



Ethical Issues In TikTok YouTube And Digital Political Communication

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Abstract : TikTok and YouTube are stages for political participation, and organisations of visibility bring ethical problems related to truth, autonomy, accountability and equal participation to light. This paper studies the application of these responsibilities to digital political communication. It only conducts a qualitative comparison of published studies, platform policy statements and institutional documents, without new research on the audience. Deontology, consequentialism and the concept of public responsibility are used to analyze. The European Commission's December 2024 proceedings on TikTok and electoral risks in Romania and YouTube's June 2023 revision of its policy on misinformation about the past United States presidential election are two cases of conflicting obligations. Therefore, only the deletion of content is insufficient for ethical governance. optimise the recommendation mechanism of the platform, disclose political influence, protect users from manipulation, and build an independent review system. At the same time, the intervention should not equate legitimate criticism of the political system with false information. Proportionate sanctions will be imposed on the platform, political party and content creator according to the extent of their control. In short, the main content of this paper is that responsible political communication should be both truthful and verifiable.

IndexTerms - Media ethics; TikTok; YouTube; political communication; platform accountability; misinformation

I. INTRODUCTION

Political Communication on TikTok and YouTube combines information, entertainment, persuasion and personal expression. A speech can be placed next to a comedy sketch, and a creator can discuss public policy in an informal account of daily life. These forms can promote popular participation in politics. Citizens who do not follow traditional news often learn about public affairs through familiar figures, and those far from established media organisations can communicate directly with the public. These options are relevant because the concept of ethics does not restrict participation to professional journalists; participation itself can be considered a good.

However, increased participation does not automatically mean greater information. The audience will judge the truth of the content and may not know who financed, edited or distributed it. A recommendation can be made without knowing the person's interests. A humorous short film may have an actual denunciation, and commendable behaviour in service of virtue could be motivated by political motives. The above cases are problems of morality: people need to make political decisions in situations where they do not know the truth.

How to balance freedom of speech with the need to prevent misinformation and promote a well-informed public sphere on TikTok and YouTube? Ethics are not only about how people behave but also about social responsibility. Platforms use exposure, recommendations and enforcement to exercise influence; however, political actors and creators are still responsible for their own claims and conduct. Discuss the ethical norms and investigate the two reported cases for practical safeguards. Neither platform decides on the election results, nor will exposure to them change one's political opinion.

II. Approach and Scope

Based on the selected academic research, official platform announcements and institutional publications provide the qualitative ethical basis for this paper. The sources selected are related to recommendation systems, regulation of political content, and the two cases in study. It is an interpretation and comparative study, not a systematic review of the literature. No interviews, surveys, experiments or original platform data were collected. The aim is to find the source of responsibility and conflicting values; it does not determine the spread of false information or alter people's voting will.

The cases have various ethical conflicts. TikTok's Romanian election case relates to the lack of preventative measures and the connection between written rules and possible manipulation. YouTube's policy modification will affect the protection of discussion and response to demonstrably false electoral claims. Official documents report which institutions or companies announced, but not how effectively the policies worked. Therefore, platform statements are considered the records of the relevant parties. Historical decisions are treated as discrete events and not assumed to apply to all current policies.

III. Ethical Framework

Deontology is the idea that some actions are right or wrong in themselves, irrespective of the consequences (Alexander & Moore, 2024). At this time, the relevant duties are to refrain from intentional deception, treat the people as capable political decision-makers, and provide a reasonable procedure for restricting expression. A campaign cannot be cited as a reason for harm to an opponent if it is to benefit society. Similarly, the platform should not conceal serious enforcement irregularities out of fear of damage to its reputation. These are examples of the application of a duty-based approach, and not claims that all deontological theories put forward the same platform policy.

