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WHAT DO FACT-CHECKERS CHECK? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL AND NON-POLITICAL MISINFORMATION ACROSS FOUR COUNTRIES

ÖZLEM DELAL ABANOZ[1], DREN GËRGURI[2], EDLIRA PALLOSHI-DISHA[3], MUHAMET JAHIRI*[2] & ENES ABANOZ[1]

[1]Ondokuz Mayis University, Turkey
[2]University of Prishtina, Kosovo
[3]South East European University, North Macedonia
**corresponding author*

ABSTRACT

The scope of misinformation is extensive, yet studies of fact-checking in Southeastern Europe and Türkiye have disproportionately focused on political or health-related claims. This study provides a broader empirical evaluation through a content analysis of 1,067 fact-checking articles published between January and June 2025 by seven fact-checking organizations in Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Türkiye. Rather than concentrating on a single issue, the analysis distinguishes fact-checked claims into two broad categories: political claims, including elections, political actors, and public policy, and non-political claims, encompassing topics such as health, crime, and the economy. The findings show that non-political misinformation constituted the majority of fact-checked content across all four countries, although the balance between political and non-political misinformation varied by country context. Political and non-political misinformation differed systematically in misleading characteristics, content formats, and platform origins, with political misinformation more often involving fabricated or manipulated content across the analyzed national contexts.

KEYWORDS

misinformation • fact-checking • Western Balkans • Türkiye

INTRODUCTION

Misinformation has emerged as a primary issue for democracies and public institutions worldwide, affecting political turnout, population health outcomes, and media credibility. Though the academic literature in fact-checking has grown considerably in recent years, much of the research interest has been on narrower areas, especially those related to politics or health (Vraga & Bode, 2020), or on fact-checking economies that have been well-developed, such as the United States (Guess et al., 2020a), Western Europe (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024), or even some Latin American countries (Palau-Sampio, 2018). By contrast, the media climate in Kosovo, Albania, North Macedonia, and Türkiye remains relatively understudied. Yet, their political situations are highly complex, and there are also active online communities. There are established professional fact-checking organizations that operate across linguistic, cultural, and institutional boundaries (Akser & Baybars, 2024; Gërguri et al., 2026; Palloshi-Disha & Bajrami, 2025).

The literature demonstrates that misinformation is not evenly distributed across topics. Political misinformation has been identified as escalating during elections and other significant political events, where it is, in most cases, fueled by the political elite, partisan media, or organized networks. In comparison, non-political misinformation is more prevalent in public health, crime, scientific controversies, and celebrity culture, where public understanding is unequal, and information spreads rapidly on social media. There is, however, little information available on comparing these topic categories with the output of smaller or developing fact-checking media ecosystems, particularly in southeastern Europe and Türkiye, where political polarization, historical tensions, institutional distrust, and varying degrees of media freedom create unique conditions for misinformation.

The fact-checking organizations in the region have become significant actors in countering misinformation, but they operate within the circumstances of limited resources, varying media freedom, and serious political influences (Akser & Baybars, 2024; Gërguri et al., 2026). This is because their knowledge of what types of claims they consider and the way in which they consider them is essential for mapping out the information environment in a larger sense. Furthermore, comparative research involving two or more countries is especially useful for distinguishing structural similarities from country-specific patterns in misinformation and verification practices.

Current studies of misinformation and fact-checking have predominantly targeted specific areas, with the most prevalent being political communication and health crises (e.g., Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Cinelli et

al., 2020; Vraga & Bode, 2020). Fact-checking practices have been studied in established media systems in Western democracies (Graves, 2016; Walter et al., 2020). Although these studies offer valuable information, they are inclined to examine misinformation in individual topic areas or in individual country systems, and we cannot learn about the interactions and prioritization of various kinds of misinformation in various media conditions. Furthermore, there is a lack of comparative studies that can identify systematic differences between political and non-political misinformation across multiple countries, especially in the poorly studied areas of Southeastern Europe and Türkiye. This gap matters as misinformation does not exist solely in the political domain but is a part of the daily informational environment, such as health, the economy, and social problems. The present research fills these gaps through the cross-country comparison strategy and by a wide thematic categorization that differentiates the political and non-political misinformation across various areas of issues and media regimes.

This research aims to fill these gaps by presenting a cross-country systematic analysis of 1067 fact-checking articles from seven fact-checking organizations, three in Türkiye, two in Kosovo, one in Albania, and one in North Macedonia. Instead of focusing on a particular issue like climate change or vaccines, as some previous studies have done (Bode & Vraga, 2021; Çömlekçi, 2025) we instead approach more holistically by differentiating between fact-checked statements falling into two broad, analytically useful categories:

- Political claims: elections, political parties, politicians, public policies, legislation, institutions, and foreign affairs.
- Non-political claims: health, crime, economy, society, celebrity stories, and scientific or technical issues.

The classification of articles depends on their primary topic and main focus, as it is determined in the coding table. The classification represents the central point discussed in the claim (e.g., health, elections), not its broader, indirect political implications. This content-based approach will make the distinction between political and non-political misinformation consistent, even when some issues are politically disputed. This classification would enable a better understanding not only of the thematic structure of fact-checking outputs but also of the sociopolitical forces behind misinformation within each of these spheres. It also enables us to examine the diversity of claims to determine whether different categories of claims exhibit distinct patterns of verification, such as reliance on expert authority,

transparency of verdicts, and reliance on evidence or external connections.

