# Highly Partisan and Blatantly Wrong: Analyzing News Publishers' Critiques of Google's Reviewed Claims

**Emma Lurie**
School of Information
University of California, Berkeley
emma_lurie@berkeley.edu

**Eni Mustafaraj**
Department of Computer Science
Wellesley College
emustafaraj@wellesley.edu

## Abstract

Google's reviewed claims feature was an early attempt to incorporate additional credibility signals from fact-checking onto the search results page. The feature, which appeared when users searched for the name of a subset of news publishers, was criticized by dozens of publishers for its errors and alleged anti-conservative bias. By conducting an audit of news publisher search results and focusing on the critiques of publishers, we find that there is a lack of consensus between fact-checking ecosystem stakeholders that may be important to address in future iterations of public facing fact-checking tools. In particular, we find that a lack of transparency coupled with a lack of consensus on what makes a fact-check relevant to a news article led to the breakdown of reviewed claims.

## 1  Introduction

The online fact-checking ecosystem is a complex sociotechnical system that includes technology platforms, news publishers, fact-checking organizations, and online information seekers. As platforms try to limit harmful misinformation on their platform and fact-checkers work to increase the reach of their fact-check articles, there have been a number of collaborations, some of which are ongoing,[1] and others that can be considered failed experiments.[2] We focus on one "failed" experiment, that of Google's reviewed claims. Focusing on the breakdown (Mulligan and Griffin, 2018; Akrich, 1992; Bucher, 2017) or failure of a specific feature like reviewed claims enables us
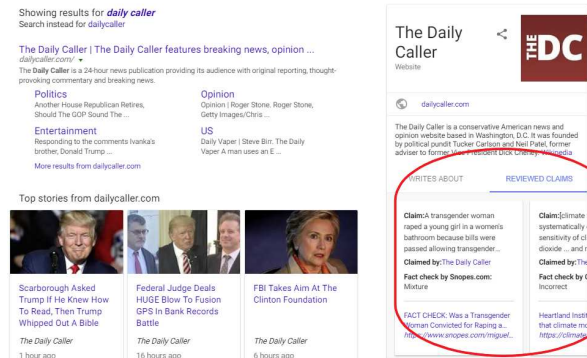


Figure 1: The SERP of *The Daily Caller* with the reviewed claims feature circled as it appeared in January 2018. Reviewed Claims component contained fact-checks of articles produced by that news publisher.

to explore both conceptual misunderstandings between stakeholders as well as inconsistencies arising from the technical implementation of the feature.

In November 2017, as part of an expanded effort to provide users with context about news publishers, Google released reviewed claims (see Figure 1 and 2). The reviewed claims feature displayed third-party fact-checks about content produced by a subset of news publishers. This feature was publicized as a meaningful aid to information seekers to identify misinformation.[3] This is one of several ways that Google tried to highlight fact-checks in search results, in accordance with best practices in media literacy (Wineburg and McGrew, 2017).

However, several news publishers complained about this feature in January 2018. They alleged that Google was displaying partisan bias and claimed that several of the fact-checks listed in their reviewed claims components were not relevant to the associated content. Soon after, Google

---

[1] https://www.blog.google/topics/journalism-news/building-trust-online-partnering-international-fact-checking-network/

[2] https://medium.com/facebook-design/designing-against-misinformation-e5846b3aa1e2

[3] https://www.blog.google/products/search/learn-more-about-publishers-google/

**Claim:** California will have the "highest gas tax in the nation" once its 12 cent gas tax hike goes into effect.

**Claimed by:** The Daily Caller
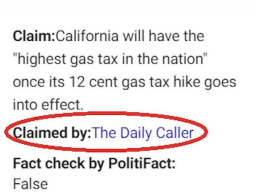
**Fact check by PolitiFact:** False

Figure 2: The Reviewed Claim feature attributes this claim to *The Daily Caller*. However, the PolitiFact fact-check does not mention *Daily Caller*. This is an example of an algorithmically assigned fact-check.

removed reviewed claims from the search engine results page (SERP), citing "bugs" in the feature's implementation.[4]

