



# Public Responsibility in Digital Political Communication

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**Abstract :** It is hard to blame anyone responsible when the people who produce, disseminate and distribute a message manage various aspects of its circulation. The paper will analyse that challenge by means of critical interpretive synthesis, hypothetical election case and counterfactual comparison. The social responsibility theory places duties on public communication roles, Kantian ethics sets restrictions on deception and instrumentalisation, and utilitarian reasoning informs the consideration of predictable outcomes. All these viewpoints help identify the responsibilities in question regarding the creation of a claim, the increase in its visibility, and the elimination of its effects. The argument made is that possibilities to avoid or alleviate harm create duties, and culpability can be influenced by previous awareness and reasonable expectations. Design of platform is important as it decides where the attention is directed, the amount of verification needed and if the correction is sent to the initial audience. The suggested framework brings together personal judgement and institutional control via differentiated verification, meaningful disclosure and contestable interventions. It gives a process-oriented interpretation of accountability that does not eliminate political disagreement but renders the implementation of communicative power accountable. As a set of norms, it should be tested empirically, particularly in multilingual political environments.

**IndexTerms** -public responsibility; media ethics; digital political communication; epistemic agency; platform governance; corrective accountability.

## I. INTRODUCTION

As soon as a political accusation is spread to thousands of people without having been verified, who is supposed to investigate it, discontinue its dissemination or set the record straight? Accountability can not be imposed merely by finding out who started speaking, because subsequent choices change the audience as well as the implication of the accusation. Endorsement by an influencer might give it credibility, but the recommendation system takes it to individuals who were never searching for it; a qualification which was associated with the initial upload may fade away in the process of reposting. When credible information is eventually available, those capable of restoring the record may have no relationship with the person who made the initial claim. The urgency of accountability then happens at the same time as the uncertainty about where the appropriate responsibility lies.

This question has a practical stimulus due to the mismatch between participation and control. People make use of digital media to contest official narratives and record wrongdoing since publication is fairly easy, and such opportunities will be reduced when participation requires verification mechanisms available only to established institutions. Simultaneously, it can be said that the description of the usual sharing as insignificant lets the individuals with false accusations do not have an obvious explanation of who ought to react. The sufficient ethical stance should be able to maintain the potential of public participation in the process but at the same time require every participant to perform tasks that are within their capabilities, which may include explaining uncertainty or transmitting credible fixes to other parties.

The literature looks at the issue in various aspects. Vosoughi et al. (2018) discuss information diffusion, whereas Pennycook and Rand (2022) explore the circumstances that can enhance the sharing choices; Gillespie (2018) highlights institutional decisions regarding visibility and moderation. These works explain the process of communication circulation and how it is organised, but the responsibility allocation needs further reasoning. A regular recipient, an employed political communicator and an intermediary regulating recommendations are not in the equal position, even when they are part of the same chain of circulation. That chain should thus be considered with regard to an explanation of what every participant could reasonably know and do.

In my analysis, I explore what portion of the public responsibility ought to be given to the production, distribution and correction of digital political claims. This position links duties to possibilities to stop or mitigate damage, as knowledge, predictable effects, scope and power contribute to judgement. It divides blame on an earlier action with a present duty to help: a middleman who has not created a claim can still be held liable in regard to the further spreading of it. The terms of the argument are set by a critical literature synthesis, and then analyzed using an explicit analytical design and hypothetical election case.

## II. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

### 2.1 From institutional press responsibility to distributed gatekeeping

The Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947) associates the freedom to communicate with serving the community, and makes accountability to the public an essential part of that freedom not as a voluntary element. Extending this view to digital communication is problematic because of its institutional background: publication, endorsement and distribution are now capable of being separated among the participants who do not necessarily fill the same professional roles or share the same standards.

What is important about this division is how specific decisions are allocated. A citizen can choose to repost but might not be able to affect recommendation; a campaign manages production without revealing its sponsorship; a platform plans exposure without expressing support on the message that it disseminates. An actor's institutional identity will thus leave certain responsibilities unattended to. This approach to social responsibility is further developed in this case by the communicative role, i.e., the creation of evidence, solicitation of trust, distribution of visibility as well as access to redress all demand justifications that are relevant to the decision to be taken.

The representation of Gillespie (2018) of moderation contradicts the view of intermediaries as passive channels because the selection of acceptable content contributes to the formation of the environment in which other people express themselves. Acknowledging that power does not mean that platforms are liable to all negative consequences; it presents a more precise issue of what control over distribution involves reasonable possibilities of intervention. The framework answers that question without assuming that institutions have unlimited knowledge or competence.

### 2.2 From factual accuracy to conditions of political judgement

The differentiation offered by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) between misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation is an account based on factual accuracy in that harm can occur via falsehood or even when genuine material is used and intention plays a role in the evaluation. The context and purpose should then be considered, albeit neither of them can necessarily be deduced with certainty on the basis of an isolated message.

