Research Question: How effective are fact checks for voters during political campaigns?

Thesis: In order to ensure accurate reporting, fact checking has become the new standard during political campaigns to hold politicians accountable for their statements and to help voters correct misinformation from political speeches and advertisements. However, many are still skeptical about the impact of fact checking on voters and politicians; yet still agree that fact-checking organizations such as PolitiFact, and Factcheck.org should continue to exist.


I located this Academic Journal article using the Academic Search Complete Database, using the search terms: political campaigns AND fact check. The authors for this article are all from Arizona State University; Kim Fridkin is professor of Political Science, Patrick J. Kenney is Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Amanda Wintersieck is a PhD candidate in political science.

In their article the authors cite both previous studies on fact checking and discuss their Internet survey from August 2012 which tested whether fact checks were influential for
participants that saw a political ad for one of two candidates (one a Republican and one a Democrat) for the Senatorial race in Ohio. Some participants viewed the ads without receiving a fact check and other participants received either a negative fact check (that denied the claim of the ad) or a positive fact check (where the ad’s claim was proven true). They also tested other conditions like the political sophistication of participants, tolerance to negative ads, and partisanship. The study found that having a previous level of political sophistication or a low tolerance to negative ads made the participants less likely to think a negative fact checked ad was true, but partisanship did not play as great of a role. The authors concluded that participants who viewed negative fact checks that challenged the ads and deemed them untrue were more likely to rate the ad as less accurate than those who viewed fact checks that confirmed the negative ad claims were correct (positive fact checks). Since this is a scholarly article I know that it was produced years after the research was conducted in 2012, and since it provides references to other sources and data such as charts as graphs, it would be considered a strong source for my research.


To locate this article I used Google and searched the terms: political campaigns, fact checkers, and voters. The third article in my search results was from NPR, and since I know that NPR is usually a reputable source I decided to read it. I found out that Danielle Kurtzleben is a political reporter and has worked for other companies like Vox.com and U.S. News and World Report, so she is an experienced journalist.
In her article, Kurtzleben states some of the difficulties involved in the effectiveness of fact checking. For example, many voters still do not seek out the facts, and simply telling voters the truth without showing them evidence might make it tough to change their widely held beliefs or opinions. Real-time fact checking, as exemplified in the September 26, 2016 Presidential debates may help. Kurtzleben cites studies such as those conducted by Brendan Nyhan of Dartmouth College and Jason Riefler from the University of Exeter. Since this online news article was posted the day after the September 26 Presidential debates, it falls in the next day stage in the Information cycle, but since it is coming from NPR and cites several sources, I feel that it would be a reliable source for my paper.


I located this Academic Journal article using the Academic Search Complete Database, using the search terms: political campaign AND fact check. The authors for this article are Brendan Nyhan, Assistant Professor, Department of Government, Dartmouth College, and Jason Reifler, Senior lecturer of Politics, University of Exeter in the United Kingdom.

In the article, the authors seek to test their hypothesis; fact-checking can help increase political accountability of politicians and reduce public misperceptions about controversial issues. To test this hypothesis in 2012, the authors conducted a field experiment in nine different states sending (at random) 1,200 state legislators a series of letters about the risks to their reputation if they were caught by a fact checker making
questionable statements. The legislators who were sent these letters were significantly less likely to risk spreading misinformation. Their study also measured what impact if any can fact checkers have on the voting public. Among the mass public, the evidence is mixed on whether fact checking improves citizens’ political knowledge. Fact checking may fail to reduce misperceptions especially among those individuals who are most likely to believe them. Despite these results, fact checking should not be discredited. It may be ineffective in changing public opinion, however, it can be used as a monitoring tool for politicians at all levels of government. Since this is an Academic Journal article I know that it was published years after the research was conducted in 2012, and since it provides references to other sources as evidence and statistics such as charts as graphs, it would also be considered a strong source for my research.


I used the U.S. Newsstream database, searching the terms: “political campaigns” AND “fact check*” AND voters. By googling Rem Rieder, I found out that he is an Editor at large and Media columnist at USA Today. He has held previous editing positions at various newspapers and has a BA in English from Harvard University.

In his article, Rieder discusses the rise of fact checking in elections, citing organizations such as PolitiFact, FactCheck.org, and several newspapers that have corrected some of Donald Trump’s claims. He also mentions a Monmouth University Poll in which 60% of Americans were in favor of debate moderators fact checking candidates, yet some of the moderators and even the fact checkers mentioned negatives of instant fact checking though they did not go into detail about it. I could sense a slight left-leaning bias in this
article just because of the names of other newspapers the author mentions and the fact that he focuses solely on Donald Trump’s untrue remarks, but it still gave a good overview of some of the fact-checking sites, which are non-partisan. Since it is a newspaper article, it would have been published within a few days of an event, so pretty reliable since he cited some of the fact-checking sites but not the most reliable source, according to the Information Cycle Timeline.


I used the Academic Search Complete Database to find this article and tried some truncation in my search to find variations, using the terms: politic* campaigns AND fact check*. The first article I chose is a magazine recent article written by Tatiana Walk-Morris, a Chicago free-lance writer with a Journalism degree from Columbia College, and Eryn M. Carlson who is an editorial assistant for Nieman Reports at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University.

As also mentioned in the *NPR* article I read, many people are still unfamiliar with fact checking, yet those who are seem to be in favor. The article cites groups like PolitiFact that have debunked some of Donald Trump’s claims and Claimbuster that rates whether or not political statements need verification. They also mention that fact-checking technology is still developing and some fact checkers like Michelle Ye Hee Lee from the *Washington Post* are starting to use social media platforms like snap-chat to quickly correct political claims. Since this is a magazine article, it would be written about a week after an event, and would hold a little more credibility. In addition, the Nieman Reports are from an award-winning organization at Harvard University.