Reviewed claims (RC) is a worthwhile case study for several reasons. First, RC is an example of a major platform using fact-checks as a source level credibility signal (i.e. displaying fact-checks for publishers not individual articles) for information seekers. Researchers (Wineburg et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2018) have called for greater context and information cues for information seekers to evaluate the the credibility of surfaced content. Second, purportedly without informing fact-checking organizations, news publishers, or information seekers, Google leveraged automated fact-checking techniques. Automated fact-checking, which uses algorithms to increase the scale and reach of fact-checks, raises additional questions about the values, such as a commitment to transparency[5] that undergird fact-checking. Third, while publishers often raised poorly supported claims of anti-conservative bias, publishers also raised substantive concerns about particular stories that were surfaced in the reviewed claims panel. These are of particular interest in this paper as they offer the opportunity for various stakeholders to build deeper understanding of the challenges that will confront future automated fact-checking features. The following research question guides our work: **what examples and issues did publishers raise to contest the reviewed claims feature?**

We explore this research question by 1) a data collection effort[6] that measured the prevalence and

scope of the the RC feature and 2) a more focused and qualitative thematic analysis of 45 online news articles about the reviewed claims feature. Our major takeaway from this case study is that the implementation of algorithmic solutions in support of fact-checking is a complex process that requires and deserves the kind of transparency that is so valued by the fact-checking community. Our findings contribute by expanding the conversation around the efficacy of fact-checking interventions in the informational ecosystem.

## 2 Auditing reviewed claims

To situate publishers' claims about the reviewed claims feature, we report our findings from a January 2018 audit of news publisher SERPs. In summary, we identify 59 publisher names that displayed a RC tab when their names were searched. These RC tabs were collected incidentally in a larger audit of the state of partisan and unreliable news publisher SERPs. While our data collection was not designed to be an exhaustive list of publishers with a RC tab, it does provide the most complete picture of the reviewed claims feature to date. In Table 1, we report the 59 publishers with the reviewed claims tab, accompanied by their bias/accuracy label from BuzzFeed News or Media Bias Fact-check. While we find that more publishers on the "right" had RC tabs, there were more "left" sites than what was alleged by conservative publishers.

Our manual examination of the 171 unique fact-checks attributed to the 59 publishers leads us to conclude that Google used an algorithm to match existing fact-checks (that did not name the publisher) to articles by that publisher. This practice is called claim matching and is an automated fact-checking technique that matches articles or statements (i.e. claims) to existing fact-checks. The use of this method is significant because Google did not disclose the use of automated fact-checking in its documentation[7][8] about the feature.

### 2.1 Methods: Auditing RC

In January 2018, as part of an audit of news publisher SERPs, we discovered that 59 publishers

---

[4] https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2018/blame-bugs-not-partisanship-for-google-wrongly-appending-a-fact-check-to-the-daily-caller/

[5] https://www.ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/know-more/the-commitments-of-the-code-of-principles

[6] https://github.com/emmalurie/reviewed-claims

[7] https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/7568277?hl=en

[8] https://www.blog.google/products/search/learn-more-about-publishers-google/

| Bias or Accuracy | List of websites to which Google assigned a reviewed claims tab (ordered by Alexa Rank) |
| --- | --- |
| Right | Breitbart, The Daily Caller, The Daily Wire, WND, The Gateway Pundit, The Federalist, Free Republic, The Conservative Tree House, OAN Network, Big League Politics, The Political Insider, Frontpage Magazine, American Greatness, American Renaissance, Bearing Arms, Red State Watcher, Truthfeed, 100 Percent Fed Up, Freedom Outpost, Commentary Magazine, The Millennium Report, VDARE, Sparta Report, En Volve, Conservative Fighters, Silence is Consent, America's Freedom Fighters, Freedom Daily, American News, American Conservative Herald, The New York Evening. |
| Left | Upworthy, Palmer Report, Democratic Underground, Counterpunch, Rightwingwatch, Bipartisan Report, True Activist, OpEd News, American Herald Tribune, Occupy Democrats, Egberto Willies, If You Only News, American News X, Resistance Report |
| Conspiracy / Pseudoscience / Fake news | Zero Hedge, Before It's News, Natural News, Above Top Secret, Collective Evolution, Your News Wire, Investment Watch Blog, Awareness Act, Activist Post, Renegade Tribune, The Common Sense Show, Fellowship of the minds, Intellihub, 21st Century Wire |

