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Fact-checking as a quasi-media institution: Thematic and argumentative analysis of demagog publications in the 2023 election year

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Abstract

Fact-checking as a quasi-media institution: Thematic and argumentative analysis of demagog publications in the 2023 election year

The article examines fact-checking organizations as quasi-media institutions, focusing on the activities of the Demagog portal during the 2023 election year. Based on 599 cases of fake news, a content analysis was conducted to determine the topics of disinformation and the argumentative strategies used in corrections. The results indicate that the most frequently debunked content concerned health-related issues, and the dominant argumentative technique was original investigation using OSINT tools. At the same time, risks were noted related to referencing institutional sources or rejecting claims due to a lack of evidence, which may reinforce the confirmation and backfire effects. The analysis confirms the significance of fact-checking as a tool of editorial intervention in the public discourse.

Keywords: misinformation, disinformation journalism, Internet, politics

In times of hybrid warfare, intensified disinformation efforts, and growing political polarization, fact-checking has become one of the key tools for defending against false content in public debate. The development of fact-checking and the rising prominence of organizations engaged in content verification have grown exponentially in response to the increasing volume of disinformation. However, it must be recognized that fact-checking is a reactive measure against disinformation, and its effects in countering it are, unfortunately, not particularly spectacular, as false messages spread more quickly and on a larger scale than truthful ones (Mayer, 2018). Nevertheless, research emphasizes the role of fact-checking organizations in reducing susceptibility to disinformation and enhancing civic awareness through education (Tejedor et al., 2024).

Although global fact-checking organizations such as PolitiFact, Snopes, or FactCheck.org declare neutrality and methodological rigour, they are increasingly becoming the target of accusations of bias — from both audiences and researchers. Polish organizations such as Demagog, Pravda, or Fakenews.pl also continually face similar concerns. A key instrument for addressing these challenges is affiliation with the International Fact-Checking Network

(IFCN), established in 2015 by the Poynter Institute (IFCN, 2025). The goal of this organization is to promote best practices in fact-checking worldwide and uphold transparency and independence within fact-checking institutions. Organizations from various countries may obtain IFCN certification if they meet specific criteria. In media discourse, the IFCN is regarded as a global benchmark for quality in fact-checking. The organization's code of principles includes the following rules:

- Commitment to Nonpartisanship and Fairness — The organization must not promote political, ideological, or financial interests. It should apply consistent criteria to all sources.
- Commitment to Transparency of Sources — All sources of information used for verification must be clearly identified to allow users to verify them independently.
- Commitment to Transparency of Funding & Organization — The organization must disclose its sources of funding, organizational structure, and any potential conflicts of interest.
- Commitment to Transparency of Methodology — A description of the fact-checking methodology should be publicly available and clearly explained.
- Commitment to Open and Honest Corrections — The organization should have a clear policy for publishing corrections and acknowledging mistakes.

As can be seen, a key principle of the IFCN is transparency. While this is a significant value, it is worth noting that it is not exhaustive. The proposed solutions may indeed be transparent, but not necessarily substantive or methodologically sound — an issue that will be further elaborated later in this article. It should also be noted that the position of fact-checking organizations, with the IFCN at the forefront, within the media systems of various countries — including Poland — is not clearly defined. On the one hand, fact-checkers perform work that was initially assigned to journalistic editorial offices, along with the full ethical responsibility that entails. On the other hand, fact-checking organizations often operate as non-governmental organizations, viewing themselves as oversight institutions over politicians or journalists. The lack of precise legal or institutional regulation of fact-checking entities means they exist somewhat outside the media system, which, in practice, makes it difficult to assess the substantive value of their work or to sanction the influence they exert on public discourse.

