



Ethical Issues in Digital Journalism: Strategies and Responsibilities in Combating Fake News and Misinformation in the Online Era

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Abstract

Journalism has undergone a significant change in today's world, where fake news and misinformation have come out as serious ethical challenges that need to be addressed. The pressure to publish news quickly and gain audience attention often leads to compromised accuracy, a decline in content quality, and a loss of credibility for journalists. It examines how to maintain truth and transparency by highlighting the responsibilities of journalists and media organizations and the ethical issues in digital journalism.

The study adopts a content analysis method to examine digital news content and identify effective strategies and responsibilities required to combat fake news and misinformation in the online world. This paper emphasizes understanding the role of ethical practices, fact-checking, and responsible reporting in strengthening the trust in digital media. It also investigates the use of AI by human journalist against ethical issues to generate stories. It concludes that responsible journalism is essential for developing trust and ensuring the reliability of information in the online age.

Keywords: journalism, digital era, ethical challenges, digital journalism ethics, fake news, misinformation, fact-checking

Introduction

Digital journalism is facing many challenges at this time since technology, consumer demand, and the need for ethics come into play. The explosion of social media sites, instant messaging, video sharing, and online news aggregators has led to an upheaval in the creation and dissemination of news. Whereas these changes have brought with them the ability for people to have access to more information as well as participate actively in a public debate, they have also been responsible for the exponential growth of fake news. As we move through this new phase of digital journalism, we must be aware that digital journalism is not bound by the temporal and physical constraints of print or broadcast journalism but operates globally and in real-time within an information economy which has little regulation.

For journalists operating in the age of digital information, there is a convergence of technology, audience expectation, and ethics that places journalism in a critical situation. The explosion in the number of online platforms through which news can be consumed has led to a redefinition of both how news is gathered, disseminated, and consumed. This has created a scenario in which individuals can participate and contribute in shaping public opinion and discussions on certain matters, while at the same time creating a breeding ground for the exponential increase of fake news and misinformation. The advent of digital journalism implies that the journalist can no longer operate under the constraints of time and space of print or even broadcast journalism; rather, digital journalism operates in an international, instantaneous, and uncontrolled environment where the line between news and opinion, propaganda, and deception is blurred.

In light of such considerations, ethical concerns of digital journalism take on renewed significance. Accuracy, impartiality, transparency, accountability, and minimizing harm remain central norms within journalism, but their implementation in digital environments requires a new ethical

perspective. In a digital environment, a reporter is confronted with a number of challenges that include the need to be fast in an around-the-clock news environment; to produce content that attracts clicks; to adhere to formats peculiar to different platforms, including short video content, live broadcasting, and visual content; and to blur boundaries between a journalist, influencer, and an everyday user. Furthermore, the development of artificial intelligence in news production brings additional ethical issues regarding authorship, transparency, possible biases, and automation of disinformation campaigns.

The study explores ethical issues associated with digital journalism and identifies practical strategies and responsibilities required to combat fake news and misinformation in the online era.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the ethical issues in digital journalism.
2. To analyze the role of fake news and misinformation in the digital era.
3. To identify strategies that can help combat misinformation online.
4. To understand the responsibilities of journalists and media organizations.
5. To study findings from previous research through content analysis.

Review of Literature

(Sneh, 2026) points out that digital platforms have created a surge in fake news, and honestly, that's become one of the biggest ethical headaches in journalism today. The paper states that the fact-checking and sensationalism damaging the reputation of renowned channel and websites these kinds of issues are making people to lose their credibility in mass media. According to (Caled & Silva, 2022) digital media makes it easy to mess with information and push fake news using algorithms and social networks. Their paper shows that there is a simple solution of it, which is Teamwork. They want everyone to be fully focused on digital

literacy, better regulations, and developing stronger tools to combat these issues.

(Reddy, 2024) Investigates another problem into the mix: paid news and journalists cutting corners just to keep brands happy or grab clicks online for chasing profit and views that is eroding real journalistic standards. Then there's (Orosz, 2024) this paper tested online programs that teach teens how to think critically. The research shows that students get much better at spotting and ignoring fake news and misinformation when they get to learn about media literacy and critical thinking.

(Gunarathne, 2025) focuses on the difficult ethical decisions that journalists must make, such as revealing the truth, safeguarding privacy, and maintaining a balance along with the public interest. It reaches to the conclusion that digital platforms require greater accountability and ethics in reporting. Johansson et al. (2023) examined various strategies people are using to combat false information on the internet. They discovered that fact-checking, restrictions on content, awareness campaigns, and being knowledgeable about algorithm conduct are all important.