Vosoughi et al. (2018) find significant variations in the spread of verified true and false stories in a historical Twitter corpus, but do not claim that all the wrong posts lead to quantifiable political damage or have the same motivations behind them. The internal meta-analysis of twenty experiments by Pennycook and Rand (2022) is supportive of the use of accuracy prompts to enhance sharing discernment, but the synthesis of their own group studies does not provide independent replication in political and linguistic environments.

Such results relate to various aspects of circulation: which assertions are traveling, and why attention influences the choice of sharing. The next issue is to assign the task of verification since communication systems may affect how much work that task requires. One source might need significant effort to follow even when the message may be easily reposted with one gesture, making the cost of checking and amplification very different. This asymmetry adds an institutional aspect to responsibility. The assessment of judgement also depends in part on whether or not people are able to retrieve the evidence and the context necessary to evaluate what they face, rather than the mere fact of being willing to look for accuracy.

As Chesney and Citron (2019) demonstrate, deepfakes are a threat to privacy and democracy and provide opportunities to challenge authentic evidence. Technical detection can only be one aspect of the solution because audiences need to determine what authentication should be trusted. The concept of epistemic agency is applied in this case in the sense of a practical capacity to evaluate statements using available evidence, comprehensible context and understanding of persuasive interests; it relates the quality of information to the circumstances under which political judgement is made possible.

### 2.3 Integrating duties consequences and public functions

The Kantian ethics connects the refusal to deceive with the reverence of persons as well as with the universalisation of the principles of action (Kant, 1785/2004). The fact that fabrication is concealed denies audiences the chance to judge a message in accordance with the circumstances under which they are presented the message, with their judgement being used as a political tool by manipulating them with falsified evidence. Extending Kant's argument to misleading editing and hidden sponsorship is consistent with that line of reasoning; it does not imply that he had directly spoken about digital platforms.

The obligation not to deceive limits behavior without resolving all decisions in cases of uncertainty, when reporting can be honest but provisional and waiting time can safeguard one interest at the cost of another. The concerns regarding welfare and suffering make utilitarianism take into account the outcomes of disclosure, postponement and intervention (Mill, 1863/2004). This sort of comparison has to consider the focused nature of harms and the longer term chilling effects because popularity alone is insufficient to explain the costs of exclusion to a smaller group.

In this context, Social responsibility defines the social role that gives rise to the obligation, respect to persons restricts its implementation, and evaluation of consequences evaluates all possible responses, including non-action. There must be a clear reason behind such a clash between these two methods as it is not sufficient to assume that theories combine to overcome them. The emphasis on the right to freedom of expression, the right to access information and the fact that there are various stakeholders with responsibilities as stated by UNESCO (2023) encourages this approach to responsible judgement.

## III. Research Design and Analytical Procedure

### 3.1 Design scope and source selection

The conceptual ethical analysis helps to explore the communicative decisions by way of purposive narrative synthesis. The appropriate decision could include publication of an allegation, recommendation to a broader audience or response to a justified

complaint, which would permit obligations to be considered at certain stages of the circulation process. Ten pieces were chosen because they added to the concept of truthfulness, audience autonomy, distribution or accountability. The selection includes both classical ethical works, scholarly reports on information disorder and platform governance, empirical studies of circulation and sharing, as well as institutional or professional guidelines; law and specific guidelines of platforms are not within the main scope.

The selection allows comparing kinds of evidence without asserting completeness of coverage. Since there is no complete database protocol or formal quality score, the synthesis cannot determine the results of a systematic review. Every kind of source has a distinct functionality: empirical researches can be used to justify the statements in the limits of the design, philosophical literature provides the grounds to assess behavior, and guidance documents express the institutional intentions. Maintaining those differences creates the gap between observation and ethical judgement visible rather than permitting the pattern in the evidence to operate as a prescription by itself.

### 3.2 Comparison and counterfactual testing

Comparison of sources is done in four steps, involving four questions that can be asked about what an actor would be capable of reasonably knowing, what consequences were predictable, how far their contribution might extend, and what decisions they had the power to control. These dimensions are developed specifically to this paper as interpretational questions and not as validated measurement scales. These have been done to reveal the reasons behind a judgement and allow comparing the roles and avoid placing different actors into an equal position regardless of the fact that some have more or less access to information or corrective measures.

This model is subsequently used in a fictitious election video where the authenticity of the video is not resolved at first hand and the identical charge is located in various contexts of knowledge and control. Counterfactual variants change the authenticity of the clip, the knowledge of the communicator or the distribution role of the platform. The comparison question is whether a judgment is responsive to morally substantial variations and constant in the face of non-substantial variations. It can be tested by argumentative consistency, but the created case does not provide any grounds to estimate the prevalence, forecast the behavior, or determine the efficacy of an intervention.