This issue appears to be of critical importance, as evidenced by an increasing number of academic studies. Considering these conditions, it becomes necessary to adopt a more vital and multifaceted perspective on fact-checking practices — not only as a method of combating disinformation, but also as a socio-cognitive phenomenon influenced by conscious or unconscious ideological and structural factors. The literature points to systemic factors that may affect the impartiality of fact-checking. These include, among others, sources of funding, political affiliations of editorial teams, media pressure, and audience expectations. Phenomena such as "false balance" — the artificial balancing of opposing views regardless of evidence — or "funding bias" — bias resulting from sources of financial support, as known from other fields such as science and journalism (Jasanoff, 2012) — may likewise influence the practices of fact-checkers. Additionally, the fact that many fact-checking organizations operate in partnership with large technology platforms (e.g., Meta, Google) raises questions about their editorial independence and their alignment with the public interest of individual countries.

In addition to institutional factors, qualitative aspects related to the processes of perceiving reality are also significant. Several empirical analyses indicate that fact-checkers may unconsciously exhibit political leanings. For example, a study of over 10,000 PolitiFact entries found that Republican politicians were rated as lying significantly more often than Democrats (Colicchio, 2023). One way to measure the volume of disinformation disseminated by political elites — and others — is to analyze the content produced by fact-checking sites. Many existing studies examine fact-checkers' outputs across different political spectrums to estimate partisan asymmetry in the spread of false messages (Card et al., 2018). This method is reasonably practical, though it carries certain inference risks. Fact-checking platforms may not provide an objective measure of a given group's propensity to spread rumors and conspiracy theories. This is because fact-checking organizations cannot verify every claim, and therefore must choose which content to debunk (Uściński, 2015). For instance, during Donald Trump's presidency, fact-checkers concentrated their resources on correcting the unprecedented volume of false information he disseminated. This, in turn, limited their ability to monitor and debunk false claims made by other politicians. Moreover, empirical data from the United States indicate little overlap among statements verified by different fact-checking organizations, suggesting bias and potential prejudice in the selection of topics and politicians for verification (Ostermeier, 2011).

Another essential aspect is evaluating the effectiveness of the corrections proposed by fact-checkers themselves. The way these texts are constructed — the choice of sources and arguments — can be crucial for how users receive this content. Empirical research shows that users interpret fact-checking in ways consistent with their own political beliefs, leading to a "reception bias." From a cognitive psychology perspective, fact-checking processes are susceptible to the same cognitive errors as other information selection and evaluation activities. Research published in *Information Processing & Management* has shown that fact-checkers — much like scientists — may fall prey to confirmation bias, various heuristics, and time pressure, all of which influence their decisions regarding which information is deemed worthy of verification and how it is interpreted (Soprano et al., 2024).

Studies by Michael Soprano's team demonstrated that even well-trained fact-checkers may unconsciously assign greater credibility to content that aligns with their own beliefs. This phenomenon points to deeply rooted cognitive mechanisms that are difficult to eliminate, even at a high level of professionalization. Meanwhile, research published in the renowned journal *Misinformation Review* indicates that the effectiveness of fact-checking depends on the message's form — subtle differences in wording can trigger very different cognitive responses among audiences (Park et al., 2021). The article shows that bias may stem not only from fact-checkers' ideology but also from natural cognitive mechanisms among recipients — such as uncertainty avoidance, resistance to belief change, and overinterpretation of missing data as evidence of falsehood.

Therefore, a crucial aspect is the design of labels and the evidentiary structure in fact-checkers' corrections, with attention to rhetorical principles and cognitive psychology, to avoid adverse effects on the audience, such as the backfire effect. This effect refers to a situation in which some recipients, when confronted with evidence contradicting their beliefs, paradoxically reinforce those beliefs rather than change them, thereby becoming further entrenched in false views. In this context, the choice of evidence may be crucial.

The above literature review prompted the author to pose a research problem regarding the analysis of the manifestations and mechanisms of bias in the fact-checking process in Poland. The study aims to analyze publications on the Demagog portal to determine the content's thematic scope and assess the strategies used to debunk false information. Demagog is the oldest fact-checking organization in Poland, is affiliated with the IFCN, and

publishes the most corrections for fake news, making it the most appropriate case for such an analysis.

