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International Journal For Research in  
Applied Science and Engineering Technology



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# **INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH**

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

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**Volume: 14    Issue: VII    Month of publication: July 2026**

**DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2026.84145>**

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# A Media Ethics Critique of Fake News, Disinformation and Misinformation in Social Media

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**Abstract:** *This paper critically reviews the journal article "Fake News, Disinformation and Misinformation in Social Media: A Review from a Media Ethics Perspective". With the development of digital media and social networking platforms in recent years, many people have begun to spread various types of false and misleading information online. The purposes of this paper are to explore the ethical problems caused by fake news on social media and to assess how far the selected article has contributed to this research. This paper presents the goal and path of the above research; lists the main results achieved; and finally studies two prominent ethical issues: the conflict between truthfulness and the speed of information dissemination, and the conflict between public interest and commercial profit. Utilitarianism and the Potter Box Model will be used to analyse the problems and provide an organised ethical evaluation. The strengths and weaknesses of the selected article are introduced in the study, along with other extensions to journalism, digital platforms, policy and society. Based on the above results, the following are required to combat the problem of false information and maintain public trust in the digital information environment: Ethical journalism, media literacy, algorithmic transparency, and multi-stakeholder governance.*

**Keywords:** *Media Ethics; Fake News; Misinformation; Disinformation; Social Media; Utilitarianism.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of digital media and social networks in recent years, people's ways of communicating and interacting have also been changing considerably. At the same time, the way people obtain information and take part in public discussions has also changed.

Facebook, TikTok, YouTube and X (formerly Twitter) are all good platforms for spreading news and other information around the world quickly. Although the above technologies have improved the efficiency of communication and extended public access to information, they have also promoted the spread of fake news, misinformation and disinformation. The spread of false information has increased at a faster rate recently and is now a serious problem for the government, the media, and society. This kind of false information may mislead the public, harm their political awareness, cause social disorder, and lose the trust of the public in the media.

Recently, a serious problem in media ethics at the intersection of technology and society has been spread by fake news. Social media platforms are not subject to the same editorial review as traditional media, so false or misleading information can spread rapidly among all sectors of society in a very short time.

The purpose of the new digital platform is to increase the participation of users and the income from other sources; therefore, it will be more likely to be used to spread fake or exaggerated news. As a result of the above changes, many serious ethical problems have emerged in journalism; for example, the truthfulness and accountability of media organisations and technology companies, as well as transparency and social responsibility, are all facing scrutiny.

The selected article for this critique is "Fake News, Disinformation and Misinformation on Social Media: A Review for Analysis". Aïmeur, Amri and Brassard (2023) studied the development of fake news on online social networks in this paper, analyzed the characteristics and detection methods for misinformation, and put forward countermeasures to mitigate harm.

First, this paper will present the research goals, methods and results of the above article. Then it will identify the two main media ethics problems mentioned in the article and analyse them with Utilitarianism and the Potter Box Model. Finally, it will offer an evaluation of the strengths and deficiencies of the paper, along with suggestions for promoting ethical behaviour in digital media.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the selected article "Fake News, Disinformation and Misinformation in Social Media: A Review" by Aïmeur, Amri, and Brassard (2023), this paper will focus on the rising problem of false information in recent years and its impact on contemporary society. The authors have conducted a systematic review of the previous research on fake news, misinformation and disinformation, found that these types of information spread rapidly in the era of digital communication networks, and have had a significant impact on public opinion.

Research will be conducted on the way that digital media and political communication have changed the production, distribution and application of information through social media. Different from the old way of using traditional media, professional reporters do not check the truthfulness of the content on social media before posting and are thus not subject to editors' oversight. Therefore, the false information may spread rapidly in times of political elections, public health emergencies and other times when people are eager for information.

The first goal of this paper is to summarise previous studies on fake news and misinformation, classify various kinds of false information, analyse the technological means used to detect such content, and propose countermeasures for the negative consequences of fake news at the levels of government, media, technology companies and the public. Many parties will also work together to combat fake news, not just technology.

