

# FAKE NEWS AND DISINFORMATION: ETHICAL IMPACTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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## Article history

**Received date** : 15-6-2023

**Revised date** : 16-6-2023

**Accepted date** : 28-7-2023

**Published date** : 13-9-2023

## To cite this document:

'Ainuddin, N. F., Abdul Malik, N. A. A., Aruan, M. I. A., & Md Radzi, S. (2023). Fake news and disinformation: ethical impacts and responsibilities. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 8 (55), 32 - 41.

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**Abstract:** *Ethics considers how people interact with one another and with nature, as well as their own freedom, responsibility, and sense of justice. Therefore, this study aims to examine the ethical implications of fake news, disinformation campaigns, and misinformation spread on social media platforms. Furthermore, this study also investigates the impact on public discourse, democracy, and the ethical responsibilities of social media companies and users in combating disinformation. Many fake news is widely disseminated without ensuring such information from trusted sources. The literature review research methodology was employed to answer the objectives of the study. The information was explored from online databases by reviewing existing literature through academic journals. People were acting out of control without checking if the news is true or simply fake. Many people share fake news because they find it exciting and relevant to what is happening in the world. The journal article expands our understanding of how disinformation and fake news spread on the platform. The conclusion of this paper will be beneficial for readers and help them in detecting the negative effects by spreading it.*

**Keywords:** *Fake news, information, disinformation, misinformation, ethical, ethics, social media.*

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## Introduction

Fake news is pernicious as it spreads misleading and false information while disinformation is information that is intentionally shared to confuse others. Fake news is more likely to spread false perceptions in both information areas (Peren, 2023). The spread of fake news and disinformation is becoming a public and global concern. By spreading fake news and

disinformation using some platforms, it has a big impact especially on ethics and responsibility. According to Wadigala (2020), a systematic way of understanding, analysing, and discriminating issues of right and wrong, good and evil, and positive and negative things as they relate to the well-being of and interactions among human beings is what ethics appears to be. The concepts of good and bad, obligation and duty, and ethical responsibility are central to the study of ethics. When ethicists use terms like "good" or "right" to describe an individual or a behaviour, they often suggest that the pointed out things comply with some sort of moral norm (Wadigala, 2020). A nice person or desirable behaviour possesses attractive traits for humans. According to Lisa Et al. (2023), there are three morality categories that form up ethics. First of all, a common ethic is an ethical principle that members of the same group or culture share. Second, personal morality is a person's ethical values that they have developed through religion or related to one another origin. The third one is that experts in a profession are guided by professional ethics, a collection of ethical norms embraced by professions. As a matter of fact, "top management set rules, standards, and codes of conduct which provide guidelines for ethical behaviour, and leaders can increase subordinates' understanding of such factors". The development of organisational culture and the existing ethical environment are both significantly influenced by leaders (Ana, 2020). Based on an article written by Ileana Et al. (2020), being genuine, accurate, and well-intentioned are just a few rules of ethics that should guide our communication. When educating the public, responsibility is the key component of ethical engagement. Countless philosophers and writers have debated the connection between morality and ethics. Most of them agree as the two concepts are synonymous, while others point out slight distinctions between the two concepts (Ercan, 2017). Hence, the objective of this journal article aims to examine the ethical implications of fake news, disinformation campaigns, and misinformation spread on social media platforms. Aside from that, this study aims to investigate the impact on public discourse and democracy, as well as the ethical responsibilities of social media companies and users in combating disinformation.

### **Literature review**

By definition, ethics is the idea of right and wrong, good and bad. Having the right values in social media refers to having the correct perspective, the correct way of considering how to use social media successfully, and the correct way of interacting with others. The impact of social media goes well beyond marketing and technology. Other implications are rarely discussed. There are rules of ethics and etiquette for social media that must be observed.

According to Riccardo (2020), ethics can be defined up as "moral principles that guide an individual's actions or the carrying out of an activity" or "the research into what is considered morally right and wrong or a set of thoughts about what is morally right and wrong." Business ethics is a topic that is closely related to using manipulated or false communications and reporting documents.