Finally, reports from the OECD and the Digital Cooperation Organization lay it out clearly. Fake news and misinformation hurt society and economies, and stopping them will take everyone pitching in: governments, journalists, tech companies, and all of us.

Research Gap

Although many studies have focused on fake news and misinformation, few have explored the specific ethical responsibilities of journalists in fighting misinformation in digital journalism. Existing studies have focused mostly on technological solutions or the role of social media platforms. Few studies discuss practical ethical strategies journalists and media organisations should use in their everyday reporting practices. However, there is a lack of an integrated discussion that brings together ethical issues, content analysis, and professional responsibilities into one framework. To

mitigate fake news in the digital age this research seeks to bridge the gap by investigating ethical concerns and practical measures and obligations necessary.

Research Methodology

The research method of this study is qualitative, with data analysis techniques using content analysis and literature review. I reviewed a host of online news articles, digital media reports, peer-reviewed journals and studies on fake news and digital journalism to identify the key ethical issues and the strategies to curb them. We used content analysis to examine patterns of misinformation, ethical issues, journalistic practices, and audience influence in digital journalism. To understand the duties of journalists and media organisations in the fight against misinformation, academic articles, research papers and reports were reviewed as secondary sources. The methodology helps to provide a holistic understanding of how ethical journalism can help in reducing fake news and misinformation in online environment.

Ethical Issues in Journalism

1. Fake News and Misinformation

Fake news and misinformation are some of the most serious ethical problems in online journalism because information can race through social media and other online spaces very fast, unverified stories can touch millions of people in just minutes. And then, wrong stuff can steer public opinion, cause panic, fuel hatred, or damage the reputation of people and even whole organizations.

2. Clickbait Journalism

In clickbait journalism, the use of provocative or misleading headlines is employed to capture the attention of the audience. Clickbait headlines tend to overstate facts in a way that undermines the integrity of the media organization. This strategy puts more emphasis on the number of views gained rather than on reporting. When

readers get disappointed by the information contained in the article, they may feel deceived.

3. Breach of Privacy

The breach of privacy involves publishing personal details or images without permission. It poses an extreme threat to personal privacy because it results in the exposure of sensitive material online. Victims of crime and normal people are among those who can suffer from unscrupulous journalism. The challenge for journalists is to consider both public interest and individual privacy while reporting.

4. Failure to Verify Facts

The need for immediacy in news stories may result in insufficient verification of facts prior to publishing them. False information may become pervasive and erode the credibility of media in the eyes of the public. Once falsehoods are posted on the Internet, they are very hard to rectify. Journalists must exercise great diligence in verifying their sources.

5. Paid News and Sponsored Content

The concept of paid news has created confusion between journalism and advertising. Media houses sometimes publish promotional messages for monetary gain and do not disclose it to their audience. It is unfair to the readers and compromises the integrity of journalists. Unethical journalism results from the need to satisfy commercial interests.

6. Algorithmic Bias

There are algorithms employed by digital platforms that tend to favour sensationalized and engaging content over accurate information. Misleading and polarizing news can quickly gain ground online owing to algorithmic bias. Such practices can give rise to

echo chambers and contribute to social polarization, whereby people only get selective information depending on their preferences.

7. Social Media Manipulation

Social media manipulation entails sharing false or inaccurate information with the purpose of swaying people's opinions. This includes creating fake accounts, using bots, and manipulating information. The end result is always social unrest and political chaos. It has become common practice for many people to share information on social media without first ensuring that it is accurate.

8. Sensationalism in Journalism

Sensationalism is the act of making news more dramatic in order to generate attention. News items that are sensational can lead people into a state of panic or fear. The use of sensationalism takes away from the educational value of journalism. Matters that are important in life become overstated for the purpose of entertainment.

9. Content Stealing and Plagiarism

When content, images, or ideas are stolen and no credit is given to their rightful owners, this problem arises. Plagiarism is very rampant in today's digital journalism because of the availability of everything through digital media. Ethical journalism should ensure honesty and creativity. It also goes against copyright laws.

10. Decline in Journalistic Autonomy

The pressure from both business interests and politics has weakened journalistic autonomy during the digital age. The journalists can be motivated by the advertiser, the owner, or the political pressure group

while reporting the news. The objectivity and integrity in journalism is hampered as a result. The audiences get manipulated news rather than the truth.