Through a country-comparative analysis of fact-checking in Kosovo, Albania, North Macedonia, and Türkiye, the study broadens the geographic and topical scope of research on misinformation. It adds to the literature demonstrating how the landscape of verified information is determined by political context, claim type, and institutional ecosystems. Moreover, the study provides a more detailed insight into misinformation in Southeastern Europe and Türkiye and highlights the necessity of considering a wide range of types of claims when assessing the role and effectiveness of fact-checking organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I. Efficacy and Limitations of Fact-Checking

Although misinformation has existed throughout history, the proliferation of digital technologies and the emergence of Web 2.0, which enabled ordinary users to start producing content, have caused this problem to grow exponentially. In particular, with the advent of artificial intelligence technologies in recent years, users can now produce text, photos, and videos without needing professional knowledge, increasing the number and variety of misinformation on social media. Digital media environments not only facilitate content production but also radically increase the speed at which information circulates. Unverified information can reach thousands of users in seconds and have an impact on large audiences. Studies show that individuals struggle to identify fake content, especially in digital environments (Nygren & Guath, 2019), and are often unprepared to question the source and impartiality of information (Wineburg et al., 2016).

Fact-checking platforms, which have emerged to combat this problem, are becoming increasingly widespread around the world. Studies on fact-checking, which acts as a shield against misinformation, a global problem, show that these initiatives can correct real beliefs, improve the perceived quality of news, and thus improve the quality of the information environment (Berger et al., 2025; Flynn et al., 2017; Pingree et al., 2014; Van Erkel et al., 2024). Research has also shown that fact-checking organizations, which are particularly effective in reducing political polarization (Hameleers, 2019; Liu et al., 2023; Walter et al., 2020), reduce the likelihood that politicians found to have spread misinformation will engage in similar behavior in the future (Nyhan & Reifler, 2015).

Although fact-checking platforms play a central role in combating misinformation, academic literature reveals that these initiatives have various

structural, cognitive, and functional limitations. These platforms have limitations in terms of accessibility, concerns about impartiality in news selection and framing, and the impact of fact-checking on users.

The most significant limitation in manual verification is that fact-checking organizations cannot cope with the magnitude and speed of misinformation. Fake news spreads faster and reaches a greater number of people than real news (Vosoughi et al., 2018). One study shows that misinformation receives 784 times more likes, 240 times more comments, and 5,341 times more shares than fact-checked content (Brautovic & John, 2023). This puts fact-checking organizations at a disadvantage in terms of reach, limiting their impact. According to Gërguri and Lilleker (2025), fact-checkers are constrained not only by limited reach but by the fact that citizens seldom turn to them in the first place, meaning their corrective efforts often fail to penetrate public information habits.

A related issue to limited access is the selection of claims to be verified. Millions of questionable pieces of content circulate in digital media environments every day. Human fact-checkers are compelled to select from among this content. The impartiality of this selection, and whether ideological perspectives influence the selection of claims, is a significant criticism of fact-checking platforms. Although the methods used by fact-checking platforms to verify claims are quite meticulous and disciplined, the process of selecting which claims to verify is "less scientific" and subjective. This creates uncertainty about which claims the platforms select and examine from a vast pool of information (Graves, 2016). Research on this topic shows that determining which claims are worthy of fact-checking is an editorial and interpretive process (Birks, 2019; Delal Abanoz & Kocaman, 2025; Lim, 2018). This process, referred to as selection bias (Ostermeier, 2011), demonstrates that even if fact-checking platforms approach objectivity at the point of fact-checking, they cannot avoid ideological bias in the selection of claims to be verified, highlighting a significant limitation for fact-checking platforms (Fernandez et al., 2016).

These cognitive and structural limitations apply not only to verifiers but also to users of fact-checking platforms or fact-check consumers. Users exposed to misinformation often use fact-checking content not as a tool for critical evaluation, but to generate new justifications to defend their own beliefs. Individuals who accept arguments that support their own thoughts approach content that does not align with their views more critically and skeptically (Taber & Lodge, 2006). This situation, defined as motivated reasoning, significantly limits the persuasive effect of the evidence and sources provided by fact-checking platforms, especially in polarized environments (Lewandowsky et al., 2012; Walter et al., 2020).

These cognitive processes also limit the behavioral impact of fact-checking. Research indicates that a substantial portion of fact-checking content consumers are individuals with high media literacy skills (Delal Abanoz, 2023; Guess et al., 2020b). This is considered a limitation, as fact-checking content struggles to reach groups that embrace misinformation, and its impact remains limited. Additionally, the cognitive state of fact-checking consumers is a significant limitation to the effectiveness of fact-checking.

In this context, fact-checking platforms should be considered a complementary part of a broader information and communication environment, rather than a sufficient solution on their own, in the fight against misinformation. The literature indicates that the impact of fact-checking is contextual and limited, yet it can make meaningful contributions under specific conditions. Despite their structural and cognitive limitations, fact-checking platforms remain one of the fundamental tools for supporting the quality of information in the digital public sphere and mitigating the impact of misinformation.

These restrictions point to the fact that fact-checking is not merely limited by its size, resources, and audience acceptance, but also by the character of the assertions that it aims to fact-check. The various misinformation types can have different difficulties to its verification, interpretation, and correction to the audience. This poses a critical analytical question which is whether the performance and activities of fact-checking differ according to the nature of the misinformation under consideration, especially when there is a comparison between political and non-political claims.