Methodology

According to the method described later in this study, the research involved a media content analysis of a sample of 601 fake news cases published on the official website of the Demagog portal in 2023 (an election year, offering broad insight into various forms of disinformation). However, 3 cases were excluded for not meeting the criteria for falsehood — two were updated by the portal itself (Demagog, 2025), and one was excluded at the author's discretion. For this reason, the final research sample comprised 599 cases of fake news.

The content analysis presented in this article was conducted to identify the themes of the generated fake news and to assess the argumentative techniques used by the portal to debunk it. Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), which includes three approaches: conventional, directed, and summative. These approaches differ in their coding schemes, and for this study, the traditional approach was applied to develop codes and categories. In this way, preliminary analytical categories were created and subsequently coded.

Coding procedure

After the data collection phase, each entry was subjected to a critical content analysis, which served as the basis for developing a codebook. To facilitate the coding process, a glossary of terms characteristic of each category was also created. The codebook included detailed descriptions of each category, examples, classification instructions, and a glossary of terms specific to each type or topic to assist in making classification decisions. Based on this, the first round of coding was conducted, with two expert judges independently coding the content. After compiling the complete dataset, a second round followed, involving the verification of coded data within both the thematic and argumentative categories.

The coders read all examples of fake news along with the corresponding corrections published by the Demagog portal. On this basis, they assigned

thematic categories and determined the dominant argumentative technique. For the thematic criterion, the inter-rater reliability (measured using Cohen's Kappa coefficient) was 0.84, indicating very high agreement (coders agreed on 552 cases and disagreed on 47). A different situation occurred in the category concerning the argumentative specificity of the fact-checking portal. In this area, the agreement coefficient was 0.41, indicating moderate agreement (coders agreed on 276 posts and disagreed on 323). This situation likely results from the fact that, in responding to a single fake news item, fact-checkers often employ multiple arguments, making it challenging to identify the dominant one, which is an important finding for the conclusions of the entire study. In such cases, the author had the deciding voice in classification.

Analytical categories

Content Themes. This criterion referred to the thematic area around which the fake news content was constructed. The categories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Fake news themes

Thematic Areas	Description
War	Content related to armed conflicts, military operations, armed forces, casualties, military equipment, etc.
Health	Content related to medicine, methods of treatment, vaccines, pandemics, healthy lifestyles, diseases, or health-related threats.
Technology	Content related to new technologies, artificial intelligence, 5G, the Internet, mobile phones, etc.
Media and Journalism	Content concerning journalists, alleged censorship, message manipulation, or fake news targeting specific newsrooms or individual journalists.
Celebrities	False reports about well-known figures from show business, sports, or the Internet — e.g., concerning their private lives, alleged statements, or behaviors.
Politics	Fake news about political parties, politicians, elections, government decisions, legislative actions, or international politics.

Thematic Areas	Description
Society	Fake news related to social behaviors, social groups, mass events, social changes, everyday life, etc.
Worldview	Disinformation related to religion, morality, ideologies, cultural issues, gender identity, sexual orientation, values, etc.
Economy	False information about inflation, taxes, prices, the labor market, public finances, economic crises, etc.
Disasters	Disinformation about natural disasters or sudden events — e.g., earthquakes, floods, fires, explosions, contamination, etc.
Other	Content that does not fit into any of the above categories.

The specificity of the fact-checking portal's argumentation is a category in which the types of sources used by the portal to debunk fake news were analyzed. The categories and their descriptions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The specificity of the fact-checking portal's argumentation

Types of Arguments	Description
Reference to primary sources of information (e.g., laws, legal or historical documents, etc.)	Referring to original documents — such as statutes, regulations, archival materials, court records, or treaties — to verify the content.
Citing positions of institutions or public figures (e.g., statements, official remarks, articles, including those from government domains)	Quoting official communications, statements, or documents issued by institutions (e.g., ministries, WHO) or individuals holding public office.
Consulting experts from various fields	Seeking opinions from specialists in a given field (e.g., doctors, historians, lawyers) who, based on their expertise, explain why a particular piece of information is false.
Rejection due to lack of evidence	Classifying information as false or unverified because, in the organization's assessment, no reliable data support the claim presented in the analyzed content.