The case is not based on empirical results but normative conclusions since no participants were enrolled and no survey, interview or platform data was gathered. The conclusion includes a sequential mixed methods study as one of the ways of assessing the framework and the separation between the current discussion and future empirical research is kept all through.

## IV. Analysis of the Communication Process

### 4.1 How amplification redistributes responsibility

According to the hypothetical example, a video that was released a few days before an election seems to demonstrate that a candidate is mocking a community. A social media personality shares it and adds an accusatory comment, and subsequently, the platform suggests it to more people than just the influencer followers and people spread the home address of an individual who is accused of having created it. Since the full recording has not been made available yet, the participants need to choose their action before the main accusation could be confirmed. The situation creates an ethical dilemma and does not make any statement regarding an actual election.

While the clip is circulating, the alterations in the presentation may be as significant as the growth in reach. Accusatory title prompts spectators to perceive an undetermined recording as a concluded accusation, whereas repeated reposts may appear to be independent confirmation even though they were posted once. The audiences who were contacted by way of recommendations could also fail to see the uncertainty that was expressed earlier. They are likely to be reasonable aspects of the hypothetical case instead of measured consequences, and this explains why determining the uploader leaves subsequent choices ethically unexamined. Every contribution will alter what the audience has reason to believe next.

A regular recipient is reasonably careful in that he or she reviews the accessible source and does not admit guilt until the charges are resolved. The bigger audience of the influencer and their assumed credibility add to the predictability of the effects of an unverified accusation, which supports the need to investigate it further; secret campaign payment would be an extra breach of disclosure. In areas where recommendation increases the visibility of the clip, focus moves to the question of whether the systems of distribution and complaint on the platform provide a reasonable chance to locate and counteract the risk. The actors have different points of intervention so the relevant obligations will be different.

Such discrepancies also constrain what can be reasonably expected. The lack of authentication of a sophisticated document cannot be used to infer citizen negligence unless functional checks existed or the warning signs were not regarded. Institutional size alone is not enough to decide accountability as a broker; it is necessary to take into consideration control over the mechanism and possible remedies. Differentiation then defines the tasks that an actor might perform, along with their practical constraints, rather than using increased power as a just cause of increased blame in all cases.

### 4.2 Why truth does not settle publication ethics

Should the recording be found to be genuine, the remark of the candidate might be worth considering in the view of the people, but the dissemination of a private address also needs a separate rationale. If the political allegation is true, it is not necessary that there is a common need to identify the home of an individual especially where the identifying information can be omitted without hindering discussions on the evidence. Ethical evaluation should differentiate between the social value of the claim and its dangers caused by the manner of its presentation to ensure that a reasonable investigation would not turn into a permission to intrude unnecessarily.

But if editing has done the opposite and changed the meaning of the candidate, a general warning that the video was edited cannot necessarily destroy the misleading suggestion. Disclosure is effective only when the recipients are able to utilize the disclosure to reassess the information they meet, and this is what makes a clear indication of the alteration qualitatively different than information in other places. Satire that is recognizable is also a special case since it does not require the same level of faith as documentary evidence. The important factor is the interpretation that a reasonable viewer is likely to take, such as whether the audience is being asked to consider a fabricated performance to be an authentic event.

Whichever result will need provisional answers to be looked at anew in light of changing evidence. The initial alert that assists viewers in identifying uncertainty may eventually mislead them when the decisive verification is ignored, similarly to how a constraint may persist even after the conditions under which it was justified are no longer present. Intervention thus implies an ongoing obligation to re-examine its evidential foundations, shielding political decision-making against unprocessed disinformation and institutional actions that no longer fulfill their declared function.

### 4.3 Correction as an obligation with its own distribution problem

The deletion of the fraudulent clip once the full recording was discovered would not allow any more views via the initial posting by the influencer but would have left previous viewers without the explanation of the mistake. Others might also keep seeing reposted versions of it without ever being exposed to the evidence that altered the influencer evaluation. The repair should thus be evaluated in part based on its capacity to restore the connection between these audiences and the corrected version, as opposed to the fact that the first upload has disappeared. In this case, the act of closing the communicator record would not do much to alter what the recipients think.

According to the Society of Professional Journalists (2014), urgent, high-profile correction and explanation is encouraged. That commitment applied in this context would mean that a communicator identifies the mistake, gives the correct foundation and makes a reasonable attempt to contact the initial audience. Corrections could also be connected to redistributed copies, depending on privacy and re-visibility issues. Correction reach as a separate responsibility will cover the issue of the separation between a claim authorship and its subsequent distribution.