II. Political vs. Non-political Misinformation

The study of misinformation has become a global requisite when requiring systemic conditions for the development of democracy. However, a distinct approach to the study of misinformation has been applied to determine how misinformation is defined and what techniques and strategies are used for dissemination. Wardle and Darekshan's (2017) widely used concept distinguishes the information disorders by the agent's intent to spread misinformation: Misinformation (false information shared without harmful intent), disinformation (false information shared deliberately to cause harm), and malinformation (information used in misleading or harmful ways to discredit a public figure). Political misinformation frequently aligns with disinformation, as it is often produced and disseminated strategically to influence public opinion, electoral behavior, or trust in democratic institutions. In contrast, non-political misinformation more commonly stems from errors, oversimplifications, or the absence of critical context, aligning more closely with unintentional misinformation

(Nyhan & Reifler, 2010; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). As this study examines the association between political and non-political misinformation and fact-checking outcomes, the term misinformation is used as a neutral analytical category that does not presuppose the intent of the information producer.

Research on political communication constantly shows well-coordinated attempts to misinformation campaigns that are not accidental, but systematically embedded in partisan media ecosystems and amplified through digital infrastructure (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Similarly, Bradshaw and Howard (2019) demonstrate that political actors, both foreign and domestic, deploy intentionally fabricated or manipulated claims to advance political agendas, polarize societies or undermine democratic institutional endeavors. Election campaigns are also targets of misinformation campaigns where political misinformation is often designed to provoke emotional appeals, reinforce existing biases and mobilize or demobilize voters (Allcott & Gentzkow 2017; Guess et al., 2020a). These characteristics make its deceptive intent more visible during the fact-checking process, and political claims are more likely to involve falsification, manipulation of facts, or deliberate narrative construction, which fact-checkers often classify as false or manipulated (Markowitz et al., 2023). On the other hand, non-political misinformation such as content that relates to health, science, economy, etc, emerges from different communication and information patterns. Research often indicates that this type of misinformation is often the result of misinterpretation of data or outdated or incomplete information (Southwell et al, 2018). Vraga and Bode (2020) primarily refer to non-political, context-dependent misinformation, particularly in areas such as health and science communication, where claims are often bounded, containing elements of truth but becoming misleading due to missing context, evolving evidence, or divergence from expert consensus rather than deliberate fabrication. As a result, non-political misinformation often reflects unintentional communication failures rather than strategic manipulation. This distinction has important implications for fact-checkers when identifying and categorizing articles. Therefore, this study tries to understand whether political or non-polical misinformation type of articles shape how fact-checkers in the Western Balkans and Türkiye classify misinformation, reflecting differences in intent, context complexities, and communicative strategies. These views indicate that both the political and non-political misinformation are not merely conceptually different but can also be systematically different in terms of their production, interpretation, and assessment of the fact-checking practices. There is, however, scant comparative evidence of the manner in which these categories

are spread across various national contexts and their correlation with the outcomes of fact-checking.

In order to fill this gap, the study analyzes the prevalence of political and non-political misinformation, and then the question is whether these two types of misinformation are linked to various verification outcomes:

- *RQ1: To what extent is misinformation in each country political or non-political?*

In addition to their distribution, a critical issue that arises is whether political and non-political misinformation is systematically different in the way they are rated by fact-checking organizations, especially in terms of verification and the misleading characteristics. Therefore, we have posed this research question:

- *RQ2: Are political claims more likely to be classified as "False" or "Manipulated," while non-political claims are more frequently classified as "Misleading" by fact-checking organizations?*

III. Misinformation Across Platforms

Based on the difference between political and non-political misinformation, this section explores the distribution and nature of these two types of misinformation through platform-specific affordances. The social media platforms and their architecture and affordances inherently influence the circulation of misinformation and how users interact with it. The distinct environment each of the platforms creates with their respective algorithms, social interaction patterns, and content formats creates an environment that generates political and non-political misinformation. These cross-platform differences are needed to clarify the way not only false information is spread but also how people react to fact-checking and moderation work in various national and regulatory contexts.

Misinformation and its spread are mediated by platform architecture, which is characterized by design features and affordances. The platform design and the cultural context mediate the spread of misinformation and the perceived risks, as demonstrated in comparative research in the Global North and South (Hameleers & Garnier Ortiz, 2024). The algorithmic amplification of Facebook favors emotionally engaging posts (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Guess et al., 2023), whereas Twitter/X tends to focus on the spread of information quickly with the help of retweets and trending topics (Pacheco et al., 2021). TikTok rewards the viral content provided, no matter the source credibility, encouraging the proliferation of visual

misinformation (Mulcahy et al., 2024). The recommendation system of YouTube was also discovered to drive users towards increasingly radical content, especially in political areas (Berjawi et al., 2024).

The spread of misinformation varies across platforms based on the user interaction mechanisms. Misinformation flourishes in closed echo chambers on Facebook (De-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2023); on Twitter/X, bots and organized networks are central to it (Shao et al., 2018). Misinformation on TikTok is likely to be disseminated through the audio trend and remix culture (Biddle, 2022), whereas on YouTube, there is a high dependence on algorithmic reinforcement and recommendation loops (Berjawi et al., 2024).