Types of Arguments	Description
Referring to statements of witnesses/ involved individuals/subjects of disinformation	Contacting individuals directly related to a given situation (e.g., quoting a witness, a person featured in the fake news, the owner of an object, etc.).
Statistical data	Using numbers, indicators, reports, surveys, or official databases that demonstrate the discrepancy between the truth and the false information.
Quoting scientific articles	Referring to scientific papers, peer-reviewed publications, or academic studies to confirm or refute a given claim.
Referring to Polish journalistic materials	Citing analyses, articles, or investigative reports published in mainstream media as sources confirming or correcting the information.
Referring to foreign sources	Quoting foreign media outlets, institutions, experts, or databases as a point of reference in assessing the truthfulness of information.
Original investigation of the authenticity of audiovisual materials and online sources (e.g., OSINT, reverse image search, etc.)	Independent analysis of materials — e.g., video verification, Google image search, metadata analysis, geolocation — to verify the authenticity of the content.
Lack of sources/editorial opinion	Verification based solely on editorial commentary, without providing external sources — a subjective assessment without documentation.

Results

The study indicates that fake news across various thematic areas can be identified on the Demagog portal, as shown in Figure 1. The most significant number of verified items concerned Health-related topics (203 cases). More than twice as few entries were related to Politics (93 cases), followed by War-related content (69). Further down the list, false information was identified in the areas of technology (57), other topics (47), Society (45), Economy (32), Celebrities (27), Disasters (12), Worldview (11), and Media and Journalism (3).

Health-related disinformation primarily included content undermining the credibility of vaccinations (both COVID-19 and HPV vaccines) as well as recognized diagnostic methods; for example, many fake news items concerned the alleged harmfulness of mammography. A leading subtopic was alternative cancer treatments, including garlic, lemon, turmeric, and even death cap mushrooms. The dominant narrative in most of these messages revolved around discrediting doctors and medicine. Despite differences in content, the main disinformation message consistently undermined trust in medical institutions, reinforcing negative emotions and conspiratorial thinking among recipients.

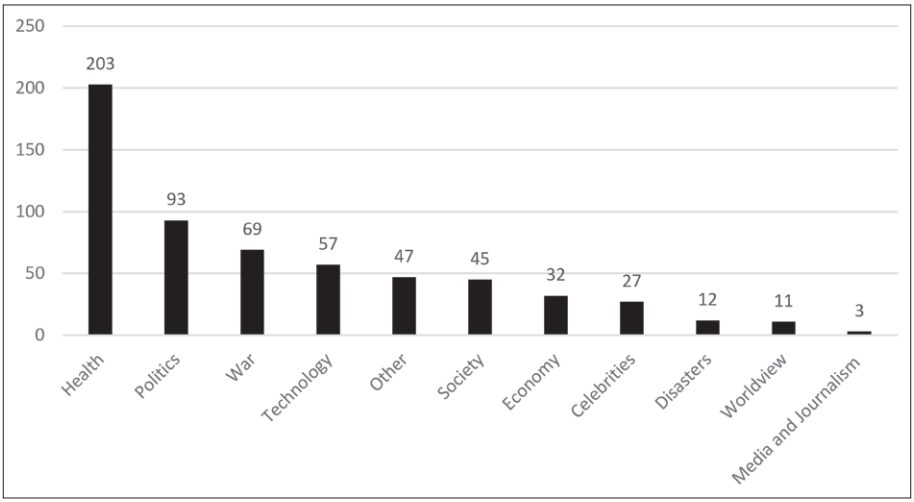
It is noteworthy that health-related content ranked first, even though the analyzed year (2023) was an election year, during which a campaign was underway. The identified political content referred to specific politicians, primarily representatives of major political parties, e.g., Andrzej Duda, Donald Tusk, Jarosław Kaczyński, Sławomir Mentzen, or Krzysztof Bosak. The main goal was usually to discredit these individuals and the parties they represented in the eyes of voters.