Consequentialism is based on the results of behaviour, and utilitarianism is a representative kind of this idea (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2023). Thus, the problem of this paper is whether the intervention is likely to reduce harm and retain valuable political participation. Removal of fabricated voting instructions may prevent disenfranchisement. Omission of open-ended humour may lead to censorship and restrict freedom of speech. Therefore, there may be problems of illegal law enforcement, an unequal distribution of burdens and lost opportunities for expression, and harm caused by false information. Engagement or revenue alone are not appropriate measures of public welfare.

A model of public-service responsibility creates an institutional problem: What should organisations responsible for political communication give back to society? UNESCO (2023) links platform governance to freedom of expression, access to information, and the responsibilities of all parties. Therefore, this paper believes that the platform needs to be able to explain and justify its decisions. They are not regarded as neutral carriers or replacements for the elected bodies. They are responsible for failing to regulate communication and have been aware of the harm caused by such failure.

They may not be. A rule against falsehood may cause harm in the absence of actual damage, and according to a consequentialist school of thought, a less restrictive remedy would be chosen to avoid curbing free speech. Accountability will show us where the decision-makers have failed. Therefore, the above way will employ the necessary and procedural guarantees as safeguards to choose a reasonable option. The problem is not the content of the offence, but who will be harmed; what evidence supports the intervention; and whether a less restrictive response can address the risk.

IV. Ethical Problems in Digital Political Communication

4.1 Truthfulness and Context

Honesty is not the absence of fake videos. Editing can delete a qualification, captions may have misidentified an event, and an old recording may be displayed as recent. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) distinguish among misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, and separate false information from deliberate deception and harmful use of true information. The degree of the ethical violation varies; a negligent observer, an organised fraudster, and a privacy violator are motivated by different reasons and bear different levels of responsibility. A single label cannot present the different types of fake news.

Assume there is a short video of the politician speaking during the argument, and it ends before he says the contradictory words. They are true, but they do not achieve the desired result. Provide sufficient background information for the audience to grasp the purpose of this post. If the platform knows about the omission, then it will be responsible for the false statement and not blame the popularity of the politician. The same standard should be applied to the modification of a favourable political group. Consistency is required so that the exception to truthfulness is not used for manipulation.

Artificial content is thus lacking in authenticity. An obviously fictional animated work may be satire; a realistic imitation of a person cannot be verified to have occurred either. YouTube announced in November 2023 that disclosure of realistic altered or synthetic material will be added to its plan for responsible use of AI (YouTube, 2023b). Disclosure does not solve all the ethical problems. A labelled video will still frighten people and is thus harmful. Assessments should focus on the content and mode of presentation of the claim, possible misunderstandings and harm, and not blame the AI.

4.2 Recommendation and Political Visibility

It is recommended to not spread information one has not been informed about and allow people to learn of it independently. Excluding a video from recommendations and adding context are all different methods. A platform for disseminating information will likely be used more actively in the spread of such information than a service that only stores it. The platform will not process the content; only upon selection of this work will it be held liable. Users should be able to learn why they were recommended by the government and exercise their right to objection.

Research should be cautious about simplified claims of algorithmic radicalisation. Hosseinmardi et al. (2021) found that there was little evidence to support the idea that YouTube recommendations themselves drove the consumption of radical materials, and instead focused on user behaviour and other information-seeking patterns. Yesilada and Lewandowsky's (2022) research has shown that recommendation systems can be used for problematic content; however, their application has also been inconsistent and difficult to access for researchers. In combination, these studies have shown that recommendations do not lead to radicalisation or affect all users equally; therefore, such a claim cannot be made.

The ethical implication developed here is a duty of investigation under uncertainty. Platforms need to determine whether their distribution systems are giving more weight to false political information, and instead of requiring full-scale verification of altered votes, take no action. At the same time, the audit will also find false positives and their effect on minority interests. A non-controversial recommendation system may favour well-known people and thus fail to spread the legitimate protests. Therefore, responsible distribution requires proof of both harm from exposure and missed opportunities due to restrictive design.