Platform-Specific Patterns of Political vs. Non-Political Misinformation

Facebook and Twitter are dominated by political misinformation, which is frequently associated with ideological polarization and election campaigns (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Jerit & Zhao, 2020). Non-political misinformation, including health, science, or celebrity-related content, is more common on TikTok and YouTube in contrast (Cinelli et al., 2020). The informal aesthetics of TikTok make the dissemination of misinformation seem fun as it is perceived as a game, and political misinformation on the platform is often combined with entertainment (Abidin, 2021). These disparities suggest that the format and the nature of interaction on every platform affect the nature and tone of misinformation that is propagated. Although it is possible to distinguish between political and non-political misinformation at the content and verification level, such trends are also determined by the platform conditions under which misinformation is shared. Various platforms could favor various types of claims. Therefore, we have posed this research question:

- *RQ3: Is political misinformation more likely to originate on certain platforms?*

The effectiveness of fact-checking labels is different between platforms. Evidence indicates that warning labels on Facebook decrease sharing by about 10-20% (Pennycook et al., 2020), whereas the "read before retweet" prompt on Twitter does slightly decrease the promotion of misinformation (Clayton et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the fact-check panels that YouTube implemented are frequently ignored (Godinez & Mustafaraj, 2024), and the interventions that TikTok applied, like the option to redirect searches to the WHO pages, cannot be considered very transparent (Zeng & Kaye, 2022). Correction of political misinformation is more resistant than non-political misinformation (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010).

Besides influencing the nature of misinformation, platforms can also affect the fact-checking results, which begs the question of whether some platforms are linked to particular fact-checking results. Following on the earlier studies on platform design and user interaction as determinants of misinformation dynamics, this paper examines how structural and cultural variations across the Western Balkans and Türkiye determine the stronger links of some platforms to some forms of misinformation and examines if these trends are consistent across countries. In particular, it is going to answer the following hypothesis and research question:

- *RQ4: Are certain platforms more associated with verified falsehoods than with misleading or unproven claims?*

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to fill a gap in misinformation research by adopting a broader thematic framework and focusing on relatively under-researched media environments. The methodology employed is content analysis. Through this method, the study has identified the topic headings, verification methods, and similarities and differences across countries regarding claims examined by fact-checking platforms. Content analysis was chosen because it enables a systematic, comparable, and reproducible analysis of misinformation produced and verified across different national media ecosystems (Krippendorff, 2004).

The study's population consists of fact-checking content published by fact-checking platforms operating in four countries. The selection of countries is based on the Media Literacy Index, which comparatively assesses levels of media literacy and societal resilience against misinformation across these nations (Lessenski, 2023). According to the Index, Türkiye (29), Bosnia and Herzegovina (24), Albania (23), North Macedonia (22), and Kosovo (21) rank among the countries with relatively low media literacy scores. This systemic vulnerability is further illustrated by localized research; for instance, Jahiri et al. (2024) highlight that in Kosovo, young digital users face high exposure to online risks yet remain largely unprepared due to a critical absence of media literacy in the educational curriculum. Furthermore, a study conducted in 2020 by Hrvatin, Petković, and Hodžić (2020) demonstrates that in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, disinformation and propaganda operate not as marginal phenomena but as a structural element of the media system, shaped by political and economic interests. In this context, selecting these countries represents an analytical choice to examine verification practices in media environments that are more sensitive to misinformation.

The selection of fact-checking platforms operating in these countries is based on membership in the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). Established in 2015 under the auspices of the Poynter Institute, the IFCN is a global organization that supports best practices in fact-checking by promoting collaboration, capacity building, and adherence to common standards. Fact-checking organizations that have signed the IFCN Code of Principles are expected to meet internationally recognized criteria for transparency, impartiality, and methodological rigor (IFCN, n.d.). Based on this criterion, the sample includes seven fact-checking platforms: three from Türkiye, two from Kosovo, and one each from Albania and North Macedonia. This distribution may have led to a relatively higher representation of claims originating from Türkiye in the dataset. To address this potential imbalance, the analyses were conducted both on the total dataset and by normalizing the data on a country-by-country basis.

The data was collected from the official websites of the selected fact-checking platforms. Each fact-checking article was treated as an analysis unit representing a single claim. The dataset consists of fact-checking content published between January and June 2025. This data was obtained using web scraping techniques. This technique for collecting data from the web enables the automatic retrieval of an almost unlimited number of Google search results for predefined search queries (Diakopoulos, 2019; Schwab et al., 2023). The collected data was then converted into a structured dataset for analysis. The final sample comprises 1,067 fact-checking articles published by seven active fact-checking platforms during the specified period.

Table 1. Number of articles across countries and organizations (n = 1,067)

Platform	Country	Articles analyzed
Doğrula	Turkey	66
Doğruluk Payı	Turkey	180
Faktoje	Albania	32
Hibrid	Kosovo	250
Kallxo	Kosovo	199
Teyit	Turkey	246
Vertetmates	North Macedonia	94

The coding scheme was developed through an initial review of the collected data, and a detailed coding guide was prepared to ensure consistency during the coding process. Within this framework, fact-checking claims were grouped into two main categories—political and non-political—based on their primary focus. This distinction was applied using a set of subcate-

gories defined in the coding guide. Political claims covered elections, political actors, political parties, public policies, legislative processes, government institutions, and foreign policy. Non-political claims, on the other hand, covered topics such as health, crime, economy, social events, entertainment, and scientific or technical issues. The coding guide provided clear definitions and examples for each category, ensuring consistency among coders.