In the category of war-related content, fake news covered both the war in Ukraine and the conflict between Israel and Hamas. In relation to Ukraine, propaganda narratives portrayed the country as the aggressor or referred to Banderism — a continuation of Russian disinformation from previous years. Meanwhile, in the context of the Israel-Hamas war, the identified fake news amplified negative sentiment toward Israel while presenting Hamas in a favorable light.

Technological disinformation was primarily associated with 5G technology. In the area of society, false stories about child abductions and anti-refugee content were predominant. In the economy category, scams impersonating major companies — such as Biedronka, Żabka, and Orlen — were the most common. Impersonation tactics aimed at deceiving users also dominated the category of celebrity-related content.

Within the domain of disasters, fake news included claims about wildfires and earthquakes around the world, allegedly caused by HAARP technology. In the worldview category, most of the disinformation concerned LGBTQ+ issues.

Figure 1. Topics of fake news identified by the Demagog portal in 2023



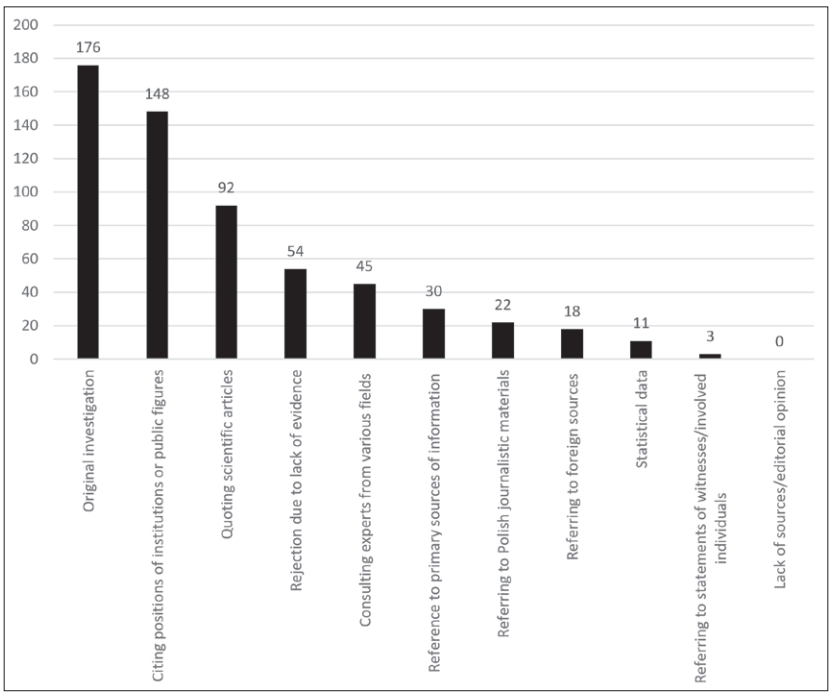
Source: Author's own research.

Equally as interesting as the content of fake news itself was the analysis of the argumentative strategies used by the Demagog portal to debunk it (Figure 2). A significant observation in this regard is that the portal often employed mixed evidence, drawing on various sources. However, the most frequently used form of argumentation was conducting original investigations, most often to verify audiovisual materials. Within this technique (176 cases), the authors of the correction published step-by-step screenshots of their investigations, such as reverse image searches or geolocation, which demonstrated the falsehood of the analyzed materials. This was mainly possible when the fake news involved AI-generated fabrications or used false images or videos.