Social media has evolved into a quick and simple tool for spreading news and the latest trends. Due to the widespread information sharing on these platforms, as well as the spread of false information and fake news, social media users frequently notice content that goes viral. According to Kulvinder et al., (2022), malicious social bots produce millions of social media pages with false, incorrect with regard and misleading material with the aim of harming brands. People are scrambling to share news about Covid-19 at the same time without realizing it, there are those who overlook it and put other people's lives in danger. For instance, they say that the pandemic is over while the government still has not spoken. This is what happens when those who are not aware of the importance of the impact and responsibilities of ethics.

Besides that, Julie (2019) mentioned that the gathering's relational ethical space encouraged knowledge as relationships in action through physical, spiritual, and procedural means that balanced opportunities for listening and speaking, seeing and showing, feeling and practicing ideas, as well as ways to challenge oneself and others to comprehend, think, and act better. Having a physical connection to a place is a component of relational ethics. Similar to this, the group's orientation to spiritual practices helped them understand what it means to seek out the right path while also listening with their hearts.

The term ethics is derived from the Greek word "ethos," which means "way of living" (Singer, 2023). According to Madineh et al., (2021), different definitions of ethics as a collection of spiritual behaviors and traits have been presented. Ethical performance is an aspect of philosophy that deals with human conduct, more specifically with how people behave in society. It refers to a set of acceptable rules that people in a profession should follow or avoid. When choosing what is morally right or wrong, just or unjust, ethics looks at the rational basis for our moral judgments. The study of ethical concepts is a topic covered by a number of academic fields, including philosophy, theology, law, psychology, and sociology. In a broader sense, ethics takes into account a person's freedom, responsibility, and sense of justice as well as how they interact with others and the natural world. It can be argued that ethics is generally concerned with human independence when it focuses on the interaction that occurs between people and the rest of the world.

They contend that it would be unreasonable for someone not to act if they realized that doing so would be morally right. But despite their heads telling them to do otherwise, humans frequently act irrationally and go with their "gut instinct." However, ethics does offer useful resources for considering moral dilemmas. Many people desire that there be just one correct response to ethical dilemmas. They find moral ambiguity difficult to deal with because they sincerely want to do what is morally just, and even if they are unable to determine what that right thing is, they prefer to think that there is, "somewhere," a single correct response. However, there may be multiple appropriate answers or only a few least bad responses in many cases, and the person must select between them. Others find moral ambiguity challenging because it makes them accountable for their decisions and acts rather than depending on practical rules and customs.

### **Method & Material**

The literature review research methodology was settled in answering the objectives of this study. The information was obtained and explored from online databases through the UiTM Library E-Resources (Ezaccess), Scopus etc. Academic journals were used as references and sources to analyze and collect data in journal writing based on previous studies from 2017 to 2023. The researcher studied some of the articles on online websites as references for research as well. The journal from related topics with keywords such as ethics, social media, disinformation and fake news has been discovered. Information has been explored by reviewing existing literature to discuss the objectives of the study.

## Findings

### **The ethical implications of fake news, disinformation campaigns, and misinformation spread on social media platforms**