Before the main coding process, coders were trained using coding guidelines and a subset of the dataset. To assess coding reliability, a stratified random subsample comprising 20% of the dataset (n = 216) was selected, and these units were recorded by an independent second coder using the same coding guidelines. This analysis is shown in Table 2. In the content analysis literature, it is noted that recoding 10–25% of the dataset is appropriate for reliability assessment (Neuendorf, 2017; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). The 20% rate chosen in this study exceeds the recommended minimum thresholds and was distributed in a balanced manner to represent different platforms. Inter-coder agreement was calculated using Krippendorff's alpha coefficients depending on the measurement level of the variables, and the analysis results indicate a high level of agreement among coders. This stems from the fact that the coding categories are defined in a relatively concrete and clear manner. A significant portion of the variables used in the study—such as the format of the misleading content (e.g., image, video, or text), the subject of the claim (e.g., health, politics), the fact-checking methods used, and the type of misleading element—are explicitly and directly stated in the fact-checking texts. In line with the principles of the International Fact-Checking Network, the transparent presentation of verification content in terms of sources, evidence, and methods facilitates more consistent interpretation of this information by coders. This structural transparency has contributed to a high level of inter-coder agreement.

Table 2. Intercoder Reliability Results

Country (Scope)	Subject	Confirmation result	The misleading aspect of the suspect's claim	Type of suspected claim	The place where the suspicious claim arose	Fact-checking method	Evidence
ALL COUNTRIES (Overall)	0.9081	1.0	0.8992	0.9721	0.9758	0.9206	1.0
Albania	0.6176	1.0	1.0	0.7451	1.0	0.8354	1.0
Kosovo	0.9017	1.0	0.9001	965	0.9509	0.8854	1.0
North Macedonia	1.0	1.0	0.8722	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Türkiye	0.9091	1.0	0.8825	0.9839	0.9818	0.9295	No Variance

This study focuses on the following categories in the coding table to systematically examine the thematic distribution of false and misleading claims addressed by fact-checking platforms, their verification results, and the fact-checking methods used:

1. What topics do the claims examined by fact-checking platforms focus on?
2. How are the verification results (true, false, mixed, inconclusive) of the examined claims distributed?
3. Which misleading elements (miscontextualization, manipulation, fabrication, imitation content, etc.) are most frequently used in verified claims?
4. Under which claim types (visual, video, text, live stream) are the claims addressed by fact-checking platforms classified?
5. Where do false or misleading claims most frequently emerge (X, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)?
6. What fact-checking methods do fact-checking platforms use to verify or debunk claims?

It aims to uncover the thematic and structural characteristics of fact-checking practices in media ecosystems that have been relatively under-researched in the literature, such as Türkiye and the Western Balkans. The article is innovative in its comparison of political and non-political misinformation and its focus on countries that have been insufficiently studied in the discourse on misinformation and fact-checking. However, rather than improving existing methods and frameworks or adopting new ones, it has adopted them as they are.

RESULTS

Distribution of political and non-political misinformation

To address RQ1, a Pearson Chi-Square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between the country of origin and the subject of the misinformation (political vs. non-political). The analysis revealed a statistically significant association between the country and the political nature of the verified claims, $\chi 2(3, N = 1{,}067) = 65.09$, $p < .001$. The effect size, calculated using Cramér's V, was .25, indicating a moderate relationship between the variables.

Table 3. Frequencies and Percentages of Misinformation by Country

Country	Non-political n (%)	Political n (%)	Total N
Albania	18 (56.2%)	14 (43.8%)	32
Kosovo	263 (58.6%)	186 (41.4%)	449
North Macedonia	73 (77.7%)	21 (22.3%)	94
Türkiye	401 (81.5%)	91 (18.5%)	492
Total	**755 (70.8%)**	**312 (29.2%)**	**1,067**

Note. $\chi 2(3, N = 1,067) = 65.09$, $p < .001$, Cramér's V = .25. Percentages represent row proportions, indicating the extent of political versus non-political misinformation within each specific country.

Overall, non-political misinformation was more prevalent than political misinformation across the entire dataset. However, the distribution varied notably by region. Specifically, Albania and Kosovo had the highest proportions of political misinformation, accounting for 43.8% and 41.4% of their respective verified claims. In contrast, misinformation originating in North Macedonia (22.3% political) and Türkiye (18.5% political) was overwhelmingly non-political. The findings in Table 3 indicate that, although non-political themes generally dominate the misinformation environment, the scope of political misinformation is significantly context-dependent, and the selected Balkan countries exhibit a more politicized misinformation environment than Türkiye.

Fact-Checking outcomes and misleading aspects

To answer RQ2, two separate Pearson Chi-Square tests of independence with post-hoc standardized residual analyses were conducted. The first test examined the association between the subject of the claim and the final confirmation result. A statistically significant, albeit weak, overall association was found, $\chi 2(3, N = 1,067) = 10.44$, $p = .015$, Cramér's V = .10. However, post-hoc analysis of the standardized residuals (z) did not support the hypothesis that political claims are more likely to be classified as "False" (z = 0.31). Instead, the significant driver of this association was that political claims were significantly less likely to be verified as "True" (z = -2.57) compared to non-political claims.

The second test examined the association between the subject and the specific misleading aspect of the claim. A statistically significant and moderate association was observed, $\chi 2(7, N = 1,067) = 57.23$, $p < .001$, Cramér's V = .23. Post-hoc analysis partially supported the hypothesis regarding manipulated claims: political misinformation was indeed significantly more likely to be classified as "Manipulation" (z = 2.12). Additionally, political claims were significantly more likely to involve "False Context" (z = 2.75). Conversely, the hypothesis that non-political claims are more frequently classified as

"Misleading" was unsupported (z = -0.68). Rather, non-political claims were significantly more likely to be categorized as a "False Connection" (z = 2.62) and to possess "No misleading aspect" (z = 1.61) than their political counterparts. The results of these analyses, shown in Table 4, revealed that fact-checkers primarily detect political claims through manipulation and false context rather than simple categorical falsehoods.