4.3 Political Sponsorship and Audience Autonomy

Political influencers are in an awkward situation; their audience may believe that the videos are their own views despite receiving money. TikTok announced in September 2022 that its ban on political advertising included creators who were paid to create brand-promotional political materials (TikTok, 2022). The aim of this policy is to restrict; a written prohibition cannot

assure this will be realised. Identify indirect connections and distinguish between hidden promotion due to political reasons and genuine, independent support for a cause.

In a hypothetical arrangement, the campaign could pay an intermediary to arrange seemingly spontaneous creator endorsements. The main fault was to mislead the public about the origin and autonomy of the work. Deontological reasoning objects to the use of trust without informed consent. Consequentialist reasoning will consider the wider harm to society caused by the loss of free speech. Therefore, creators should disclose relevant material relationships and political organisations should keep records for verification. Do not equate the common person with the organizer solely because of differing political opinions.

Autonomy also relates to the use of personal data. Therefore, the targeted political education will not be designed to exploit people's latent deficiencies. A person watching a video about financial stress should be careful not to believe a fake political statement that takes advantage of this. It is an example and not the report of a particular campaign on either platform. The problem is that when people do not know why others have received different information or what has been promised, they are unable to object.

4.4 Expression and Equal Participation

Moderation of content can protect the right to participation of others by handling threats, targeted harassment and election disinformation. Restrictions may limit participation due to misclassification of ambiguous speech. Sarcasm, local references and reclaimed language are not recognised by the automatic system. Rules of good behaviour should take into account special circumstances and make exceptions; otherwise, the same technical regulations will not be feasible in all places. The person who made the legitimate criticism has been removed from office and will bear the political cost.

Therefore, a mechanical balance is not employed here. An unsupported factual claim of the same weight as corroborated evidence will not be disclosed to the public. Reliable sources should not automatically be favoured by official institutions; their actions are also subject to investigation. The platform should provide the basis for fact-finding and should not judge the tone or safety of the content. Public responsibility will be more effective if there is an open-access channel for appeal of the restriction and users are not required to accept an unexplained result.

V. Comparative Case Analysis

5.1 TikTok and Electoral Risks in Romania

On December 17, 2024, the European Commission formally opened proceedings on suspected failures by TikTok to assess and mitigate electoral risks under the Digital Services Act following Romania's presidential election on November 24. The announcement listed recommendation systems, possible coordinated manipulation, and political advertising or paid political content as the subjects of inspection (European Commission, 2024). The beginning of the trial was only an inquiry and not a finding of guilt. It also did not show that TikTok was responsible for any specific election results.

However, the case also shows a lack of preparation. If the platform does not offer paid political promotion, then one must find a way to conceal it. Therefore, one must take reasonable steps to identify the warning signs, protect the relevant evidence, and promptly investigate the credible reports. It is not necessary to ensure that no manipulation takes place. In terms of duties, if a strong public rule is not properly implemented, it will be difficult to ensure that the users are protected as expected.

Consequentialist evaluation determines that the preventive measure reduces the risk of deceptive coordination; thus, it is not deemed unlawful. A sudden increase in likes, comments and shares is not necessarily due to fraud. An act of enforcement that mistakes volunteer organisation for hidden control will restrict participation unfairly. Therefore, the suitable investigations should use several indicators, consider the relevant circumstances, and provide reasons for their selection. The countermeasures should target the dishonest organisation and the act of misleading, not infer fault from a person's association with the cause.

Accountability should be assessed at the level of the system and held responsible by individuals after an incident. A fake operation will release several small-scale messages to give the appearance of broad public support. Isolation of the videos will not reveal this connection. Network analysis can also be used to violate privacy. Therefore, this paper recommends limited, purpose-driven access to relevant evidence, independent supervision, and restrictions on the indiscriminate exposure of users. Electoral integrity should not be used to justify all-weather political surveillance.