Slightly fewer cases (148) were corrected by citing the positions of public institutions — for example, in the case of health-related disinformation, this often involved the WHO; in political topics, references were made to statements from the Chancellery of the Prime Minister or government spokespersons. Notably, this method was also used when the identified content did not constitute obvious fake news but rather conspiracy theories. In such cases, the rejection process due to a lack of evidence was also applied (54 cases).

Another argumentation technique — particularly popular in the health category — was quoting scientific articles (92 cases) that disproved specific claims found in the fake news. This method was often combined with consulting experts from various fields (45 cases). Further down the list were references to primary sources (30), mainly historical documents, as well as secondary sources such as materials from Polish (22) and foreign (18) media and other fact-checking organizations. Statistical data (11) and witness statements (3) were rarely used.

Figure 2. Specificity of the argumentation used in corrections published by the Demagog



Source: Author's own research.

A comparison of the types of arguments used across specific thematic areas is presented in Table 3. The most common type of argument for each topic is highlighted in yellow. In most topics, the dominant approach was original investigative work conducted by Demagog's fact-checkers, indicating the large volume of audiovisual fake news in those categories.

Table 3. Specificity of argument types used across different thematic areas of identified fake news

	Health	Politics	War	Technology	Other	Society	Economy	Celebrities	Disasters	Worldview	Media	Total
Original investigation	8	38	43	9	4	28	14	24	2	4	2	176
Citing positions of institutions or public figures	66	30	9	18	9	4	10	–	1	–	1	148
Quoting scientific articles	70	–	1	7	10	–	–	–	2	2	–	92
Rejection due to lack of evidence	11	12	6	8	7	4	1	1	3	1	–	54
Consulting experts from various fields	20	4	4	4	5	2	2	–	3	1	–	45
Reference to primary sources of information	11	5	2	4	1	3	2	–	1	1	–	30
Referring to Polish journalistic materials	9	2	3	1	4	2	1	–	–	–	–	22
Referring to foreign sources	5	1	1	4	3	–	1	1	–	2	–	18
Statistical data	3	–	–	1	4	2	1		–	–	–	11
Referring to statements of witnesses/ involved individuals/ subjects of disinformation	0	1	–	1	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	3
Total	203	93	69	57	47	45	32	27	12	11	3	599

Source: Author's own research.

There are, however, four thematic categories that deviate from this pattern: health, technology, disasters, and other. In response to fake health news, the most frequently used argumentation was scientific, followed by references to public institutions and expert consultations from various fields. It is worth noting that 11 health-related fake news items were rejected due to insufficient evidence supporting their claims.

The rejection due to lack of evidence also occurred in a relatively high number of cases within the categories of politics (12) and technology (8), and was almost always used in response to various conspiracy theories.

Discussion

The conducted study contributes to a deeper discussion on the quality and effectiveness of fact-checking in the fight against disinformation. To date, fact-checking organizations have no clearly defined place within the media system, nor do they operate under uniform ethical standards. Meanwhile, an increasing number of studies show that the style and structure of argumentation can significantly affect the effectiveness of counter-disinformation efforts.

This perspective is supported by long-term research conducted by Adam Berinsky (2023), who found that participants across the political spectrum updated their beliefs when presented with fact-based evidence. Paradoxically, however, updating factual knowledge did not necessarily lead to a change in candidate support. It appears that recipients of fact-checks do not struggle so much with recognizing facts as true, but rather with drawing appropriate conclusions from them or with reinterpreting reality accordingly.

This is why Berinsky argues that the quality of corrections plays a fundamental role in belief updating. Corrections originating from an *"unexpected" source* generate the most significant trust because people are more likely to believe a correction if it comes from an authority that must challenge their own beliefs to debunk a falsehood. As a result, right-wing disinformation is more effectively debunked by right-wing figures, and left-wing disinformation by left-wing figures.