Table 4. Standardized Residuals for Confirmation Result and Misleading Aspect by Misinformation Subject

Variable and Category	Non-political (z)	Political (z)
Confirmation Result		
False	-0.20	0.31
Mixed	-0.41	0.63
True	1.65	**-2.57**
Unable to finalise	-0.35	0.54
Misleading Aspect		
Fabricated	-0.98	1.53
False Connection	**2.62**	**-4.07**
False Context	-1.77	**2.75**
Imposter	-0.54	0.84
Manipulation	-1.36	**2.12**
Misleading	-0.68	1.06
No misleading aspect	1.61	**-2.51**
Parody	0.76	-1.18

Note. Overall Confirmation Result test: $\chi 2(3) = 10.44$, $p = .015$, Cramér's V = .10. Overall Misleading Aspect test: $\chi 2(7) = 57.23$, $p < .001$, Cramér's V = .23. Standardized residuals (z) indicate the difference between observed and expected frequencies. Values in bold indicate a statistically significant deviation from expected frequencies ($z>1.96$ or $z<–1.96$, corresponding to $\alpha = .05$), showing categories that are significantly more or less likely to occur than chance would dictate.

Platforms where misinformation originated

To address RQ3, a Pearson Chi-Square test of independence was conducted to assess the relationship between the subject of the misinformation (political vs. non-political) and the platform where the suspicious claim originated. The analysis, presented in Table 5, revealed a statistically significant, moderate association between the subject matter and the platform of origin, $\chi 2(7, N = 1,067) = 52.48$, $p < .001$, Cramér's V = .22. A post-hoc analysis of the standardized residuals (z) confirmed that political misinformation is heavily stratified by platform. Specifically, political claims were significantly more likely to originate on Meta/Facebook (z = 3.31) than expected by chance. Conversely, political claims were significantly less likely to originate on Instagram (z = -3.18) and X/Twitter (z = -3.22). Instead, Insta-

gram (z = 2.05) and X/Twitter (z = 2.07) were significantly associated with non-political misinformation. Other platforms, including TikTok, individual websites, and multi-platform combinations, did not exhibit statistically significant deviations toward either political or non-political subjects (|z|<1.96). These findings suggest that within the studied countries, Meta/Facebook serves as the primary vector for political misinformation, while platforms like Instagram and X/Twitter are disproportionately utilized for non-political claims.

Table 5. Standardized Residuals for Misinformation Subject and Confirmation Result

Platform of Origin	Non-political (z)	Political (z)	False (z)	Mixed (z)	True (z)	Unable to finalise (z)
Both traditional media and social media	0.10	-0.16	0.37	-1.10	-1.10	-0.28
Instagram	**2.05**	**-3.18**	-1.20	**2.20**	**5.20**	-0.42
Meta/Facebook	**-2.13**	**3.31**	0.25	0.38	-1.90	0.36
Multiple social media	-1.00	1.55	0.12	0.27	-0.89	-0.23
Other/Combined	0.01	-0.02	-0.61	1.30	1.30	**3.90**
TikTok	-0.79	1.23	0.52	-1.50	-1.50	-0.39
Website	-0.84	1.31	-0.14	1.30	-0.39	-0.32
X/Twitter	**2.07**	**-3.22**	0.21	-1.40	0.40	-0.82

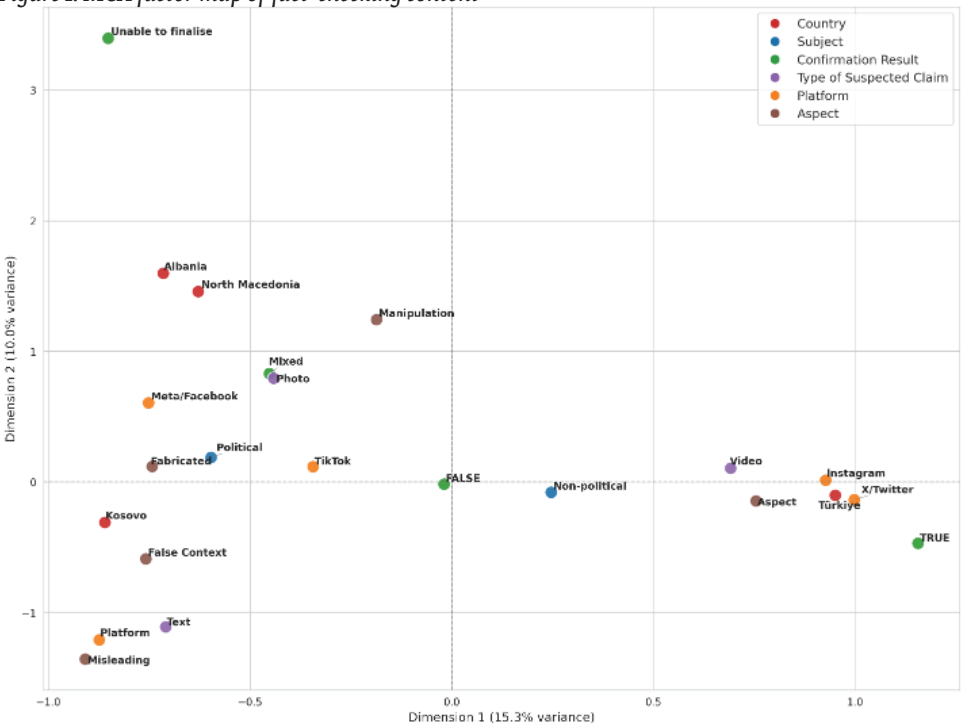
Note. For misinformation subject $\chi2(7, N = 1,067) = 52.48$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .22$, for confirmation result $\chi2(21, N = 1,067) = 70.36$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .15$. Standardized residuals (z) represent the difference between observed and expected frequencies. Values in bold indicate a statistically significant deviation from expected frequencies ($z \geq 1.96$ or $z \leq -1.96$, corresponding to $\alpha = .05$). Positive significant values indicate that a specific subject occurs more often than expected by chance on that platform, while negative significant values indicate it occurs less often.