No new empirical data will be collected; instead, a study of related materials published by others will be carried out. Many definitions of fake news have been put forward; the reasons for the spread of false information have been studied; existing detection methods have been reviewed; and problems in identifying fake news online have been analysed. In this way, the paper will introduce the contents of this field in an organised manner and point out any deficiencies in current studies.

Therefore, in recent years, fake news and misinformation have become serious problems for ethics and society in the digital age. AI and machine learning have been applied to address the problem of fake news to a certain extent; however, these technical means alone are insufficient. To prevent the spread of fake news, we need to enhance the media literacy of the public, promote ethical conduct by the press, improve transparency in platform management, encourage responsible dissemination behaviour, etc. Therefore, the article proposes that the government, the media, digital platforms and individual users all bear a collective responsibility for creating a truthful and reliable information environment. Thus, this body of literature offers a theoretical basis for analyzing the ethical problems addressed in this critique.

## III. ETHICAL ISSUES

### A. Truthfulness Versus Speed of Information Dissemination

One of the main problems in the chosen paper that has been frequently discussed is the conflict between truthfulness and the speed of dissemination of information in the digital age. Social media platforms now include Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, etc., and they have changed the ways in which news and other information are created and shared. Different from traditional news organizations, which have editorial control and verification systems, many people have been posting and spreading unverified information online at a high speed.

Although the such technologies have enhanced the convenience and speed of information collection, they have also created a structural environment that favours the spread of fake or misleading information. Vosoughi, Roy and Aral (2018) have shown that false news spreads faster and reaches more people than true news because it is more likely to make people feel strongly, such as fear, anger or surprise. These emotions will motivate users to interact and will thus be endorsed by algorithms. Therefore, the correctness of the content is often ignored in favour of spreading and popularity.

According to the Code of Ethics for the Media, no falsehood should be presented as a fact. Scholars of media ethics, such as Christians et al. (2009), believe that in order to tell the truth about life and reality, communicators in society should take moral responsibility. However, in the era of real-time competition and algorithmic amplification in the digital world, this ethical responsibility is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. Journalists and content creators are often in a hurry to publish and keep up with the times, so they may reduce verification and thus spread false information.

A typical case of this ethical issue problem can be seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time, false information about vaccines, treatment methods and the origins of viruses spread widely on all sides. Many false reports of vaccine harm and ineffectiveness, as well as links to political control, spread widely through Facebook and WhatsApp. Despite multiple clarifications by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021) and other medical institutions, this false information continued to spread in the public sphere and thus led to vaccine hesitancy in several nations. It can be seen that after spreading in the digital world, such false information is very difficult to address or delete.

Utilitarianism can be used to investigate the ethical problem mentioned above. John Stuart Mill put forward in 1863 that, in line with utilitarianism, the objective of behaviour should be to maximise the greatest happiness for the largest number of people. Given the speed of information dissemination in the Information Age, some immediate benefits have been realised, such as higher participation and wider spread. However, the advantages are far outweighed by the damage to society over time from false information.

The damage includes a loss of public trust in the media organisation, increased social division, political polarisation and potentially harmful behaviour by the public. People who have heard of the false health information will not seek medical help or will engage in dangerous behaviours. Utilitarianism suggests that the results will show that, by choosing speed over accuracy, one is causing more harm than good overall; thus, it is ethically unreasonable.

Given the above reasons, utilitarianism can also be used to argue that media institutions and technology companies should introduce stricter verification measures before disseminating information on the Internet. Delaying the release of the fact-check may reduce the spread of harm caused by false information, but it will not be available immediately. Therefore, in the era of digital technology, moral education should be guided by reasonable design of an authentication system rather than quick circulation; it may thus lose some popularity.

Therefore, the problem of ethics in the digital age still demands that we be honest. If there are no corresponding checks on the speed of spread, it will harm the public's understanding and spread of social order in all areas.

