HSR London International Conference on Multidisciplinary Academic Research
(HSR-ICMAR) 2026
https://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/conference

FAKE INFORMATION IN DIGITAL MEDIA: JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

Jasmina Akhmedova
a student at the University of Journalism and Mass Communications of Uzbekistan
ORCID: 0009-0001-4478-2548
E-mail: a965880@gmail.com
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22303456

Abstract. This paper examines the key challenges of disseminating fake news and disinformation in digital media, as well as issues of journalistic professional and ethical responsibility. Factors contributing to the spread of inaccurate content include the high speed of digital exchange, audience interest in emotional and sensationalist materials, insufficient source verification, and the influence of algorithmic recommendations. Particular attention is paid to fact-checking and verification of information as key professional responsibilities of journalists. The paper also explores the potential application of the Potter Box model for ethical decision-making in situations involving the dissemination of unverified information. The need for a comprehensive approach combining technological tools, professional standards, and media ethics principles is substantiated.

Keywords: digital media, fake news, disinformation, journalism, media ethics, journalistic responsibility, fact-checking, verification, Potter Box.

Introduction

Digital transformation has significantly changed the processes of information production, distribution, and consumption. Social media, online platforms, and instant messaging apps enable the rapid dissemination of information to a wide audience. However, the high speed of content sharing simultaneously facilitates the spread of false and manipulative information.

C. Wardle and H. Derakhshan note the need to distinguish between various forms of information disorder, including false information and information disseminated with the intent to cause harm (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In the digital environment, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that false content may superficially conform to the hallmarks of a professional news report.

The goal of this thesis is to identify the key factors in the spread of fake information in digital media, to elucidate journalists' professional responsibility for the veracity of published information, and to demonstrate the application of the Potter Box model in ethical decision-making.

Main Body

The key factors in the spread of fake information include the high speed of digital sharing, the emotional appeal of sensational content, insufficient source verification skills, and the influence of algorithmic recommendation systems. A user can quickly spread a message without identifying its original source or verifying the veracity of the information it contains. A study by S. Vosoughi, D. Roy, and S. Aral found that false reports on Twitter in some cases spread faster and reached a wider audience than reliable information (Vosoughi et al., 2018). This confirms the need to strengthen professional verification mechanisms in digital journalism.

One of the most important responsibilities of a journalist is to verify information before publishing it. B. Kovach and T. Rosenstiel consider the pursuit of reliability as one of the fundamental principles of journalism (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021). In a competitive digital environment, speed should not be the basis for publishing unverified information.

Fact-checking involves identifying the primary source, assessing its reliability, comparing information with independent sources, verifying official documents and statistics, and establishing the

time and context of the news report's creation. Verifying photographs and videos is especially important, as previously published visual materials can be used in a new context, thereby misleading the audience. Professional verification of information is closely linked to the journalist's ethical choices. In a complex situation, it is necessary to consider not only the veracity of the report, but also the public interest, potential harm, the rights and dignity of people, and the journalist's responsibility to the audience.

In this context, the **Potter Box** model, developed by C. G. Christians et al., can be applied. It includes four interrelated elements:

Facts, values, ethical principles, and objects of loyalty (Christians et al., 2017). Using this model allows for structuring the decision-making process.

For example, if a journalist receives a widely shared message on social media without official confirmation, publishing it without verification may ensure promptness, but it also increases the risk of further dissemination of false information. According to Potter Box, a journalist must first establish the facts, define professional values, correlate the situation with ethical principles, and assess their responsibility to the audience and society. As a result, the reliability of the information should be prioritized, even if this requires not publishing immediately.

Results

The analysis allows us to identify three interrelated levels of countering fake information:

1. Technological level – use of digital verification tools, analysis of algorithmic content distribution, and detection of visual manipulation.

2. Professional level – verification of sources, fact-checking, establishing context, and adherence to journalistic standards.

3. Ethical level – assessment of public interest, potential harm, and the journalist's responsibility for the consequences of publication.

Thus, technical tools alone do not effectively counter disinformation. Their effectiveness depends on the journalist's professional competence, critical thinking, and ability to make informed ethical decisions.

Conclusion

The spread of fake news and disinformation is a significant challenge facing modern digital journalism. The rapid speed of content distribution, algorithmic recommendations, and the emotional appeal of individual messages increase the risk of unreliable information entering the information space.

Under these conditions, journalistic responsibility must be based on mandatory verification of information, access to primary and independent sources, verification of visual content, and the prevention of presenting unconfirmed data as established facts.

Fact-checking should be viewed not only as a technical procedure but also as an expression of professional ethics. The Potter Box model allows for systematization of ethical analysis and more informed decision-making in situations where speed conflicts with the demands of accuracy. Consequently, effectively countering fake news requires a comprehensive combination of digital technologies, professional standards, information literacy, and journalistic ethics.

References:

1. Christians, C. G., Fackler, M., Richardson, K. B., Kreshel, P. J., & Woods, R. H., Jr. (2017). Media ethics: Cases and moral reasoning (10th ed.). Routledge.
2. Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2021). The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect (4th ed.). Crown.

3. Lazer, D. M. J., Baum, M. A., Benkler, Y., et al. (2018). The science of fake news. Science, 359(6380), 1094–1096.
4. Tandoc, E. C., Jr., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2018). Defining “fake news”: A typology of scholarly definitions. Digital Journalism, 6(2), 137–153.
5. UNESCO. (2021). Journalism, “fake news” & disinformation: Handbook for journalism education and training. UNESCO.
6. Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. Science, 359(6380), 1146–1151.
7. Ward, S. J. A. (2015). The invention of journalism ethics: The path to objectivity and beyond (2nd ed.). McGill-Queen’s University Press.
8. Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking. Council of Europe.