Table 1: The list of all 59 websites with a reviewed claims (RC) tab in our January 2018 dataset, grouped by political bias or factual accuracy. The labels come from BuzzFeed or Media Bias/Fact Check.

contained a reviewed claims component in their SERP. These 1,150 publisher SERPs were sourced from prominent aggregated lists in the research and media literacy community.[9] [10] [11] [12] [13] The combined list of websites was designed to be a comprehensive survey of active partisan or unreliable U.S. publishers in late 2017. In total, the aggregated dataset amounts to unique 1,150 website domain names.

We use Selenium, a web browser automation tool, to issue queries to Google search. The queries sent to the browser were the domain names without the extension (e.g. "dailycaller" from "dailycaller.com"). Due to 1) the queries being domain names (e.g. "dailycaller" instead of "daily caller"), 2) some websites having stopped operation, and 3) some publishers having names that are hard to disambiguate (antiwar.com), only in 50% of results is the corresponding news publisher website ranked 1st on the SERP. Thus, we

might be under counting the news publishers with a knowledge panel. For established, well-known publishers, Google correctly inferred the news publisher website.

Each RC tab contained links to the fact-check and original article (see Figure 2). The first author manually reviewed the 171 unique fact-checks that appeared on the 59 RC tabs to extract: 1) the ClaimReview markup and 2) the mentions of all news publishers and URLs identified as claimants in the fact-check article.

## 2.2 Results: Auditing RC

Of the 569 domain names searches that surfaced news publishers as their first link, 59 SERPs had a RC tab with 221 fact-checks in total (171 unique fact-checks). See Table 1 for the list of the 59 publishers. We found that 10 fact-checking organizations wrote the fact-checks that appeared in the reviewed claims tabs, but Snopes.com had 66% (113 out of 171) of the fact-checks. There were 20 different truthiness ratings of the claims made in the fact-checking articles (e.g. false, pants on fire, unproven, mixture etc.) and surfaced in each claim description in RC.

We then focused on the 128 (58%) fact-checks that did not mention or link to the source that had published the claim being fact-checked (that is, neither the text nor metadata of the fact-check arti-

[9]https://github.com/BuzzFeedNews/2017-08-partisan-sites-and-facebook-pages

[10]https://www.politifact.com/punditfact/article/2017/apr/20/politifacts-guide-fake-news-websites-and-what-they/

[11]http://d279m997dpfwgl.cloudfront.net/wp/2016/11/Resource-False-Misleading-Clickbait-y-and-Satirical-%E2%80%9CNews%E2%80%9D-Sources-1.pdf

[12]https://github.com/BuzzFeedNews/2017-12-fake-news-top-50/tree/master/data

[13](Starbird, 2017)

cle mentioned the source). This fact serves as key evidence that Google used a claim matching algorithm to identify articles that would be relevant to fact-checks. Google researchers published work detailing how such a system would work (Wang et al., 2018). Additionally, Google attributed the failure of RC on problems with its "algorithm." Together, these three facts provide us with confidence that Google used claim matching in the reviewed claims feature. For the rest of the paper we assume that Google integrated automated fact-checking into reviewed claims.

## 3 Publisher Critiques of RC

### 3.1 Methods: Thematic Analysis

The purpose of reporting the audit study is to provide the necessary background to evaluate the publishers' critiques of reviewed claims. In March 2019, we collected 45 online news articles written about the RC feature. To collect these articles we searched Google with the search term "reviewed claims" + publisher name for each of the 59 publishers. We limited the date of the article from November 2017- March 2018. We then repeated the same search with "reviewed claims" to identify articles from additional publishers. 18 of the articles originated from a domain that had a reviewed claims tab. Almost none of these 18 came from "left" sources. The remaining 27 came from other publishers that did not have a RC tab. All of the articles were written in January 2018.

