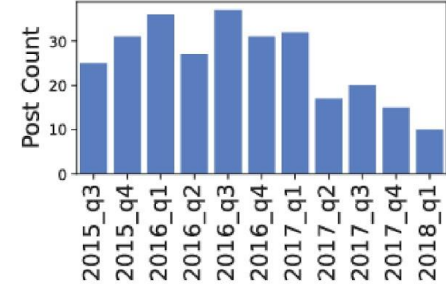
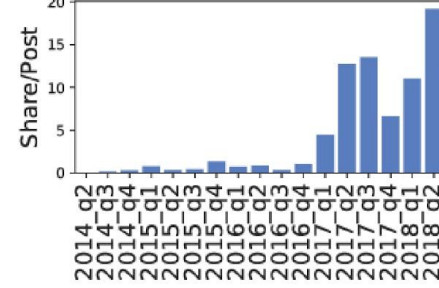
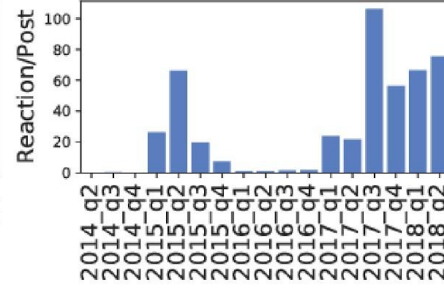
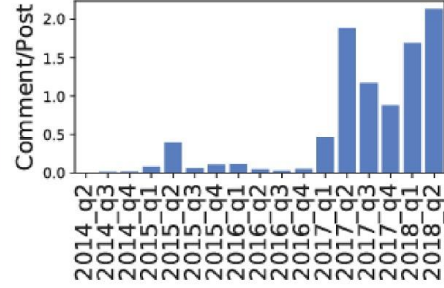
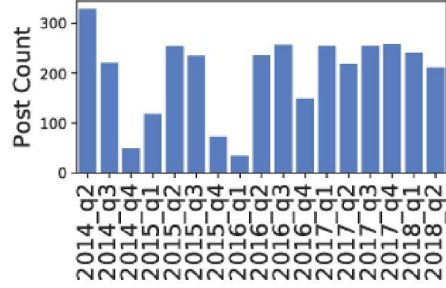
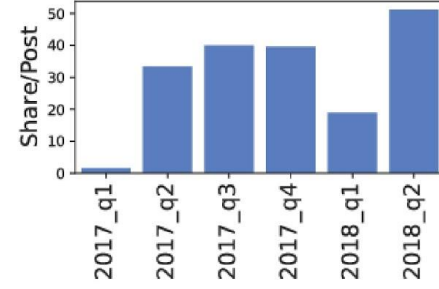
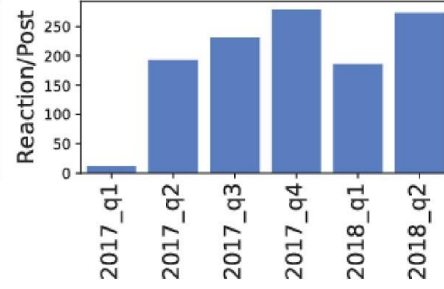
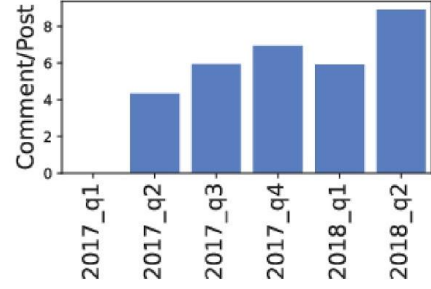
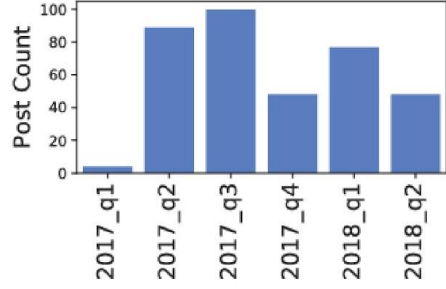
User engagement data

- 4,039 Facebook posts were collected posted between May 2014 and June 2018
- Posts included statuses, photo, video, link to an external site
- For each post, status message, comments and sub-comments, and all the reactions (Like, Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, Angry) were collected

Results

Country	#Post	Comment Per Post	Share per Post	Reactions Per Post
Bangladesh	366	7.60	34.93	221.61
India	3392	0.78	4.93	32.64
Nepal	281	0.46	1.28	133.01

Results



Challenges

Five major challenges identified

(i) Lack of resources

- Understaffed, cannot verify all suspicious claims
- Many can't afford buying licensed software and, thus, rely on free tools and volunteers or part-time employees.
- Some organizations do not even have an office.

Challenges

“We do not have any funding for software and depend on free tools such as Google reverse image search and TinEye that often cannot detect fabrication if a photo is not shared publicly.”

-- Naimul Karim, Fact Watch in Bangladesh

Challenges

(ii) Lack of Machine Learning Tools Built for Local Languages

Development of tools able to analyze texts in local languages has been extremely slow in these countries.

“If we can search for particular information from a pdf file of Nepali texts by entering keywords in electronic documents it would be easier for us to search for information we want. This facility is available in many other languages but not in the Nepali language.”

-- Mohan Mainali, South Asia Check in Nepal

Challenges

(iii) Lack of Digital Archives

“There is not any tradition of storing data in the archives. We publish our report in Bengali. Thus, it’s very difficult to find out actual data in Bengali. If you find data, you cannot get access to it.”

-- Zahed Arman, BD Fact Check, Bangladesh

“Major challenge we face is lack of archive system. We have to spend a lot of time to collect information.”

Mohan Mainali, South Asia Check, Nepal

Challenges

(iv) Scarce freedom of expression

“We already have confronted more than once with state actors as BTRC have summoned us to explain our work and warned not to publish ‘unwanted’ things. We had random phone calls from government high ups to be careful.”

-- A fact-checker in Bangladesh

Challenges

(v) Lack of A Sustainable Business Model

“We are dependent mainly on donors’ money which is always uncertain. We are unable to make long term plan and go ahead accordingly.”

-- Mainali, South Asia Check, Nepal

“Funding remained a major challenge for us. However, I believe fact-checking organizations working on public interests should remain non-profit.”

-- Mallapur, Fact Checker, India

Limitation

- Small dataset
- However, the study identified the constraints Fact-checkers in South Asia have been facing
- Future study will cover fact-checkers in the Global South

Thank you!

Questions?