

The Constant Pursuit of Truth in the Era of Lies

In a single “click,” we are able to send a post to dozens of our friends, but should we bother to fact-check whether the information we share is accurate or not? Social media platforms have empowered us with the ability to spread our voice to a global audience. But this power comes with a risk: the diffusion of false information at an unprecedented speed, blurring the boundaries of truth and lies. Fact-checking refers to the act of verifying the truthfulness of statements. Misinformation and disinformation are false claims that obscure our view of reality. This essay argues that individuals do have an ethical obligation to fact-check before sharing information, because failing to do so will undermine their own intellectual integrity while contributing to the widespread of societal harms and distorting the future development of knowledge. Despite having good intentions, the actual and possible consequences of careless sharing are too serious to ignore. Even if our understanding of truth might evolve over time, we must act responsibly in the moral context of our time.

When individuals share content online, they often do so with the belief that what they are sharing is true. Yet sharing without verifying is much like walking blindfolded near a dangerous cliff; it’s profoundly irresponsible—not only towards others but also towards one’s own perception of reality. Information one shares in public is considered to be a form of self-expression and a reflection of one’s judgment. When that information proves to be false, it can diminish that person’s credibility and make them appear gullible in the eyes of others. In this sense, fact-

checking becomes not only a way to protect others but also a way to defend our own intellectual reputation in cyberspace. The consequences of uncritical sharing extend far beyond personal reputation; they directly influence the very structure of our thought. Social media algorithms are designed to feed users content that aligns with their past engagement; thus, when someone shares false information, the system would respond by providing this user even more of the same. Over time, this mechanism undermines critical thinking by filtering out opposing viewpoints (many of which may contain the truth). Gradually, it creates a feedback loop in which the user is increasingly surrounded by content that confirms their preexisting biases and misconceptions. In such an echo chamber, the only sound one could hear is one's own voice. Socrates once declared that "the unexamined life is not worth living." In our digital age, we might say that unexamined sharing is just as dangerous. Constantly accepting and reposting information without reflection turns people from active thinkers into passive transmitters. In this way, fact-checking becomes not only an ethical duty but a practice of intellectual self-respect; instead of being stuck in the misinformation prison we unknowingly construct around ourselves, it allows us to think clearly and remain firmly grounded in truth.

In this digital age, the unchecked spread of misinformation is threatening not only individuals but entire societies as a whole. The detrimental effects include but are not limited to social division, public panic, and even tangible physical harm. A recent example of this happened during Covid-19, where conspiracy theories and baseless rumors circulating on social media have resulted in numerous real-world prejudices,

discrimination, and even hate crimes towards the Chinese community. The lasting physical and mental trauma it caused continues to exist even after the pandemic. Psychologically, the human brain tends to be more drawn to violent, extreme, and emotional content; unsurprisingly, the majority of prevailing misinformation fits tightly in this pattern. The great amount of false information rapidly drowns out the true ones, making the process of correcting them not only difficult but increasingly unlikely. As we approach the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI), problems that arise due to the spread of “fake news” go beyond their immediate effect; we must confront the deeper implication of how misinformation shapes the digital ecosystem (dataset) in which AI learns and trains itself. Much like a newborn toddler imitating their surroundings, AI is designed to imitate the patterns they observe and derive their knowledge from online platforms such as social media. But what happens when the contents the AI is absorbing are polluted with sexism, racism, conspiracy theories, and other false information? How can we expect it to provide us with a fair representation of the world when the very foundation it is built upon is flawed? This created a paradox: many people nowadays sincerely trust AI, for they view it as the “wisest being that learns all human knowledge”; some more extreme individuals even treat its words as divine oracles and worship it like a god, but what if, after being contaminated by false information, this so-called god turns into a devil?

A notable objection to the view of meticulous fact checking is derived from Hegel’s dialectical philosophy of history. The very act of verifying whether a piece of information is “true” rests on the assumption that “truth” is stable, fixed, and eternal.

However, in Hegel's view, knowledge is in a state of constant evolution; each generation challenges, synthesizes, and refines the truths held by the one before. In other words, what we consider true today might be condemned in the future, just as how we are rejecting ideas from the past that once seemed reasonable. In this sense, if moral and ethical standards are constantly changing, wouldn't it seem pointless, or even a bit arrogant, to insist that people have an obligation to share the so-called "truth"? After all, the only thing that doesn't change is change itself. While this view raises a serious philosophical challenge, it does not excuse us from our moral responsibility in the present. Hegel's philosophy does not insinuate that "truth" is meaningless; the progress of human understanding develops only through the contradiction, correction, and continuous pursuit of ideas, and the very foundation of this process depends on people striving earnestly for what they currently believe to be true. Ethical responsibility, therefore, is not about achieving perfection with absolute certainty. Instead, it's about engaging with the world conscientiously and doing our best with the knowledge available to us at this particular moment—for only by doing so can we contribute to the improvement of history. Even if today's truths are incomplete, the obligation to verify what we share remains a crucial part of ethical communication.

In conclusion, by examining the potential risks to both one's reputation and cognitive ability caused by the uncritical sharing of misinformation, the broader societal and technological hazards of false information, and the fluid nature of truth through Hegelian philosophy, this essay argues that individuals do have an ethical

obligation to fact-check before sharing content online. This obligation does not require us to achieve perfect truth, but it motivates us to act responsibly within the context of our time. In an era where unchecked information travels faster than ever, let ethical sharing be one of the clearest ways we protect ourselves, others, and the future of public knowledge.

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