

Ethical Aspects of Content Creation

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In the digital age, technology is integral to daily life, significantly impacting areas such as art, entertainment, healthcare and education. This paper explores the ethical aspects of digital content creation, focusing on the responsibilities of creators in shaping public opinion and behaviour. Key issues addressed include misinformation, digital harassment, privacy breaches, and the commercialisation of personal experiences. By reviewing existing literature and emphasising the importance of ethical digital practices, this study aims to contribute to a more responsible and ethical digital landscape. The main research question investigates whether ethical principles should guide digital content creation and dissemination.

Keywords: digital ethics, content creation, misinformation, deepfake, responsible practices

INTRODUCTION

Today, technology dominates almost every aspect of life and is no longer considered a luxury. It has become a normal part of everyday life. In addition to their essential functions in areas such as healthcare, manufacturing and education, they are becoming increasingly important in the arts and entertainment.

Technology is a set of learning, abilities and techniques that let people optimise the materials and virtual environments in which they live. It is a process that aims to provide solutions to people's needs (Podlipniak 2021: 16–27). To live in the present moment is to be in a technical vortex, where many things are computerised and robotised. Technology is an important aspect of a creative society where the life of every human being is a core value (Kačerauskas 2014).

In an era defined by rapid technological improvements and the ubiquitous presence of automated media, the ethical dimensions of content creation have become a subject of critical importance. Ethics is a major branch of philosophy which involves a systematic, critical and informed assessment of how and why we ought to behave. The proliferation of content generated by users, the rise of social media influencers, and the increasing reliance on digital platforms for information dissemination raise significant ethical questions about authenticity, accountability and the societal impact of digital content. Digital content has the power to inform, persuade, and even manipulate audiences. The ethical implications of this power are profound, particularly when considering issues such as misinformation, digital harassment,

privacy breaches, and the commodification of personal experiences. Addressing these ethical concerns is crucial not only for safeguarding public trust but also for fostering a digital environment that promotes truthfulness, respect and inclusivity. This paper explores these ethical aspects, emphasising the need for a nuanced understanding of the responsibilities borne by content creators in shaping public discourse and influencing individual behaviours.

There is a great amount of research that addresses digital ethics issues, in particular misinformation, privacy concerns and online harassment. These areas are widely studied in the contexts of sociology, communication, law, and computer science. While digital ethics issues are well recognised and actively researched, their complexity and the rapidly changing technological environment mean that they remain relevant and require constant attention and adaptation.

The main **issue** of this paper is the ethical principles of creating and distributing digital content and its transparency.

The **objectives** of this paper are the following:

1. To review the existing relevant scholar literature.
2. To highlight the importance of digital ethics and the impact on society of unethical content creation in the digital space, based on scholarly sources.
3. To summarise existing research to contribute to a more responsible and ethical digital landscape.

The **object** of this research is the ethical principles and frameworks applicable to digital content creation. By investigating these principles, the paper seeks to provide a base of ethical content creation concept that could be adaptable to various digital platforms and content types.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ETHICS

Digital technologies, which include mobile apps, internet and social media, became integral to everyday life for a lot of people worldwide. As of January 2023, there were 5.17 billion people who actively use internet, accounting for 59% of the entire human population (Statista 2024). Social media lets users connect directly with an online audience, which is a mighty instrument for communication. However, using social media also raises ethical and legal issues (Schoenbrunner et al. 2019: 118–125).

As people spend more time online, companies have integrated social media into their marketing strategies (Stephen 2016: 17–21). In terms of marketing costs, digital and social media marketing is a relatively low-cost method for businesses to achieve their goals (Ajina 2019: 1512–1527). Public services and political campaigns are also promoted using these technologies (Grover et al. 2019: 438–460). Despite many advantages of social media, it also poses a number of ethical, legal and professional challenges, which encompass transparency, authenticity and privacy, reflecting the need for heightened ethical awareness among communication professionals (Cheng et al. 2024: 114–129; Sahebi et al. 2022: 70–90). The ethical implications of content creation practices must be carefully considered to uphold fundamental rights such as privacy and autonomy (Veretilnykova et al. 2021: 128–140). The main concerns are maintaining professionalism, protecting confidentiality, and keeping professional and personal boundaries separate (Schoenbrunner et al. 2019: 118–125; Buijsman 2024: 33–42). To avoid the initial challenges of unethical content at least partially, and to create social media content that is ethical and professional, it is suggested to follow a framework (Figure) based on Diamond (2020).