We conducted a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of the data. We are particularly interested in latent themes in the articles that reveal more than the surface level arguments the publishers were making. While we were aware of existing research and theories, we coded using an inductive approach that did not start with any preconceived notions of what we would find in the data.

### 3.2 Disputing fact-checks

Before reporting key findings from our thematic analysis, we present two excerpts of the critiques of RC that highlight the types of issues surfaced by our analysis.

#### 3.2.1 Example 1: Who said that Robert Mueller hired all Clinton supporters?

The first is an excerpt from the article "Google's New Fact-Check Feature Almost Exclusively Targets Conservative Sites," written by the Daily Caller (DC).

> "...The third-party "fact-checking" organization says the "claim" in a DC article that special Counsel Robert Mueller is hiring people that "are all Hillary Clinton supporters" is misleading, if not false. The problem is that TheDC's article makes no such claim. Their cited language doesn't even appear in the article. Worse yet, there was no language trying to make it seem that the investigation into the Trump administration and Russia is entirely comprised of Clinton donors. The story simply contained the news: Mueller hired a Hillary Clinton donor to aid the investigation into President Donald Trump."[14]

In a follow up article by the DC, there is a quote from the third-party fact-checking organization the Washington Post in response to the Daily Caller's claims:

> "We went back and double-checked the story and the information submitted to Google, and The Daily Caller was not mentioned at all, even in links," Kristine Coratti, vice president of communications at WaPo, told TheDCNF. "We clearly labeled the source, so I cannot speak to how The Daily Caller ended up being erroneously listed as the source of the fact-checked quote in this case."[15]

Google removed this particular fact check from DC's reviewed claims tab after their complaint was published. Nevertheless, several important issues are surfaced in this example. First is that the Washington Post cannot explain the appearance of their fact-check on reviewed claims. This implies that a breakdown in communication between Google and fact-checking partners about the details of the feature.

Second is the issue of defining what is a relevant fact-check. For political misinformation, the ideal fact-check, in terms of information seeker preference and corrective effect, is a combination of a

---

[14]https://dailycaller.com/2018/01/09/googles-new-fact-check-feature-almost-exclusively-targets-conservative-sites/

[15]https://dailycaller.com/2018/01/11/wapo-we-didnt-attack-the-daily-caller-and-dont-know-why-google-is/

truth scale rating and longer explanation with additional context (Amazeen et al., 2015).

While both the Washington Post and DC agree that the fact-check claim that was evaluated on the truth scale was not in the the DC article, the DC article lists multiple members of Mueller's team that donated to Democratic campaigns and then quotes Newt Gingrich casting aspersions on the independence of the Mueller investigation because of these hires. The Washington Post fact-check provides context on the question "Do Russia probe attorneys' donations to Democrats threaten their independence?" This leaves us with three motivating questions for evaluating whether the fact-check is relevant to the news article.

First, does the original statement have to appear verbatim in the article to be a relevant claim match? Claim matching systems (Hassan et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018) have operated as if the answer to this question is no, but the Washington Post response does not reflect that understanding. Graves finds that many fact-checking organizations do not list all claimants because it is unrealistic and costly for fact-checking organizations to continually update all claimants especially when the media ecosystem recycles so many persistent claims (Graves, 2017).

Second, does the claim that is in the metadata and rated in the fact-check have to appear in the news article? The DC as well as other publishers seem to operate under that belief. This seems reasonable, but many fact-checks address a specific claim and then give additional context that is applicable to a broader set of claims.

This leads to the third question: is it sufficient (with regard to a relevant claim match) for a fact-check to address the context of a misleading article, even if that is not fully reflected on the claim listed in the metadata? The Washington Post fact-check provides a detailed explanation about why campaign contributions are not evidence of bias in Department of Justice investigations, which is the assumption at the core of the DC article. Put another way, changing the claim the Washington Post embedded in the metadata, but not altering the content of the article, may change whether the fact-check is relevant to the DC article.