Anyone with an internet connection can access breaking news in some form online and watch it as it happens. The necessity of investigating how individuals act in using and sharing information on social media has increased due to the growing use of social media platforms, as a source of information that people may consult for various purposes, such as educational or medical purposes. There has been an increase in the amount of information shared in real time, which has both advantages and disadvantages for people and governments because of the nature of social media platforms (Ahmad et al., 2023). Due to advances in technology that enable people to create networks and take part in public discussions on social, political, economic, environmental, cultural, and other issues, social media usage continues to explode globally, with low- and middle-income countries encountering an exponential rise (Kulvinder, 2022). Social media posts can spread more quickly than most fact-checkers and moderators can keep up with, and they frequently contain a confusing mixture of the real, the fake news, the out-of-context and the outright propaganda. People's acceptance of social media makes them take every piece of information they get seriously. The spread of false information, along with disinformation and fake news, can change people's perceptions of the outbreak and public health measures, as we have seen with the Covid-19 pandemic (Marie, 2023). However, fake news has existed for a long time, appearing with the global increase in social media use and web-based information consumption over the past few decades. The issues of Covid-19 are quite important to saving lives. But some of these people have taken advantage to gain popularity. They do not think about the effects and consequences of spreading fake news in this kind of situation without having an ethic and responsibility. Miftachul (2021) states that a change in how they are set up has allowed millions of users to connect with one another and exchange ideas, opinions, and information, leading to the daily creation of huge online data sets in particular. In fact, the number of SNS users is rapidly increasing every year for a variety of reasons. These include posting and sending text messages and comments to wider audiences via friends' lists and other settings on online networks like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. They also include sharing rich content, such as videos or pictures, chatting with other users, and exchanging rich media with other users (Miftachul et al., 2021). From these platforms, they also can have disinformation campaigns. It is information that spreads intending to manipulate someone or something, as opposed to misinformation, which is incorrect because a reporter mixed up the facts. When disinformation matches up with the audience's point of view, fake news can spread quickly because the audience is less likely to question it. Even unknowingly, social media users play an important role in the spread of false information. Users occasionally spread news stories even when they suspect they may be biased or mistaken out of fear of not spreading information that could have been accurate and beneficial or simply because they agree with that side of the story. According to Troullinou (2021), we should base our decisions on the likely outcomes of our choices. In this sense, we must consider the pros and cons for all parties involved before acting on a piece of news we discover on social media. A social media post that spreads misinformation could make us popular and draw attention, but it could also hurt our beloved ones.

### **The impact on public discourse and democracy**

Public discourse refers to any method or forum where individuals may express their opinions and disagreements in front of others about decisions and the decision-making process. Democracy is an important ideology that is held by the majority of countries in the world.

Democracy refers to a system of government where the people are allowed to participate in the law-making process. From public discourse and democracy, fake news and disinformation will appear. The potential for disinformation campaigns to skew election results, influence public opinion, increase political ineffectiveness, and exclude the public is a growing concern for media experts. Politicians' use of false information to attack credible media poses a threat to free speech and could seriously affect the public's trust in those connections (Nili, 2022). Disinformation and conspiracy pseudoscience-promoting political channels create significantly more feedback and replies (Heydari et al., 2019). Shu et al., (2017) found that most users usually comment and express skepticism when they initially come across false information online. The spread of extreme speech on social media platforms, which are viewed as very powerful media outlets with the ability (if not the desire) to influence public discourse, is part of the social and political context (Brett, 2018). On the other hand, Reuter et al., (2019) report that about fifty percent of their respondents who came across false information online never responded, interacted with the material, or left a comment. Those who did were primarily younger users. According to Brett (2018), politicians, commentators, and members of the public have demanded that the social media sites that enable user-generated content take action to stop the spread of extreme speech in response to this controversial speech. A powerful civil society and press freedom (as parts of democracy) support bigger social spending and welfare plans. Therefore, when a crisis or period of extreme poverty develops, the media may exert direct pressure on governments or other powerful actors. Additionally, a strong civil society and socially engaged organizations may apply strong pressure on political institutions by advocating for any necessary changes to social policies (Fadillah, 2019). The media is one of the agents that plays an important role in spreading information to each individual and also to any party that has an interest. It doesn't matter whether the media is still in traditional form in nature that supports a political party or online media that reports the news transparently, the influence of this media is also very important. In Malaysia, the issue of media freedom is often played out every time before the election so that it becomes a campaign issue in both the ruling party and the opposition party. With a less ethical society, they cannot distinguish whether every thought, speech and behavior is good or not. This will cause the decision taken to be less accurate. According to a survey of several articles, many respondents agreed that fake news and misinformation will affect the way a person thinks, acts and resolves conflicts. This is a way that the community can gradually adopt a new cultural pattern and start to have its thoughts and behaviour shaped by the mass media. Without knowing it, the mass media has influenced our needs and helped us set up our daily schedules. Therefore, if false negative information slowly spreads through people's minds, eventually there will be a variety of negative ways for an individual to act and settle conflicts, such as battling, slandering, and so on. For example, the Finance Minister of Hesse, Germany, is believed to have committed suicide after being seen to be 'too worried' about the economic crisis following the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic, said the state's leader, Volker Bouffier. The spread of false news and information about no medicine can cure or prevent has worried all walks of life.