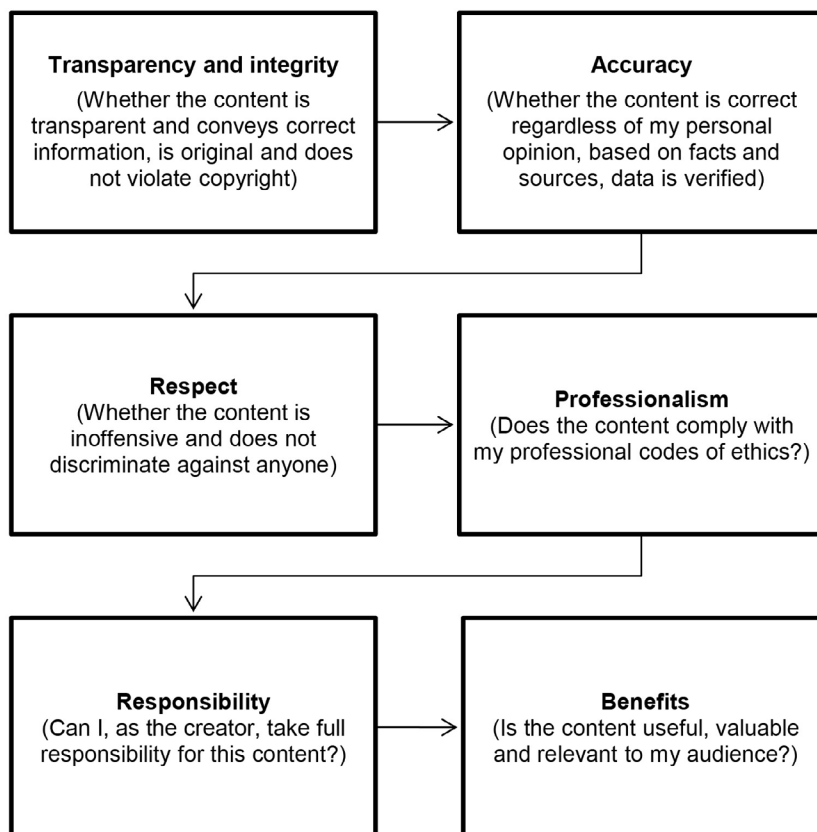


Figure. A framework for creating ethical social media content. Source: created by the author based on Diamond (2020)

Transparency is a core aspect of ethical content. A clear and open communication about existing affiliations, sponsorships and biases helps build trust with our audience. It is important to ensure that the content we publish is accurate, credible and factual, and that the sources and data we use are thoroughly verified. Respect for audiences, clients and stakeholders, as well as their dignity, privacy, and their cultural, social and legal norms, has a powerful influence on the opportunities for partnerships and the communities we build. Any harmful, offensive, or discriminatory content should be avoided (Sahebi et al. 2022: 70–90). The inherent dignity of all human beings forms the core of our discussion, emphasising the need for an inclusive approach that respects and values every individual's contribution. The cosmopolitan tradition highlights the equal worth of all individuals and their entitlement to justice and dignity, which should guide our approach to ethical content creation (Nussbaum 2021; Veretilnykova et al. 2021: 128–140). Similarly, the intellectual property rights of others must not be forgotten, and their names must be properly and clearly indicated when using their content. It is important to maintain the highest standards of quality and professionalism in content and practice and to correct any errors or inaccuracies in a timely manner and in a publicly visible way. Users

of social media platforms should take responsibility for the content they provide. It is important that the content is valuable, relevant and useful to the audience. The desire to create and disseminate content that contributes to the public good and social welfare is highly valued. Ethical content creation is not a rigid set of rules, but an ongoing dialogue. Respecting diverse perspectives and prioritising fairness can help shape a digital landscape that educates, inspires, promotes diversity, balance, and the impartial dissemination of information (Elahi et al. 2022: 103–114). In considering the ethical framework within which we operate, it is imperative to adhere to universal principles that ensure justice and fairness for all individuals involved. This aligns with Kant's categorical imperative which urges us to 'act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law' (Kant 1998).