### 3.2.2 Example 2: We didn't say it, and we only said something similar one time!

The Federalist, a U.S. right wing news publisher, wrote an additional critique of the reviewed claims feature. Below is one of the examples they raise to critique the fact-checks on reviewed claims.

> "Out of many thousands of pieces published by The Federalist over the past four years, a single one mentions the name Eileen Wellstone. That article, detailing the sordid history of Bill Clinton, mentions her name exactly once: "Another woman, Eileen Wellstone, claimed Clinton raped her while he was at Oxford University in the late 1960s.
>
> For some reason, in this "reviewed claim" against The Federalist, Google sends the reader to a Snopes fact-check that argues that Clinton wasn't expelled from Oxford over this alleged rape — a point I concede sounds completely accurate and is also an assertion that no one has ever made in this publication.
>
> So the question is, does Google tag every article that relays accusations of sexual misconduct or rape as "unproven," or just the ones against Bill Clinton? Or is the mention of Wellstone specifically worthy of a claim? The Wellstone case has not only been cited in all types of publications...[including] by The Washington Post's own fact-checker."[16]

This example also raises multiple points of potential contention for fact-checking ecosytem stakeholders. One is about ambiguous fact-check labels, where the claim in the fact-check article is rated as "unproven" rather than "false." This issue extends beyond this example, as The Daily Caller and the Daily Wire both contested fact-checks that rated their claims as "mixed."

However the Google documentation for RC explains that the feature "...simply indicates that a publisher is writing about topics that attract the attention of third-party fact-checking. A publisher could consistently be fact-checked by third-parties as accurate and have the RC tab appear in their Knowledge Panel."[17]

Another issue surfaced by the Federalist is that because they have only written a single article

---

[16]https://thefederalist.com/2018/01/10/googles-new-factchecker-is-partisan-garbage/
[17]https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/7568277

about Eileen Wellstone, it is not worthy of appearing on the RC tab. This requirement of having to repeatedly write about a topic is not raised at all in the Google documentation for reviewed claims or by fact-checkers. A distinct but related argument that the Federalist raises is that their article details many allegations against Bill Clinton, and Eileen Wellstone was only mentioned in passing in a single sentence. In the previous example from the Daily Caller, the critique was that the fact-check was overly broad to the article's specific claim, but here the issue is reversed: the news article was reporting on a pattern and the fact-check is about a single disputed claim.

### 3.3 Results: Major Themes

#### 3.3.1 Anti-conservative bias: A deep story

Throughout the news articles we analyzed, we find that the belief that Google discriminates against conservatives was a major point in almost all of the articles. Many of the articles are framed around Google's partisanship rather than the specifics of the feature itself. For most articles, other "episodes" were mentioned in passing. In particular, there were many references to the firing of James Damore, the Google software engineer who wrote a memo criticizing Google's diversity policies in the same article as the reviewed claims feature. To be clear, James Damore did not work on any element of fact-checking at Google, however he had filed a lawsuit around the same time as the Daily Caller first publicized its complaints about the RC feature. In the most detailed articles, the evidence of anti-conservative bias was that "liberal" peer publishers did not have the reviewed claims tab, resulting in an imbalanced, biased feature. For example, the Daily Caller writes:

> "When searching for a media outlet that leans right, like The Daily Caller (TheDC), Google gives users details on the sidebar, including what topics the site typically writes about, as well as a section titled 'reviewed claims'... while equally partisan sites like Vox, ThinkProgress, Slate, The Huffington Post, Daily Kos, Salon, Vice and Mother Jones are spared."[18]

---

[18]https://dailycaller.com/2018/01/09/googles-new-fact-check-feature-almost-exclusively-targets-conservative-sites/

As shown in Table 1, a number of liberal sites like *Palmer Report*, *Democrats Underground*, and *Upworthy* had reviewed claims. However, more right-leaning sites had the feature. At the same time, many major conservative media sources like the *National Review*, *Washington Examiner*, and *Washington Times*, did not have a RC tab.