### **The ethical responsibilities of social media companies and users in combating disinformation**

Social media has enabled the widespread dissemination of information that causes the information to be true or false not to be considered appropriately. The rise of social media users is increasing day by day as they use the primary source of getting their daily news (Yaraghi, 2019). As Shu (2022) mentions, the ability of social media to rapidly share information at scale makes it immensely popular for news distribution, information sharing, and event participation. When social media becomes the fastest place in spreading the news, at the same time the level



of responsibility for disseminated content should increase accordingly. Social media companies should have taken some responsibility for the published content on their platform. They must set strategies in order to handle spreading fake news. According to Shu (2022), disinformation can be prevented by introducing fake news detection methods on social media that focus on using news content and social context. There is a high volume of information circulating on the Internet, particularly through the social media platform. Devillers et al. (2020) argue in order to detect disinformation, usage of the automatic tools is the only way to make handling these problems more efficient and scalable than human fact-checkers could take. These companies should take various steps in preventing the problems of spreading disinformation and fake news including by using as well as improving their algorithms on social media. Unsupervised algorithm for detecting false news by using social media user opinions and determining the credibility of those opinions (Shu, 2022). This matter manages to detect and remove false information as well as implement good policies in limiting the spread of false information. According to the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) there is much debate regarding misinformation on social media about automated algorithms and detection (Agustin, 2021). Disinformation can be impactful by media users as well. To confront the overwhelming amount of disinformation, an approach of blocking content outright enables social media to fight the spreading of misinformation. Otherwise, an essential way must be taken by social media users to address fake news is by reporting misinformation (Huzaifa, 2023). This action must be an obligation as a user if they have found such spreading news to be harmful and impacting negatively. Moreover, the best way to achieve this matter is when users encounter certain disinformation, the most thing they must do is stop spreading the information. Similarly, any information that has been received on the Internet must be verified to ensure it is trustworthy. Users must double-check to ensure the information is from trusted sources (Jowore & Turpin, 2022).

## Discussion

The results focus on the ethical implications of social media, particularly regarding the spread of false information, disinformation campaigns, and misinformation. It emphasizes the impact of such actions on public discourse, democracy, and individual behaviour. Additionally, it explores the ethical responsibilities of both social media companies and users in combating disinformation. From our findings, there are several key points that should be highlighted. Firstly, we acknowledge that social media has become a primary source of news-based information for many people, shaping their opinions and actions. However, the abundance of information sources online has made it challenging to distinguish between factual content, half-truths, and lies. This leads to the spread of false information by individuals who genuinely believe it to be accurate, without checking the source. Lack of ethics and responsibility in these actions has significant consequences on how others perceive and act upon the information. Furthermore, from our findings, the concept of disinformation is knowingly spreading false information with the intention to deceive or present incorrect information as fact. It asserts that the spread of false information and disinformation hampers our ability to address important issues such as climate change, democracy, and public health. It can be argued that without ethics and a sense of responsibility, these issues worsen. Furthermore, it delves into the meaning of ethics and its relevance in social settings. Ethics is described as the study of standards of conduct that distinguish between right and wrong, investigating the intellectual justifications for moral judgments. It encompasses how people interact with one another, nature, and concepts such as freedom, responsibility, and justice.