Detecting and stopping the spread of misinformation online is a key objective of many participants in the global information ecosystem. Media manipulation or synthesising using AI techniques is increasingly being detected using programmatic tools. While synthetic media can serve satirical and artistic purposes, detection tools help evaluate the credibility and potential harm of content (Leibowicz et al. 2021: 736–744; Sahebi et al. 2022: 70–90). Applied ethics in AI should go beyond merely describing dilemmas and applying existing moral theories; instead, it should systematise practical solutions through a broad understanding of moral philosophy, accounting for the practical needs of real-world AI development (Floridi et al. 2016: 1–4).

FAKE NEWS

Emerging technologies frequently present social and ethical challenges, many of which are unforeseen (Luria et al. 2022: 1–12). The spread of fake news illustrates these challenges vividly. There are many types of fake news, including those that damage reputations with misleading or false information, or those that earn money over various ways of advertising through click-bait (Alvarez 2017). The internet, especially social media, facilitates the rapid dissemination of such information. Fake news continues to be a concern for many organisations and professionals, including journalists, politicians, and financial institutions (Richter 2019).

Economically, fake news is inexpensive to produce and disseminate due to the low cost of sharing content with millions of people (Nussbaum 1999: 163–201). Advances in technology, particularly AI, are expected to make the development and dissemination of fake news even cheaper and faster, exemplified by deepfakes, which are AI-modified videos. Unethical information behaviour is not limited to news but extends to politics, science, economics, and the financial industry. When misleading information about politics is provided, it can reduce citizen participation in democratic processes and contribute to election fraud (Boté-Vericad 2020: 567–578). Immanuel Kant's emphasis on the importance of truthfulness and sincerity in communication is relevant here, as he argued that 'lying, or a deliberate untruth, is a crime of man against his own person and a dishonor of humanity' (Kant 1998).

The way how fake news is spreading has significant social meaning, influencing economics, politics, culture, and public welfare more than we might realise. Intention and organising often drive the dissemination of fake news, employing strategies like hoaxes, trolling and propaganda (Leetaru 2019). The impact of fake news is costly and difficult to mitigate once it has been spread (Newman et al. 2018).

Information professionals, guided by a code of conduct, play a crucial role in training users in information literacy and curating reliable content. Training in information literacy provides tools for source evaluation and selection, offering a solution that ethics alone cannot (Boté-Vericad 2020; Houtman, Wall 2019).

The ease of producing and spreading fake news means that anyone with harmful intent can significantly influence users' behaviour, impacting various sectors, including economics and science. Information professionals must engage users to reinforce information literacy, equipping them with the tools to discern misinformation (Boté-Vericad 2020: 567–578; Sahebi et al. 2022: 70–90). Information literacy alone is insufficient to combat fake news – technological interventions are also necessary (Leetaru 2019).

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Transparency has become essential for users of technology and online consumers in the era of emerging technologies. Despite this, transparency is not clearly defined in different research domains, nor are there clear guidelines for marketers and designers (Wang et al. 2023: 1–12). Researchers emphasise the importance of transparency for protecting user privacy and fostering trustworthiness, integrity, and good conduct in the commercial world (DiStaso et al. 2012: 511–514; Buijsman 2024: 33–42).

Central to the discourse on AI ethics is ChatGPT, a generative AI model that has garnered a widespread attention for its ability to generate content in natural language. ChatGPT's opacity and reliance on unverified sources pose significant ethical challenges (Cheng et al. 2024: 114–129). People may search for information from potentially unreliable sources because of a lack of transparency in online communications (Berger et al. 2020: 1141). While digital technologies offer round-the-clock accessibility and convenience, they can also influence attitudes and behaviours without making users aware of potential risks, thereby hindering informed decision-making (Harris et al. 2017: 153–401; Franke 2022: 92–98).

