

Bridging the Trust Gap: Affective Social Ties and the Ethical Integration of AI in Fact-Checking

ABSTRACT

In a fragmented global media landscape characterized by rising information disorder, the mechanisms for building trust in journalism have become increasingly complex. This article investigates the dimensions of trust formation and the professional response to this crisis through the lens of the "AI turn" in fact-checking. To address this, the study adopts a qualitative approach, combining semi-structured interviews with citizens and a content analysis of AI policies from International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) agencies across Europe and Latin America.

The opinion of news users reveals two critical dimensions in citizens' construction of trust: social ties and the pursuit of objectivity. Social ties represent an affective influence where interpersonal trust is transferred to media outlets through parental habits or peer recommendations. This collective emotional factor challenges economically rational views of media consumption, highlighting that trust is often rooted in established social routines. Conversely, the pursuit of objectivity remains a central discursive justification; respondents claim to trust outlets they perceive as impartial, often positioning themselves as competent evaluators capable of discerning bias, particularly in sources associated with opposing ideologies.

Simultaneously, the journalistic field has responded to this trust crisis through the professionalization of fact-checking. As the industry shifts from verifying official claims to debunking social media rumors, it has entered a period of digital transformation defined by the integration of Artificial Intelligence. Analysis of policies about AI from different agencies reveals three primary pillars for ethical AI adoption: transparency, human oversight, and internal support. Organizations emphasize that AI serves as an internal tool for data processing rather than an authoritative source, maintaining a "human-in-the-loop" approach to safeguard credibility—the industry's most valuable asset.

However, the intersection between citizens' views and journalistic discourse reveals significant tensions in the preservation of trust in media. While citizens seek human-centric markers of trust like social ties and perceived autonomy, the rapid integration of AI risks professional displacement and the concentration of power within opaque tech infrastructures. Furthermore, specialized ethical concerns are emerging, such as the environmental impact of AI and the protection of intellectual property. However, a notable lack of urgency in establishing common industry-wide AI practices, coupled with the shifting power dynamics between technology professionals and editorial roles, suggests that the balance between automated efficiency and the human-driven authority required to build public trust remains precariously thin.

Keywords: Fact-checking; Trust Building; Artificial Intelligence Policies; Comparative Analysis; Disinformation