This notion of anti-conservative bias is what sociologist Arlie Hochschild describes as a deep story. A deep story is defined as a metaphor-based narrative that is a "feels-as-if story" (Hochschild, 2016). Both Hoschchild (Hochschild, 2016) and Polletta (Polletta and Callahan, 2019) find that these deep stories unfold in an episodic way, so that spreaders of the deep story need only to refer to specific episodes to remind listeners of the entire deep stories. Nicole Hemmer (Hemmer, 2016) explains how conservative media created the story of the anti-conservative bias in mainstream media in the early 1960s, and Alice Marwick goes further to argue that anti-conservative bias in technology is a growing and significant part of the overall anti-conservative bias deep story (Marwick, 2018).

#### 3.3.2 Conflicting narratives of responsibility

In the publishers' critiques of reviewed claims, there were conflicting narratives about which actors were responsible for the reviewed claims breakdown. Answers included Google, "an algorithm," and individual fact-checkers.

A number of publishers, particularly those invested in the deep story of anti-conservative bias discussed "Google's fact-checking." Of course, Google, like Facebook and YouTube, has tried to signal stakeholders that they are not the arbiters of truth, but rather neutral platforms (Gillespie, 2010), so they employ non-partisan third-party fact-checkers to assess the validity of claims. On a help page for reviewed claims, Google suggests that if a publisher disagrees with one of the reviewed claims they should know that:

> "Reviewed claims are made by publishers that fact check other publishers using the Fact Check markup and have been algorithmically determined to be authoritative. If a publisher believes a reviewed claim is incorrect, Google recommends they contact the fact-checker that wrote the review. Publishers can also use the feedback link in the Knowledge Panel to report claims they believe

are inaccurate.[19]

Despite Google's documentation, many publishers were either unaware of the distinction between Google featuring third-party fact-checks and fact-checking themselves, or did not find the distinction meaningful as evidence, by framing the story around anti-conservative bias and referring to "Google's fact-checking."

Google explained to the Daily Caller and Poynter that the incorrect stories listed in Daily Caller's RC tab were due to a bug in a Google algorithm. By casting responsibility to the algorithm, there is a implication that the mistake is accidental and not related to partisanship. It also raises questions, given that Google had previously directed publishers disputing fact-checks to fact-checking organizations rather than itself.

While we did not find any evidence that Google was trying to target conservative voices, saying that there was a bug in the algorithm is not a satisfactory explanation of the breakdown. With this public facing explanation that does not match their documentation, there is almost no transparency for stakeholders into what has gone wrong. If the problem is, in fact, a bug in their algorithm, then it may be reasonable to say that publishers problem with reviewed claims may in fact be "Google's automated fact-checking" rather than who Google fact-checks.

Gizmodo, a technology website that did not have a RC tab but commented on the controversy, places the cause of the breakdown on Google's lack of transparency:

> "...transparency is a problem for Google's reviewed claims widget. Google never likes talking about the way its algorithms make decisions, and a spokesperson for the company declined to comment when asked how the decision is made to display the panel on some outlets' knowledge panels and not others...Additionally, the knowledge panel has a feedback button at the bottom that allows anyone to flag false information...But this feature raises the question of who reviews the feedback submissions. Google didn't

want to answer this question...the fact that Google isn't saying how this works will just fuel more suspicion."

The messaging from Google may have led some publishers place the blame on allegedly "partisan" fact-checkers. Few publishers dismissed fact-checking organizations as a whole, but rather criticized specific fact-checking organizations. The fact-checking organizations were critiqued for employing "rabid anti-Trumpers," being "ideologically motivated" or having a "liberal bent." Snopes, Politifact, and Climate Feedback were the most criticized fact-checking organizations. While these attacks on fact-checking organizations did not start or end with RC, since some of fact-checkers' core values are transparency and non-partisanship, this obfuscation of the technical implementation of the feature as well as the source of the breakdown could have backfired on fact-checking organizations (Marwick, 2018, p. 508)

## 4  Discussion & Conclusion

Fact-checking organizations prize transparency and expertise. Adding claim matching algorithms into fact-checking operations strains both of these values. This doesn't preclude automating fact-checking from existing, but rather necessitates transparency in process and communication with stakeholders. While conversations between fact-checkers and platforms are happening behind closed doors, fact-checking exists to benefit information seekers. Ensuring that there is public transparency and accountability seems essential to the success of fact-checking initiatives.