Although this applies primarily to political content, it does not mean that independent corrections aimed at moderate audiences are unnecessary in other domains. Thus, fact-checking organizations like Demagog can be

effective in this regard, provided they apply a strong evidentiary and methodological foundation. Individuals with extreme views — both on the left and the right — tend to be more resistant to corrections. In contrast, moderate audiences are the most susceptible to belief change, and should therefore be the primary reference point for fact-checkers.

It is also crucial that fact-checks be simple, straightforward, specific, and free from overly complex explanations. Excessive complexity may confuse and reinforce incorrect beliefs (Berinsky, 2023). The emotional dimension of corrections also matters. They should engage recipients emotionally to a similar degree as the disinformation they respond to, to cut through the noise and produce the desired effect at the level of deeper convictions.

In this context, the study provides several reflections on the work of the oldest fact-checking organization in Poland. In its methodological statement, Demagog notes:

> The sources we most frequently rely on include: national, international, and foreign legal acts; reports from international organizations (e.g., the World Bank, OECD, WHO, ECDC); data from statistical offices (GUS, Eurostat); reports from state control institutions (NIK); reports from public opinion research institutes (CBOS); peer-reviewed scientific studies published in reputable journals (e.g., *Science*, *The Lancet*).

The organization also emphasizes that pre-existing sources take precedence over the opinions of individual scientists.

However, the analysis of fake news identified by Demagog in 2023 reveals certain pitfalls in the verification process, including potential bias. Although the website provides no information on any health-related grants (apart from a note on cooperation on child abduction issues, which aligns with some social fake news content), the high volume of health-related verifications, especially during an election campaign, is noteworthy.

This may be explained by the fact that Demagog publishes political fact-checks separately — in the form of evaluations of individual politicians' statements — and that is likely where most of the political misinformation was addressed. Therefore, we should be cautious in interpreting health as the most prominent area of disinformation, even if it appears to be the most frequently fact-checked.

What is evident, however, is that Demagog regularly debunks various conspiracy theories and alternative medicine claims, including those related to

herbal remedies — often labeling them as false. This does not appear to be intentional bias but rather the result of thematic habits. The analysis shows that many of the debunked contents originated from accounts that promote alternative medicine. These sources are likely regularly monitored by the Demagog team. As a result, individual fact-checkers may more frequently select this type of content — a dynamic that can be explained by the availability heuristic. It is important to note that this is a highly specialized field where scientific consensus does not always exist. The effectiveness of a correction in such a domain is crucial, and overreliance on scientific authority in the absence of consensus may backfire. It can even undermine trust in science itself, which is clearly the goal of disinformation actors, not of fact-checkers.

A crucial issue appears to be the selection of arguments in response to specific forms of disinformation or the domains they concern. In Demagog's corrections, there is a noticeable tendency to debunk conspiracy theories by citing scientific research or official documents from public institutions. The problem, however, lies in the very nature of conspiracy theories — they inherently assume that such sources are untrustworthy. This raises the question of whether invoking these sources might paradoxically trigger a confirmation effect among individuals already invested in believing those theories.

This concern is partially supported by the findings of Das, Mehta, and Lease (2019), who studied the influence of user ideology on the reception of fact-checking content. Their results confirmed a bias toward confirmation: individuals with firm ideological commitments were more skeptical of facts that contradicted their views, regardless of the source's credibility. Similarly, Anthony Washburn and Linda Skitka (2018) demonstrated that both liberals and conservatives were less likely to accurately interpret scientific research findings when those findings conflicted with their prior beliefs. This phenomenon may occur not only in the political domain, but also in other areas such as health.

Another observed tendency that raises concerns, considering current scientific knowledge, is the use of "negation due to lack of evidence" as an argument. For instance, if no scientific studies confirm the effectiveness or impact of a given product — such as a particular herb — on health, Demagog would classify such information as fake news under this justification. However, this approach may be perceived as overstepping the boundaries of discourse, potentially leading audiences to believe there is unofficial censorship of thought. This concern is often raised, especially in relation to ideological, worldview-related, or health-related topics.