Analysis and Findings

- As evidenced from the reviewed studies, misinformation is widespread and spreads quickly owing to the immediate sharing of contents without prior verification on the digital platform.
- The social media algorithms prioritize emotional and sensational content leading to a quick spread of fake news and misleading information.
- According to researchers, fact-checking is one of the most useful tools to control misinformation. Fact-checking organizations and independent verification services are helpful in identifying fake information for consumers of the digital news.
- However, it was found that fact-checking could not be effective unless people were well-educated regarding media literacy and how to consume news responsibly.
- As highlighted by Orosz et al. (2024), make people to critically evaluate information so that no one can easily recognize misinformation and prevent them from circulating widely.
- Another issue discussed in the literature was the responsibility of digital and social media platforms in controlling fake news.
- The social media platforms need to enforce strict guidelines for content moderation, transparent algorithm, and utilize artificial intelligence to curb misinformation.
- Journalism is considered ethical when its practitioners are transparent, accountable, accurate, and comply with all

professional ethics in their reporting practices.

- Journalists should conduct careful verifications of their claims, avoid sensational news, and produce balanced coverage of information.
- Overall, the literature suggests that no single solution can completely solve the problem of misinformation; instead, a multidisciplinary and collective approach is necessary.

Strategies to combat fake news and misinformation

Digital media and social networking sites have greatly contributed to the spread of misinformation and fake news. It requires a mix of various techniques, both technological and educational, for combating such misinformation. Below are some of the techniques that could be employed in combating misinformation.

1. Development of a Comprehensive Misinformation Classification Framework

It is important that a thorough classification of misinformation be created for enhancing the capacity of society to distinguish between, recognize, and comprehend various forms of digital misinformation. In other words, a framework will assist in the categorization of misinformation into such categories as fake news, manipulation, satire, propaganda, deepfake videos, and mislead advertisements (Organization., 2024)

2. Establishment of Ethical Standards and Guiding Principles

It is highly important to formulate some standards or ethical guidelines that will be used by all parties involved in order to deal with the problem of misinformation. It will be necessary to set forth some rules as to how journalists, media corporations, technology firms, and internet users should act.

3. Enhancing Media Literacy and Journalism Education

Media literacy education is crucial for people who want to effectively analyze digital information. Educational systems and journalism schools should ensure that their students have the great knowledge and skills required for critical thinking and verifying information from the credible sources. Media literacy helps citizens to distinguish between fake stories and make decisions based on credible online information.

4. Promotion of Advanced Fact-Checking Mechanisms

As the problem of misinformation and fake news is increasing rapidly, there is a need for highly developed and comprehensive fact-checking systems. (Organization., 2024) Media companies and digital platforms need to use AI-based fact-checking mechanisms and work together with independent fact-checking bodies. There are a number of fact-checking websites, such as Google Fact Check Tools, Snopes, PolitiFact, FactCheck.org, NewsGuard, and FakeSpot, which will help in verifying any news or statements and also find out false information before it spreads widely.

5. Encouraging Transparency in Information Dissemination

The transparency of the distribution of information is important in order to build trust. The media houses and the digital platforms must be transparent about their sources of information, patterns of funding, editorial policies, and process of information verification. Promoting trustworthy and authentic sources of information will help prevent the spread of misinformation.

6. Promoting Individual Responsibility and Pre-Verification Practices

It is recommended that people be motivated to authenticate their sources before posting the information through the social media sites. Information about the negative impacts of spreading unconfirmed news can be

provided through public awareness programs to help curb the spread of rumors online.

7. Strengthening the Role of Journalists, Governments, and Digital Platforms

(Gunarathne, 2025) Journalism stakeholders including journalists themselves, the government, educators, and social media platforms need to collaborate to deal with these ethical challenges in journalism and fake news. It is important for journalists to engage in proper investigative and fact-finding processes, and for the government to ensure creation of policies that help to deal with fake news without stifling freedom of speech.

8. Automatic Misinformation Classification Systems

The process of detecting and preventing the dissemination of fake news stories can have played a significant role by adopting the use of auto-classifying software applications for detecting disinformation (Caled & Silva, 2022). Such software applications rely on the application of AI, machine learning, and natural language processing technologies in detecting patterns and trends, collecting information, verifying source credibility, and verifying its correctness.