Continuing on, our findings highlight the detrimental effects of fake news and disinformation, emphasizing their impact on ethics and responsibility. It establishes the significance of the spread of fake news and disinformation as a global concern and underscores the need to examine the ethical implications of these phenomena. Our findings further acknowledge that ethics is a topic covered by various academic fields, such as philosophy, theology, law, psychology, and sociology. Ethical concepts can be applied as a process, approach, or way of thinking to analyse complex issues and dilemmas, including those related to social media. We also must discuss the impact of fake news, disinformation campaigns, and misinformation on social media platforms which can have a huge impact on how we perceive the media social platform ethically and how to improve on our decision making of what to believe and what not to believe. It is emphasized that false information can spread quickly, particularly when it aligns with the audience's pre-existing beliefs. Users play a significant role in the spread of false information, sometimes knowingly, but often due to fear of not spreading potentially accurate information or simply because they agree with the content. It is argued that individuals should base their decisions on the likely outcomes, considering the pros and cons for all parties involved. It calls for social media users to fact-check information before acting on it, highlighting the responsibility of users to combat the negative effects of false information. Next, we also explore the impact of false information on public discourse and democracy. It suggests that the media, including social media, plays a crucial role in spreading information and influencing individuals' thoughts and behaviours. It is argued that a less ethical society may struggle to differentiate between good and bad thoughts, speech, and behaviour, leading to less accurate decision-making. It emphasizes that false information can gradually affect people's minds, leading to negative actions and conflict resolution methods. To combat communities with less ethical behaviours that spread false and fake information referring from previous studies (Lewandowsky & Linden, 2021) such as inoculation against conspiracy theories about vaccines where researchers from previous studies conducted an experiment on people's attitudes towards vaccinations, demonstrating the effectiveness of inoculation which is one good example that false information and fake news can be reduced and prevented.

Lastly, we must address the ethical responsibilities of social media companies and users in combating disinformation so that companies and organisations are wary of the content that was disseminated, as well as the news and information they share on the internet and social media platforms and are not unambiguous. Social media companies are urged to take responsibility for the content published on their platforms and implement strategies to detect and prevent the spread of false information. To have a fruitful result, from our findings it is suggested that companies and organisations must adopt strategies such as improvements in algorithms, the introduction of fake news detection methods, and the implementation of policies to limit the spread of false information. The user is responsible for reporting the disinformation and is encouraged to stop spreading disinformation as well as verify information from trusted sources before sharing.

## **Conclusion**

Ethics and responsibility are important for us when spreading news and information. Disinformation prevention is an increasing and continuing challenge in society and democracy. In this regard, we should be responsible and ethical if we want to spread some news and information. We should check the source of the news first to ensure it is not disinformation before spreading it to other people. In the world today, there is considerable experimentation taking place with online news platforms. Apps and services that can help news organisations identify encouragement to violence and hate speech are currently being tested. The

development of new models and tactics is on the rise, which is positive for the future of online media consumption. When someone receives news, the first things they should consider are where the news is coming from, why it is being spread, and how it will affect the general public. Overall, social media is an important telecommunication tool in today's era. Globally, the use of social media is rising, with low- and middle-income nations experiencing a rapid increase in usage. Social media alters how information is shared, increasing the population's exposure to false information, such as fake news. The technology used today is not wrong, but the community is frequently more affected by the way that news and information are spread through social media. This is due to the fact that users of social media have alternate ways to access news and information that has previously been or is currently being filtered on social media. The use of social media is growing in popularity in society, and some unknown negative effects are beginning to appear. The social, economic, and political implications of the impact will all be felt. Therefore, in order to avoid being drawn into something negative, we should use social media responsibly and maintain moral principles. We need to create our own approach to identify the validity of this information. We need to be an agent of prevention against this fake news. If we receive any news, we are advised to first examine the credibility of the publisher. This shows that we are ethical users responsible for disseminating information. An article that is popular among social media users is not necessarily accurate in its content.

### Acknowledgements

First of all, we would like to thank ALLAH S.W.T and HIS Messenger, Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. It is because of HIS blessing. We are grateful because we managed to complete this journal article. We would like to thank our lecturer, Madam Salliza Binti Md Radzi, for providing helpful information and comments for this writing. Thank you for conducting and giving invaluable guidance on how to write the journal article. We also want to give our appreciation to both of our parents and family members who had motivated us to work harder and not give up and give us moral support to finish this writing. Last but not the least, this journal article cannot be complete without the effort and co-operation from our group members. Our thanks and appreciation are also extended to those who directly and indirectly helped us develop the assignment. Thank you all.

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