Behaviour-steering or persuasive technologies can threaten individual freedom and rights because influencers and designers are the ones who influence users' behaviours and not democratically elected representatives (Pettersen et al. 2006). Online marketing, persuasive technology and immersive technology can all be used to influence online behaviour and promote for-profit outcomes such as gambling or shopping online, which may lead to addiction-like behaviours (Wang et al. 2023: 1–12). Technology can manipulate people into inaction, action, or change their ideology and approaches when it manipulates their behaviour based on the intentions of others (Pettersen et al. 2006; Gram-Hansen 2021: 385–397).

Since there is no consensus and best practices are not implemented, transparency remains a utopian conception rather than a reality. It requires stronger regulatory frameworks for user protection as well as more open conversation about technology design aspects which are hidden in order to achieve transparency in convincing technology as well as online marketing and immersive technology. A better user experience and industry sustainability will result from this approach, resulting in better online information production and consumption. To improve transparency, a humanist, personalised approach or the visualisation of information are possible solutions (Wang et al. 2023: 1–12; Sahebi et al. 2022: 70–90).

INTERNET – PUBLIC SPACE?

Even though the internet is perceived widely as a public space, some parts of it might be regarded as private by users. Internet researchers face the challenge of finding a way to conduct research on people who use the internet both in their homes and in public settings like open discussion forums (British Psychological Society 2013). As Barnes explains, 'sitting at home

alone typing on a computer may feel like a private exchange. However, once private information is posted on the internet, it becomes available for others to read. We have no control over who can read our seemingly private words' (Barnes 2006: 1–10). This misunderstanding may arise from the way some websites are designed and how users sign up for them, suggesting a level of anonymity that does not really exist (Hull 2015: 89–101).

For digital ethics, defining what is public and private is essential. There is disagreement on this terminology, and there is more of a spectrum than a sharp division between private and public that sharing nearly any kind of content online qualifies as public activity and is therefore governed by the same moral standards as other public activities (Gosling et al. 2015: 877–902). This opinion is consistent with the custom that says it is not necessary to get permission or advance notification from people being observed in public places (Roberts 2015: 314–325). Others disagree, suggesting that acceptance of such observation should be determined by social norms and practices. They contend that people who use the internet might expect privacy and not expect their behaviour to be subject to research (Gosling et al. 2015: 877–902).

DEEFAKE TECHNOLOGY

Gamification is widely used in technologies to encourage user adoption and sustained use, potentially promoting positive behaviour changes, especially in young people's mental health (Brown et al. 2016: e39). However, some ethical issues arise, for example, the claim that gamification undermines human flourishing and might have a 'morally corrosive' effect on character (Seizov et al. 2019: 149–173). Overreliance on technology for tasks, like using 'Siri' for reminders, may weaken mental abilities and sensitivities.

Transparency on the possible risks of interacting with persuasive robots is another lacking aspect of human–robot interaction. Unanswered concerns include whether these robots will be useful in the long run, how to avoid addiction, and whether businesses would put morality ahead of immediate profits (Sandoval 2019: 526–527).

One of the most noteworthy developments in media synthesis that have been generated by the digital age is deepfakes. Deepfakes are an advanced type of synthetic media that create an extremely deceptive visual and audible content by slowly replacing one person's appearance with another using digital technology. Contrary to conventional techniques for manipulating content, deepfakes leverage advanced machine learning and artificial intelligence (Jain et al. 2024: 49–58). The ethical regulation of AI involves three levels: individual autonomy, social morality, and legal constraints. A significant concern is that powerful corporations may influence laws to favour their interests over the common good. This highlights the complex interplay between diverse levels of ethical regulation and the need for universal standards in AI ethics (Nemitz 2018: 1–13).