### 4.1  Limitations

The use case, affordances, and limitations of the reviewed claims and our analysis must be acknowledged. Our manual review of every collected reviewed claim revealed a multiple examples where we felt confident saying that a reasonable person would not think the fact-check was relevant to the RC matched source article. We do not want to portray a correctly implemented RC feature as a silver bullet solution to misinformation on search engines. Moreover, we did not evaluate with any user studies, so we cannot comment on how beneficial information seekers found (or would find) RC. We want to point out though that to read the details of the RC feature (as shown in Figure 1 and 2), one had to click on

---

[19] https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/7568277?p=news_publishers_kp&visit_id=637318238132485391-326966634&rd=1

the tab header "Reviewed Claims" in the Knowledge Panel. Many Google users may not have been aware that the feature existed. Additionally, we acknowledge the hostility of a number of U.S. and international publishers toward fact-checking. Our close reading of the arguments of the various publishers surfaced arguments that were not supported by evidence.

## 4.2 Discussion Topics and Open Research Questions

We have attempted to highlight substantive examples that raise credible issues as well as representative complaints about the RC feature and larger fact-checking ecosystem. Even though the reviewed claims feature is no longer on the Google results page, these questions are still important for the fact-checking ecosystem to discuss. The public-facing nature of RC allows for the interrogation by external stakeholders. This is a unique opportunity, as other claim matching tools, such as those developed by Full Fact and the Duke Reporters Lab, are internal tools still in development (Graves, 2018).

Below are issues raised by publishers that are either understudied in the research community or mismatches between Google's public statements about the feature and publishers' critiques.

**Necessity for more transparency:** Google was not transparent about 1) the criteria for displaying the RC tab on a publisher's Knowledge Panel and 2) how fact-checks were selected to be included in the RC tab. Additionally, fact-checking partners, like the Washington Post, were seemingly unaware about the feature when asked to respond to the Daily Caller. This lack of transparency inhibits accountability beyond the removal of the RC tab. While perhaps the removal of the RC feature benefited affected publishers, it is unclear if the removal of RC benefited information seekers.

**Criteria for inclusion:** At best, reviewed claims was a feature to signal to information seekers that a news publisher required a closer look. In an anonymous Google statement to Poynter after the feature was removed, it was revealed that the presence of reviewed claims was calculated based on the ratio between total articles published and fact-checked articles.[20]. This means that publish-

[20]https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/
2018/blame-bugs-not-partisanship-for-
google-wrongly-appending-a-fact-check-
to-the-daily-caller/

ers that publish many articles were less likely to have the RC tab. It also means that the truthiness of a fact-check evaluated claim was not incorporated into their assessment. So, a claim evaluated as true by a fact-checker was treated the same way as a claim rated as "pants on fire." Google accounts for this in their documentation of RC, where they explain that RC does not mean that there is an accuracy problem with the publisher, but unless one has read the documentation closely, this is not the intuitive interpretation of the feature.

Given that fact-checkers use various "truth" scales, it may be difficult to implement a "cutoff" value for inclusion on an RC tab (e.g. "mixture" vs. "unproven", etc.). On the other hand, only 10 fact-checkers were included in the RC tab, which seems like a manageable scale to collaborate with individual stakeholders about how to interpret their non-standardized fact-check labels.

**The nature of the claim:** If an article mentions a fact-checked claim in passing, does it warrant a claim match? The fact-checks on the Reviewed Claim panel appear at the article level (see Figure 2); however, the specific claim is also highlighted within the card, so it's ambiguous to the information seeker. Publishers like the Federalist contested the idea that if a claim was mentioned in passing rather than being the core argument of the piece, it was insufficient to warrant a fact-check.