To address RQ4, a Pearson Chi-Square test of independence was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the originating platform of the suspicious claim and its final verification outcome. The overall test indicated a statistically significant, though weak, association between the platform and the confirmation result, $\chi2(21, N = 1,067) = 70.36$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .15$. However, an analysis of the post-hoc standardized residuals (z) did not support the hypothesis that certain platforms are more associated with verified falsehoods. In fact, no single platform was significantly associated with the "False" confirmation outcome; all standardized residuals for this category fell within the bounds of chance (|z|<1.96). Instead, significant variations were observed within the misleading (Mixed), verified (True), and unproven (Unable to finalize) categories. Instagram was significantly more likely to host claims that were ultimately evaluated as "Mixed" (z = 2.2) and "True" (z = 5.2), suggesting its environment is disproportionately characterized by misleading contexts and verifiable truths rather than outright fabrications. Further-

more, less prominent platforms grouped in the "Other/Combined" category were significantly more likely to generate claims that fact-checkers were "Unable to finalize" (z = 3.9), reflecting the difficulty of verifying information originating from niche or localized networks. This analysis in Table 5 specifically indicates that dominant platforms such as Meta/Facebook, X/Twitter, and TikTok did not show a statistically significant deviation in fact-checking results.

To synthesize the findings across all research questions, a comprehensive Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was conducted, incorporating six key variables: country, subject, platform, media format, misleading aspect, and confirmation result. MCA examines how observations group together when described by several categorical variables. The data are recoded to 0–1 values, making it easier to see which categories tend to appear together and how they cluster (Abdi & Valentin, 2007). The analysis visualized in Figure 3 reveals two dominant clusters that define the misinformation landscape in the studied region.

Figure 1: MCA factor map of fact-checking content



The first dimension (explaining 15.3% of the variance) identifies a "Political-Fabrication Nexus" (located on the negative coordinate). This cluster strongly associates political claims with Meta/Facebook as the primary platform for dissemination. Geographically, this profile is most representative of Kosovo, and to a lesser extent, Albania. Claims in this cluster are characterized by text-based media and severe misleading aspects, specifically "Fabrication" and "False Context."

In stark contrast, the positive coordinate of the first dimension reveals a "Non-Political Digital Ecosystem," overwhelmingly dominated by Türkiye. This cluster represents a distinct profile in which misinformation is non-political, primarily video-based, and disseminated via Instagram and X/Twitter. Notably, this cluster is spatially associated with claims verified as "True" or having minor misleading aspects, suggesting that the misinformation problem in this sector is driven more by the decontextualization of real events than by political fabrication.

To robustly quantify country-level differences while controlling for confounding variables, a binary logistic regression was conducted to predict the likelihood of a suspicious claim being political (vs. non-political). The model included the country of origin and the type of suspected claim (media format) as predictor variables. The overall model was statistically significant, indicating that the predictors reliably distinguished between political and non-political misinformation (Likelihood Ratio Test $p < .001$, Pseudo $R2 = .075$).

With Albania serving as the baseline reference category, the results demonstrated that geographical context significantly predicts the nature of misinformation, even when controlling for media format. Specifically, claims originating in Türkiye were significantly less likely to be political compared to those in Albania (OR = 0.43, 95% CI [0.20, 0.92], $p = .030$). In other words, the odds of a claim being political in Türkiye were roughly 57% lower than in Albania. A similar trend was observed for North Macedonia, though the result was only marginally significant ($p = .051$). Conversely, there was no statistically significant difference in the likelihood of political misinformation between Kosovo and Albania (OR = 1.24, $p = .580$). Furthermore, the type of media was a highly significant predictor; both text-based (OR = 0.43, $p < .001$) and video-based (OR = 0.42, $p < .001$) claims were significantly less likely to be political than photo-based claims. The findings of this analysis, shown in Table 6, reinforce the conclusion that the political intensity of a country's disinformation landscape is distinctly tied to specific regional contexts, rather than merely the types of media being shared.

Table 6. Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting the Likelihood of Political Misinformation

Predictor	B	SE	p	OR	95% CI
Country					
Kosovo	0.21	0.38	0.580	1.24	[0.58, 2.61]
North Macedonia	-0.86	0.44	0.051	0.42	[0.18, 1.00]
Türkiye	-0.84	0.39	**0.030**	**0.43**	**[0.20, 0.92]**
Type of Suspected Claim					
Text	-0.84	0.19	**< .001**	**0.43**	**[0.30, 0.63]**
Video	-0.86	0.17	**< .001**	**0.42**	**[0.30, 0.59]**
Constant	0.00	0.37	0.993	1.00	[-0.71, 0.72]