It is also well established that individuals across the political spectrum are motivated to reject information that contradicts their beliefs and to accept information that confirms them (Kahan, 2013). Therefore, corrections based on negation may be more likely to be dismissed by the audience, since the mere absence of evidence is not necessarily proof of falsehood and certainly not for those who already subscribe to a given belief.

That said, it is worth acknowledging that Demagog typically supplemented this type of reasoning with additional forms of justification, which helped mitigate its potential negative impact. This only reinforces the view that using "lack of evidence" as a standalone argument may be unnecessary, and that, in some cases, withholding judgment may be more appropriate than issuing premature negations.

For neutral individuals who do not hold strong beliefs in a particular area and should be considered the primary target audience for fact-checking, one notable difficulty may lie in the length and complexity of the corrections published by Demagog. These fact-checks often cite scientific articles, official documents, and expert commentary, which can make them appear inaccessible and difficult to understand, especially when contrasted with the simple, clear message of the original fake news they aim to debunk. Although Demagog typically includes a summary at the beginning of each article, which may help structure the reader's understanding, this may still be insufficient. The overload of arguments can create informational noise and overwhelm the audience, potentially leading to rejection of the correction itself.

Moreover, contrary to Berinsky's recommendations, Demagog does not create an emotional context for its fact-checks. Their corrections often resemble formal reports and rarely address the emotions provoked by disinformation. This appears to be an area requiring improvement both psychologically and rhetorically. Emotions play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and beliefs, and without addressing or soothing those emotions, it may be challenging to achieve the desired effect of effectively countering false claims and influencing the audience.

Undoubtedly, the strongest aspect of Demagog's fact-checking work lies in its original investigations. These are typically short texts that present the step-by-step process for verifying images or other media content. The evidence of falsehood in such investigations is usually straightforward and unambiguous, and the transparent verification process serves an educational purpose as well.

This type of activity appears to be a key strength of fact-checking organizations, functioning as a valuable complement to the work of traditional journalistic editorial teams. While journalists are obligated to verify information before publication, the audience does not have access to that process, only to its result (which may not always be satisfactory). In contrast, fact-checkers, through such transparent investigations, provide insight into the evaluation of audiovisual content, effectively extending the process of information verification within the media ecosystem. In this way, fact-checking organizations may also serve as quality-control agents for journalistic content, a relatively rare but potentially equally necessary function alongside the verification of political statements.

The conducted analysis demonstrates that the Demagog portal serves as a quasi-media institution within the Polish media system, combining elements of journalistic content verification with the role of a non-governmental organization overseeing politicians' statements. On the one hand, this activity helps counter disinformation and plays an essential educational role; on the other hand, it reveals mechanisms of topic selection and argumentative strategies that may create the impression of bias or excessive complexity in communication. At times, it even leads to the erroneous classification of content as fake news.

Moreover, excessive reliance on public or institutional sources, or the use of argumentation based on insufficient evidence, poses a risk of triggering confirmation bias or backfire effects among audiences, ultimately reinforcing rather than weakening the spread of disinformation. Therefore, the analysis of Demagog's publications during the 2023 election year provides a valuable insight into both the potential and limitations of fact-checking as a tool for combating disinformation in Poland. It is worth noting that although the organization plays a significant role in public discourse, it is not subject to institutional oversight of the ethical or substantive quality of its content beyond the general IFCN standards, which still leave many issues ambiguous.

A similar situation applies to other fact-checking organizations operating in Poland. Their status remains unclear, and as such, it seems necessary to initiate a broader public and academic discussion on the role of fact-checkers in the media system. In the author's view, a key step toward the effective development of the fact-checking ecosystem would be the establishment of unified ethical standards, criteria for the effectiveness of corrections, and their implementation within the Polish media framework — alongside institutional mechanisms for evaluating and sanctioning the quality of fact-checking activities.

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