### *B. Public Interest vs. Commercial Profit*

Another problem of public interest and private profit has been identified in the selected paper at the level of digital media platforms. Most of the large social media platforms are currently operating on an advertising model; that is, users' attention and data are sold to third parties for targeted advertising. Given this economic system, the platform will focus more on grabbing people's attention than providing correct information or social benefits.

At the centre of the algorithm system is this process. The Goal of a recommendation system is to find and recommend items that users are likely to be interested in, such as popular videos, trending articles, etc. Most people are more likely to notice and be drawn in by emotionally stimulating or sensational content. Therefore, false or exaggerated information may be inadvertently promoted because it is more likely to attract the attention of the public.

Digital Platforms have serious ethical problems because they are for-profit enterprises that simultaneously serve as essential conduits for public information. Although the companies do not actively select the content to be distributed, their algorithms determine which information users see and, thus, affect public opinion and awareness of politics. Accountability, transparency, and the moral responsibility of platform operators are all concerned.

A well-known real-life case of this problem can be found in the 2016 US Presidential Election. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) found that many false political news stories spread widely on Facebook and other social media platforms during the election. Many of these fabricated stories had higher engagement than real news and were therefore spread further by the algorithm. Some fake news reached several million people and thus altered public opinion on politics, causing a split among the populace.

At this time, the main problem is a conflict between commercial goals and the duty to present accurate information; therefore, one should not compromise the correctness of the facts for profit. Given the issues of media ethics, we need to know if the profit-seeking algorithm has safeguarded the public interest sufficiently without reinforcing ethical supervision.

The Potter Box Model can be used to address the ethical problem mentioned above. The first factor, definition of the problem, is that the platform's optimisation for engagement unintentionally promotes the spread of false information. The second type is values; truth, profitability, transparency, freedom of speech and the public interest are all in conflict at this time. The third kind of ethics is harm reduction, fairness and accountability, and these should guide the decision-making of media systems. The last index is 'level of responsibility' for a specific entity on digital platforms.

Although the platforms have financial obligations to shareholders and advertisers, media ethics holds that their first duty is to the public. As these platforms offer people easy access to political and social information relevant to their lives and the construction of a democratic society, they have gradually gained the attention of the public. Prioritising profit over public welfare may erode trust in the system of digital communication and democracy.

Considering the above ethical reasons, regulations need to be introduced to restrict the spread of false information by social media companies. Increase the openness of algorithms, establish independent fact-checking institutions, adjust engagement-based ranking models, and enhance the accountability of content recommendation. The above measures will help align commercial goals with social responsibility and promote the development of digital communication systems in the public interest.

In the end, this ethical problem indicates that the root of the misinformation problem may not be only in the content itself but also in the structural deficiencies of the economic and technological design of digital platforms.

#### IV. CRITICAL EVALUATION

The selected paper provides an all-encompassing and organised introduction to fake news, disinformation and misinformation on social media. Another strength is that it can distinguish between different types of fake news more effectively and explain the particular harm that various kinds of fake news cause to digital communication. Based on a large number of previous studies, the authors have obtained a general understanding of how false information spreads online and why it has become a serious problem in contemporary society. Presently, people have also begun to use artificial intelligence and machine learning technology to identify fake news. Therefore, the paper will be of interest to researchers, the media and policymakers.

Another advantage of the paper is that it shows cooperation among all relevant parties. Not only are the social media companies to blame, but according to the authors, other parties such as governments, journalists, technology developers, educators and the public also bear responsibility for spreading fake news. The two above show that the environment of digital media today is complicated, and everyone needs to proactively improve the quality of information.

Despite the above strengths, the paper has some deficiencies in terms of media ethics. First, although it presents detailed discussions of the technology-detection method, it gives less attention to the ethics of media organisations and digital platforms. The paper proposes a way to detect fake news, but it does not discuss the ethical problems in deciding whether to remove, label or spread the detected fake news. The merits of fairness, responsibility and openness, as well as the right to freedom of speech, have not been taken into account.

Second, most of the article is dedicated to technical and theoretical discussions and does not provide sufficient real-world case studies. Provide some representative cases from the recent political elections or other major cases of misinformation to enhance the practical significance of the study and show how ethical problems occur in actual media practice.