Moreover, as discussed in Example 2 (3.2.2), there is also the question about whether a fact-check of a deep story or larger narrative can be applied to a specific instance of that story. Deep stories, such as the one that "the Clintons are corrupt", which contains episodes such as Clinton Foundation dealings, Clinton's email server, Clinton influence on the Mueller investigation, Clinton was a rapist, and others, permeate a substantial part of the fact-checks that appear on the reviewed claims across many publishers. In the first example, the Washington Post fact-check that the Daily Caller criticizes starts by evaluating a statement by President Trump and then broadens to discuss the larger narrative of corruption in the Mueller investigation. Google removed that story after the Daily Caller complained, implying that the DC's analysis of the relevance of the claim was correct. The purpose (Nyhan and Reifler, 2015) and epistemology (Amazeen, 2015; Uscinski and Butler, 2013) of fact-checking has been the subject of substantial debate, and transparency and stakeholder buy-in

seems important to the success of future features.

## References

Madeleine Akrich. 1992. The de-scription of technical objects.

Michelle A Amazeen. 2015. Revisiting the epistemology of fact-checking. *Critical Review*, 27(1):1–22.

Michelle A Amazeen, Emily Thorson, Ashley Muddiman, and Lucas Graves. 2015. A comparison of correction formats: The effectiveness and effects of rating scale versus contextual corrections on misinformation. *American Press Institute. Downloaded April*, 27:2015.

Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2):77–101.

Taina Bucher. 2017. The algorithmic imaginary: exploring the ordinary affects of facebook algorithms. *Information, communication & society*, 20(1):30–44.

Tarleton Gillespie. 2010. The politics of 'platforms'. *New media & society*, 12(3):347–364.

Lucas Graves. 2017. Anatomy of a fact check: Objective practice and the contested epistemology of fact checking. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 10(3):518–537.

Lucas Graves. 2018. Factsheet: Understanding the promise and limits of automated fact-checking. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*.

Naeemul Hassan, Fatma Arslan, Chengkai Li, and Mark Tremayne. 2017. Toward automated fact-checking: Detecting check-worthy factual claims by claimbuster. In *Proceedings of the 23rd ACM SIGKDD International Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining*, pages 1803–1812.

Nicole Hemmer. 2016. *Messengers of the right: Conservative media and the transformation of American politics*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Arlie Russell Hochschild. 2016. The ecstatic edge of politics: Sociology and donald trump. *Contemporary Sociology*, 45(6):683–689.

Alice Marwick. 2018. Why do people share fake news? a sociotechnical model of media effects. *Georgetown Law Technology Review*, 2:474–512.

Deirdre K Mulligan and Daniel S Griffin. 2018. Rescripting search to respect the right to truth. *Georgetown Law Technology Review*.

Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler. 2015. Estimating fact-checking's effects. *Arlington, VA: American Press Institute*.

Francesca Polletta and Jessica Callahan. 2019. Deep stories, nostalgia narratives, and fake news: Storytelling in the trump era. In *Politics of meaning/meaning of politics*, pages 55–73. Springer.

Kate Starbird. 2017. Examining the alternative media ecosystem through the production of alternative narratives of mass shooting events on twitter. In *ICWSM*, pages 230–239.

Joseph E Uscinski and Ryden W Butler. 2013. The epistemology of fact checking. *Critical Review*, 25(2):162–180.

Xuezhi Wang, Cong Yu, Simon Baumgartner, and Flip Korn. 2018. Relevant document discovery for fact-checking articles. In *The Web Conference 2018*, pages 525–533.

Sam Wineburg and Sarah McGrew. 2017. Lateral reading: Reading less and learning more when evaluating digital information.

Sam Wineburg, Sarah McGrew, Joel Breakstone, and Teresa Ortega. 2016. Evaluating information: The cornerstone of civic online reasoning. *Stanford Digital Repository. Retrieved January*, 8:2018.

Amy X Zhang, Aditya Ranganathan, Sarah Emlen Metz, Scott Appling, Connie Moon Sehat, Norman Gilmore, Nick B Adams, Emmanuel Vincent, Jennifer Lee, Martin Robbins, et al. 2018. A structured response to misinformation: Defining and annotating credibility indicators in news articles. In *Companion Proceedings of the The Web Conference 2018*, pages 603–612.