## V. Discussion

### 5.1 From speaker culpability to functional responsibility

The author of an offensive message is the focus of an account in which it is considered whether there was intent to deceive, a question which still holds as important in determining culpability. Nevertheless, tracing the claim through the case reveals obligations, which intention at the moment of creation cannot distribute. After a substantiated issue is discovered, the platform might be able to resolve the further amplification even though it was not involved in the process of fabrication. An original recipient who reasonably forwarded the claim may also owe other people a correction without being blamed as if they had deliberately deceived them. Subsequent information alters the possible responsibilities even when such information has not affected the nature of the first choice.

To separate blame and responsibility to act is to make this distinction clear. Blame is based upon what was known at the time the message was delivered, but feasible repair is based upon current knowledge and control. The fact that obligations are placed on those particular functions of communication expands the tradition of social responsibility and lends to the concept of collective responsibility a practical sense: various participants are given other specific tasks rather than simply being all declared jointly responsible without any further consideration as regards how they will proceed further.

### 5.2 From individual literacy to the organisation of verification

The research on accuracy-prompt also encourages the attempt to enhance personal discernment under the tested conditions (Pennycook and Rand, 2022). The case provokes a similar institutional issue because the amount of work needed to achieve discernment varies in the case of preservation of sources, visibility of sponsors and redistribution allows reflection. As soon as the context is separated with the message, the users should restore the information which its presentation might have kept; this cannot be blamed on the attention of individuals.

Epistemic labour distribution is the phenomenon that defines this connection between personal judgment and organizational arrangements. The individuals are still accountable to make reasonable checks whereas organizations that have control over a source and how it is presented determine the available checks and their costs. The literacy initiatives deal with a portion of this responsibility, though, not with responsibilities that belong to institutions, similar to how a better interface will not absolve a person of his/her fraudulent behavior. The link between agency and its practical situations clarifies why certain verification failures can be attributed to both individual actions and the organization of communication without implying that either does so in every case.

### 5.3 From content removal to contestable accountability

Evaluating moderation by the disappearance of a harmful element has left many results untested. Elimination might disrupt access but not address a claim that has already been faced, whereas the censoring of genuine information could hinder the examination of political behavior. The case thus turns the focus on whether the audiences receive usable evidence and whether the speaker has a feasible way of questioning the intervention. Those are consequences of the normative comparison not measured effects, but explain why an operational history of eliminated content is not enough to show that a choice was made in accordance with the public opinion.

Corrective accountability is the ongoing responsibility to explain, revisit, and when needed, fix the choices that impact the messages and their exposure. Clear rationales, easy access to review and sources of local language judgment could ensure that the obligation would be feasible and the possibility to evaluate the task could be achieved through the visibility of corrections, fair results of the appeals and comprehensible information on the sponsors. Removal counts retain operational value without

independently establishing ethical success. The account has defined the duties in circulation in accordance with the rights-based approach of UNESCO (2023).

## VI. Conclusion

Disconnecting the ability to make a political claim with the ability to circulate or address it also renders it hard to assign responsibility to the population. This framework that is outlined here connects responsibilities with knowledge, predictable damage, scope and control in order to allow the analysis of such a separation on the level of specific decisions. Its main value is that it will be able to differentiate between the guilt of deception and the duties associated with amplification and repair, and the reality that communication design has an effect on verification work. Even when the original decision was justifiable, correction and review are still important since a shift in evidence may generate new duties that were not initially present.

These differences in roles are translated into different duties in the field of media ethics. Political communicators may also preserve evidence and disclose persuasive interests, and intermediaries can clarify choices regarding distribution and offer working avenues to review them. It is up to citizens to conduct reasonable checks on their own abilities rather than be given investigative tasks they do not have the ability to complete. Freedom of expression remains part of this account of responsibility since the power of scrutiny and contestation is part of what maintains the political judgment that responsible communication aims at preserving.

The framework is limited by the purposive nature of selected sources and the constructed case which cannot tell the relative weight of its four dimensions, behavioural effects, or resolve disagreement about reasonable effort. The historical platform evidence does not guarantee either that the same relations exist in modern multilingual communication in Malaysia. The internal coherence provides the proposal with the basis to be examined further, but its applicability will depend on whether duties are sensible in environments with various resources, expectations, and communication behaviors.

Those uncertainties could be studied by using a sequential mixed-methods design where it starts with interviewing how citizens, political creators and moderators perceive responsibility and practice constraints to overcome them. Their descriptions might help in vignette experiments, which will differ in their prior knowledge, audience reach and distribution control and then the reasons behind the acceptance or rejection of certain duties will be investigated through interviews. Proper consent, translation processes and safeguarding of political identities of the participants would have been required. The results would then be utilized to review the tasks that turn out unattainable or poorly distributed, to determine whether the suggested types of accountability facilitate informed political decision-making given the conditions under which individuals are expected to communicate.

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