Finally, although the paper mentions that artificial intelligence can be used to address the problem of fake news, it does not investigate the ethical risks of generative AI technology, such as deepfake videos, AI-generated political propaganda and synthetic images. As these technologies for political communication have spread further, more research will be conducted on the ethical problems they present.

In short, this paper has provided some help in learning about fake news and misinformation in the Internet. However, to further explore the ethical problems in the media and offer more practical references for ethical behaviour by journalists, it will be necessary to increase research on these issues, real-life case studies, and new problems related to artificial intelligence.

#### V. BROADER ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

The ethical issues in the selected paper are serious and will have an impact on media staff, online platforms, policymakers, educators, the public, etc. With the change in form of communication of politics and public opinion, ethical norms have also been evolving gradually. Although technology has reduced the problem of the spread of fake news to some extent, new problems have also emerged, such as a decline in morality and harm to social harmony, as well as threats to democracy and public trust.

Accuracy, verification and accountability are required for journalists and media organisations according to the article. Promptly and accurately verify the facts of the information before releasing it, even when there is pressure to report breaking news urgently. Good journalism should be truthful and fair in reporting, not rushed or popular. Comply with the code of ethics for journalists to maintain the confidence of the public and prevent the spread of fake news.

A type of morality for social-media firms is proposed in this paper. As the algorithms that determine which information is shown to users by the platform are employed by technology companies, regulations need to be strengthened on the dissemination of false or misleading information. Improve the content moderation system, increase the transparency of algorithm-driven decisions, work with independent fact-checking organisations, and provide users with accurate context. The above measures can help balance freedom of expression with the corresponding obligation not to harm.

The government and schools are also promoting media literacy at present. Learn to confirm the accuracy of information obtained online and spread it responsibly. Educational programmes that strengthen digital literacy can reduce the harm of fake news and promote responsible behaviour on the Internet. The problems of ethics listed in the paper will also affect the future development of artificial intelligence. As AI-generated text, images, audio and video become increasingly realistic, so will the possibilities for generating convincing fake news. Therefore, media organisations and technology companies need to set clear ethical standards for the use of artificial intelligence in political expression to ensure that AI-generated works are publicly disclosed and transparent.

In short, the article indicates that the construction of an ethical digital information environment requires the cooperation of journalists, technology companies, governments, educators, citizens and so on. Promote truthfulness, responsibility and transparency in the media; improve media literacy to reduce harm from fake news; build a more responsible and trustworthy digital communication environment.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This journal critique has studied the ethical problems in the article "Fake News, Disinformation and Misinformation in Social Media: A Review from a Media Ethics Perspective". As shown in the article, at present, fake news and misinformation are serious problems in the digital era because they have swayed public opinion, damaged trust in the media, and harmed democratic development. Based on the review of previous studies, this paper will present some reasons for and effects of the spread of false information on social media platforms, as well as countermeasures.

The two main ethical problems that have been cited in this criticism are: the conflict between truthfulness and the speed of dissemination of information, and the conflict between public interest and commercial profit. Utilitarianism and the Potter Box Model were used to assess the above problems (Potter, 2019). Both theories should serve the public interest and aim for accuracy, transparency, accountability and public welfare rather than commercial or user-engagement goals. Ethical Communication is responsible behaviour that avoids causing harm and spreads truth and reliability.

Although the selected paper has made an academic contribution by reviewing the current situation of research on fake news and misinformation, more in-depth ethical analysis, practical case studies, and solutions to new problems, such as AI-generated political content and deepfake technology, could be added to expand the discussion. In light of the above problems, the article will be more in touch with the changes in digital media at present.

In short, in the face of fake news, journalists and others need to cooperate to build an all-around defensive system. To keep the public's trust and protect democratic discourse, ethical behaviour of the media, effective fact-checking, increased media literacy and transparent platform governance are all required conditions. As digital technology continues to develop, the rules of conduct for the media in the digital age will remain the same.

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