5.2 YouTube and Its 2023 Policy Change

On June 2, 2023, YouTube announced that it would stop removing videos with false claims of widespread fraud, errors or glitches in the 2020 and other past United States presidential elections. Continuously expel those unable to participate in political discussion and ignorant of the harm they have caused. It also mentioned that the rules on false election information and interference with democracy would still apply (YouTube, 2023a). It was an addition to a particular policy clause and not permission for all kinds of election disinformation.

YouTube's reasons for not spreading the false information may be that such false information reduces the public's attention and discussion of these problems. There are still some problems in the study and critique of electoral institutions. However, the ethics assessment in this paper does not prohibit recommending or monetising the content. They are for different purposes. The platform will organise a discussion of the debunked allegation and will not spread the presentation that has repeatedly claimed to be true.

The case also shows a lack of harm limitation. False accusations of past elections may lead to a loss of trust; however, this paper does not attribute any specific damage or cause to violence as a result. According to the norms, in addition to risk analysis, public security should also be ensured. At the same time, there is a risk that the informant has lied about the electoral failure. The problem is lack of supporting evidence and misleading representation, not that the speech shows institutions favourably.

The YouTube case is not like the TikTok case; there was no suspected breach of duty under the previous rules. Both cases show that ethical governance does not need to be turned on or off. Romania's case shows a problem of hidden coordination, and YouTube's notification feature is used to deal with known falsehoods in political speech. In all these cases, the openness of the distribution, evidence and decision-making procedures offers more effective support for accountability than a general guarantee that the platform is democratic.

VI. Responsible Communication Practices

This paper puts forward a tiered system connecting interventions with the characteristics of the problems. Incorrect information on the place or time of voting should be corrected promptly and, if necessary, removed as it prevents participation. Unsupported historical allegations may need visible context, recommendation limitations or further investigation. True disagreements over policy should be allowed to occur. These divisions are relative and cannot be expressed in political terms. The platform will post cases showing how evidence, circumstances and severity affect a court's judgment.

Traceable political sponsorship with accountability for sponsors, intermediaries and creators should be introduced. Where paid political activities are prohibited, disclosure does not authorise such activities; it only helps to detect them. If a service presents political advertisements, then the source of the funds, the content of the message disseminated, and any prominent target groups should all be disclosed. Therefore, avoid inferring sensitive characteristics in the process of political targeting and allow users to limit personalised political recommendations. These controls should be simple to operate without professional technical knowledge.

Independent audits should investigate the reasons for non-compliance with the law, not just the number of deleted videos. Other problems are that the false materials are still being recommended, the corrections have not reached the affected viewers, and the appeals fail to address repeated errors. Protect the privacy of the subjects; otherwise, the research cannot proceed ethically. Tailor audits according to language and local political conditions. The policy that is effective for some people may not be appropriate for others; therefore, the public information office should be informed of this limitation.

Creators need to ensure the accuracy of their content, provide the original reference materials, and correct any errors promptly. Political organisations should also be responsible for outsourcing communication. The users are also to some extent responsible; however, they do not need to pay for off-the-shelf sponsorship or scarce distribution channels. Educational activities should enable the audience to distinguish between facts and opinions and gain knowledge from the original works. The design of the platform should provide accessible sources and clear contextual information for such habits to reduce the need for continuous attention by people.

VII. Limitations and Conclusion

Analysis of selected documents and studies cannot determine the actual frequency of the problems identified, compare the general performance of the platform, or explain specific voting results. The cases are from various places and at different times. They are used to present ethical dilemmas rather than to conduct controlled experiments. Next, we will explore how the reasons for sponsorship influence interpretation and which languages are most suitable for use in appeals to motivate participation.

TikTok and YouTube should be assessed through the opportunities they create and the responsibilities attached to their influence over communication. Ethical political communication should be truthful, in accordance with the wishes of the people, fair in practice, and restrained to maintain fairness. Therefore, the two kinds of responsibility for a data breach will not be involved. Platforms need to consider how political materials are distributed, who benefits from the promotion of such materials, and how the affected users can question these decisions. Political actors and creators are responsible for these choices in their work.

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