Considering their potential misuse, deepfakes raise serious moral and social issues. They have been used to create illicit content, including profiteering from children, forced intimate imagery without consent, as well as to spread misinformation, hoaxes, and financial fraud. The dissemination of disinformation via deepfakes, which spread misinformation, are a serious danger to democratic values.

Because of eroding trust, manipulating public opinion, and impeding informed decision-making processes (Jain et al. 2024: 49–58), politicians face vast amounts of challenges regarding deepfakes and synthetic media. This technology presents clear concerns as it becomes more realistic, scalable and customizable (Bateman 2020). The necessity to embed ethical

frameworks within AI technology arises from the recognition that non-technical governance methods often fall short in ensuring morally desirable AI outcomes (Floridi et al. 2016: 1–4).

A revolutionary era in synthetic media is being entered by the emergence of deepfake technology, which offers both enormous opportunities and difficult barriers (Jain et al. 2024: 49–58). It is very important to follow principles of transparency and responsibility which reflect Aristotle's belief that 'the virtue of a person is the state of character which makes him good, and which makes him do his work well' (Aristotle 1908). Ensuring that AI technologies are used responsibly and transparently is crucial for maintaining ethical standards. The way AI works needs to be checked for not just how well it does its job, but also if it follows moral rules. It is important to add ethical guidelines to AI to make sure it respects people's basic rights, like privacy (Nemitz 2018: 1–13).

CONCLUSIONS

The digital era has brought remarkable advances in technology, but the proliferation of digital technologies and the emergence of new forms of disinformation and synthetic media pose many challenges. Widespread digital technologies have changed the way of people communication and information consumption. With masses of active users all around the world, social media has become an integral part of everyday life, facilitating marketing, public services, and political action. As technology advances, ethical issues which are associated with its use do too.

Transparency in technology and digital marketing is essential to build user trust and reduce potential harm. Digital technologies improve access to information and create a range of personalised services, but they also pose significant risks to consumer privacy and trust. The lack of consensus on what constitutes transparency in different areas highlights the need for stronger regulatory frameworks and an open debate on the hidden aspects of technological development.

Deepfakes also stand out as a significant innovation in media fusion, which has raised significant ethical and public concerns about fraudulent content or even a creation for potential abuse. The proliferation of fake news and deepfake technology underlines the importance of strong ethical frameworks and transparent practices in digital communication. Information professionals have a significant role to play in developing information literacy and trustworthiness, providing users with the tools to identify misinformation and navigate responsibly in the digital space.

As technology continues to evolve, it is essential to balance innovation with ethical considerations, ensuring that user protection, transparency and trust remain paramount. Interdisciplinary cooperation and ongoing research are essential to address the challenges and shape ethical norms. Prioritising transparency and accountability can create a digital ecosystem that promotes ethical behaviour, protects individual rights and enhances societal well-being in the digital age.

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Etiniai turinio kūrimo aspektai

Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama technologijų įtaka šiuolaikiniam gyvenimui, pabrėžiant jų poveikį įvairiems sektoriams, įskaitant sveikatos priežiūrą, gamybą, švietimą, meną ir pramogas. Straipsnyje akcentuojami etiniai skaitmeninio turinio kūrimo aspektai, ypač iššūkiai, kylantys dėl dezinformacijos, privatumo pažeidimų ir asmeninės patirties komercializavimo. Jame pabrėžiama skaidrumo, autentiškumo ir atskaitomybės skaitmeninėje žiniasklaidoje būtinybė, siekiant stiprinti visuomenės pasitikėjimą. Straipsnyje taip pat aptariamos etinės problemos, susijusios su socialinės žiniasklaidos naudojimu, netikrų naujienų plitimu ir išmaniojo vaizdo ir garso klastojimo (*deepfake*) pasekmėmis. Raginama sukurti tvirtesnes reguliavimo sistemas ir tarpdisciplininį bendradarbiavimą, kad būtų galima spręsti šiuos etinius iššūkius ir skatinti atsakingą skaitmeninį krašto-vaizdį.

Raktažodžiai: skaitmeninė etika, turinio kūrimas, dezinformacija, išmanusis vaizdo ir garso klastojimas (*deepfake*), atskaitomybė