9. Algorithmic Downranking and Deplatforming

Downranking of false and dangerous information by digital platforms is possible via algorithmic means, which would result in limiting the spread of such information by reducing its prominence within search results and users' social media feed. Deplatforming may also become a necessity for repeated offenders when all else fails. (Organization., 2024)

10. Debunking and Corrective Information Strategies

The strategies for debunking involve addressing the misleading statements with credible information and explanations. With successful debunking, it will help address the impact of fake news and ensure that any misleading information is not propagated either offline or online. It is suggested that debunking alone is not enough since it needs to be supported with other approaches such as prevention.

Responsibilities of Journalists

1.Ensuring Accuracy and Verification of Information

The first obligation that the journalist should adhere to is ensuring that all information is accurate, factual, and verifiable. The journalist should be able to verify his facts using several sources before relaying any news story. This will avoid the dissemination of fake information.

2. Maintaining Truthfulness and Objectivity

It is expected of journalists to provide objective information in an ethical manner. Journalists ought not to distort facts in order to benefit from such actions personally, politically, or financially. Objective journalism involves giving all aspects of the situation equal attention without any biasness.

3. Avoiding Sensationalism and Clickbait Practices

A significant responsibility of digital journalists is not to indulge in sensationalism through clickbait headlines, misleading thumbnails, and sensational content that serves only to lure the viewer. Clickbait often causes chaos, confusion, and disinformation. Ethical journalism puts the welfare of the masses above the fame and clicks.

4. Responsible Fact-Checking

Ethical journalism includes the use of fact-checking strategies and methods prior to posting any digital content on their platforms. Digital journalists need to verify information, images, videos, quotes, and data from various social media posts by fact-checking sites.

5. Providing Clear and Credible Information Sources

A key element in ethical journalism involves being transparent about the source and credibility of any information that is cited wherever possible. Care must be taken in using anonymous sources, and they should only be used when absolutely necessary.

6. Rectifying Mistakes Promptly

In order to be an ethical journalist or work for an ethical news organization, one must recognize and rectify any mistake that is made in the publication process. Corrections and clarifications must be issued whenever necessary.

7. Respecting Privacy and Human Dignity

The reporters must respect people's human rights, privacy, and dignity when covering any news as reputations can be harmed and socially disrupted by false accusations, misrepresented stories, and baseless charges. Respect for individual privacy and tact are necessary for responsible reporting.

8. Fostering Public Awareness and Media Literacy

It is a journalists responsibility to inform their readers or audience about fake news or information. To recognise false information in today's world requires critical thinking and verification skills that can help public to become more literate.

9. Resistance to Pressures of Business and Politics

It is the duty of the press to be able to voice their thoughts without bowing to pressure from wealthy persons, companies, politicians, and even advertisers. This might happen because of unethical practices that the journalism profession has set out, which include motivations and the use of prejudice in the creation of the story.

10. Compliance with Professional Ethics Code

Organisations have developed ethical codes for news reporting, which journalists have to adhere to. News reporting must contain

honesty, integrity, objectivity, accountability, and social responsibility among other things.

11. Verification of Information Produced by Users

With the emergence of social media, citizen journalism, and user-generated news, journalists find themselves using these sources regularly. Journalists need to verify information before publishing user-generated materials in order to ensure that there is no manipulation of facts or photos or videos.

12. Avoiding Mischiefous or Harmful Reporting

Ethical journalism discourages the reporting of any information that promotes hate speech, conflicts between communities, or violence.

13. Promotion of Investigative Journalism

There is a critical requirement for investigative journalism in uncovering various disinformation campaigns, propaganda networks, or networks. In order to find out where the false information originates from and why it has been spread, it is necessary that journalists conduct an investigation.

14. Ethical Use of Technology

AI, algorithms, and other technological advances must be applied ethically by digital journalists. Digital journalists need to avoid the use of AI-generated fake news, false edits, or misleading visuals on their content.¹⁵ Protecting Democratic Values and Public Trust

Conclusion

However, although digital journalism has helped enhance communication and information access, there are many ethical issues associated with fake news. From the results obtained through this study, it is evident that misinformation gets propagated very quickly because of the advanced technologies, algorithms on the social media, competition for engagement, and inadequate verification processes. Ethical journalism, fact-checking, media literacy, transparency, and responsible reporting are important methods that must be used to reduce the

prevalence of misinformation in the media industry. Journalists and media practitioners have a moral obligation to ensure that credibility is maintained. Therefore, to tackle the issue of fake news in the media, concerted efforts need to be made by all stakeholders including journalists, the audience, academic institutions, the government, and the technology industry.

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