Note. N = 1,067. McFadden's Pseudo R^2 = .075. The dependent variable is Subject revised (1 = Political, 0 = Non-political). For the "Country" variable, Albania is the reference category. For the "Type of Suspected Claim" variable, Photo is the reference category. B represents the unstandardized logistic regression coefficient (log-odds); SE is the standard error; OR is the Odds Ratio (e^B); CI represents the 95% confidence interval for the Odds Ratio. Significant predictors (p < .05) are highlighted in bold.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings confirm a consistent pattern in which non-political misinformation generally dominates across countries, although the proportion of political and non-political statements differs significantly depending on the context. In Türkiye, there is a strong dominance of non-political misinformation, while Kosovo and Albania display more balanced distributions, with relatively higher shares of political content compared to North Macedonia and Türkiye. This pattern may be partially explained by the timing of data collection, as both countries were undergoing election campaigns during this period, and existing research suggests that political misinformation tends to increase during electoral cycles (Mont'Alverne et al., 2024). This indicates that while political misinformation remains important, fact-checking practices in these media environments extend beyond electoral or partisan issues. This broader focus is also reflected in the types of claims being verified. The findings indicate that misinformation is not confined to explicitly political topics but is embedded in everyday informational domains such as health, science, and social issues. This aligns with previous research suggesting that misinformation increasingly operates within routine information consumption rather than being limited to political communication (Southwell et al., 2018; Vraga & Bode, 2020).

Differences between political and non-political claims become clearer when misleading aspects are considered. Political claims are more likely to contain manipulation and false context. Non-political claims are more strongly associated with false connections. No significant difference was observed for fabrication or misleading categories. These findings suggest

that political misinformation often involves altering or reframing existing content, whereas non-political misinformation more frequently involves mismatches between visuals, headlines, and events. This distinction aligns with broader discussions of information disorder, in which misleading content often arises from the manipulation or recontextualization of existing material rather than from entirely fabricated claims (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). These differences suggest that political claims more often involve manipulation and false context, which may require greater contextual interpretation during verification. In contrast, non-political claims are more frequently associated with false connections and misleading framing, pointing to inconsistencies in how information is presented.

Platform-based findings also indicate the importance of the source in structuring the distribution of misinformation. Political misinformation is primarily associated with Facebook, while non-political misinformation is more prevalent on platforms such as Instagram and X. This pattern indicates that platform architecture plays a role in structuring the thematic orientation of misinformation. The trend aligns with the previous studies that have focused on the importance of platform affordances and algorithms in promoting various kinds of content (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Cinelli et al., 2020). At the same time, no platform is significantly associated with outright falsehoods, suggesting that platform effects are more complex than simple categorizations would imply.

Fact-checking results showed less variability across platforms. Instagram is more frequently associated with "Mixed" and "True" outcomes, while less prominent sources grouped under "Other/Combined" are more often linked to claims that could not be verified. This finding suggests that the verifiability of content may depend not only on its form but also on the nature of its source, a point further underscored by the regression results, which underline the importance of context and indicate that even after controlling for media format, the country of origin remains a significant predictor of whether a claim is political. Claims from Türkiye are less likely to be political than those from Albania, while no significant difference is observed between Kosovo and Albania. This supports the view that misinformation is shaped not only by platforms or content formats but also by broader contextual factors, including media systems and political environments (Bennett & Livingston, 2018).

There are a few limitations that should be considered. First, there is no equal situation between countries, as two countries (Kosovo and Albania) had elections during the first part of 2025, and existing work shows that during elections, there is higher manipulated content circulated (Mont'Alverne et al., 2024). Second, the distribution of organizations across coun-

tries is uneven, with a higher number of cases from Türkiye compared to Kosovo, Albania, and North Macedonia. This imbalance may introduce a degree of bias, as aggregated patterns in the data could be more strongly influenced by the Turkish context. Third, further research may also focus on how fact-checking content is received by the audience or how the intention of misinformation is perceived and operationalized by different fact-checkers across different cultural contexts. Lastly, it would be best to expand the geographic reach to other countries in the Global South to increase comparative knowledge of the global misinformation ecosystem.

Özlem Delal Abanoz is a Research Assistant Doctor in the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Communication, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Türkiye. She completed her doctorate at Selçuk University, where her dissertation examined the news verification ecosystem in Türkiye. Her research interests include journalism studies, social media, and fact-checking platforms.
ORCID: 0000-0002-3653-5838
E-mail: ozlem.delal@omu.edu.tr

Dren Gërguri, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina, a Fulbright scholar, and former TV journalist. His research agenda is at the intersection of disinformation, journalism, AI technology, and political communication.
ORCID: 0000-0002-2347-4685
E-mail: dren.gerguri@uni-pr.edu

Edlira Palloshi Disha, PhD, is a researcher at the Max van der Stoel Institute, South East European University (SEEU), and a lecturer at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication at SEEU. She has contributed to international projects and published on political communication, information disorders, media effects, and societal resilience.
ORCID: 0000-0003-2097-0349
E-mail: e.palloshi@seeu.edu.mk

Muhamet Jahiri, PhD, is an Assistant Professor and the Head of the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina. He holds PhD in Communication and Journalism from the University of Prishtina. Since 2020, he has led the Department of Journalism at the Faculty of Philology. His main research focus is on journalism, media literacy and media reporting during crisis.
ORCID: 0000-0002-0082-7089
E-mail: muhamet.jahiri@uni-pr.edu

Enes Abanoz is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Communication at Ondokuz Mayıs University, Türkiye. He earned his Ph.D. in Journalism Informatics from Marmara University. His research interests include computational social science, social network analysis, and data journalism. He has also held visiting research fellowships at NYU and UPENN.
ORCID: 0000-0002-4250-1845
E-mail: enes.abanoz@omu.edu.tr

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