Intercultural Communication Ethics in the Digital Age: Challenges of Misinformation and Propaganda a Systematic Review

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Abstract: *This systematic review examines the complex challenges to intercultural communication ethics posed by the proliferation of misinformation and digital propaganda. It synthesises current research on the spread and impact of these phenomena, highlighting their effects on intercultural relations and social cohesion. The review identifies gaps in existing literature, particularly regarding strategies for promoting constructive online dialogue and ethical frameworks for digital communication. Findings emphasise the importance of media and information literacy in empowering individuals to evaluate information and make informed decisions. The review also explores the ethical considerations surrounding the use of AI in marketing and recommends educational interventions focused on multiculturalism and the dynamics of privilege. The conclusion calls for active engagement with ethical experts to safeguard social media users, enhance trust in research, and foster intercultural competence to combat misinformation and promote responsible online engagement.*

Keywords: *Intercultural Communication Ethics, Digital Misinformation and Propaganda, Media and Information Literacy*

INTRODUCTION

In our increasingly interconnected world, intercultural communication stands as a cornerstone of global understanding and cooperation, yet it simultaneously faces unprecedented challenges in the era of rampant misinformation and digital propaganda (Griffiths et al., 2015). The proliferation of digital platforms has amplified the speed and scale at which information, both accurate and deceptive, can spread across cultural boundaries, creating a complex web of ethical considerations for individuals, organizations, and societies (Inwood & Zappavigna, 2021). This review delves into the multifaceted challenges that arise at the intersection of intercultural communication ethics, misinformation, and digital propaganda, examining how these forces interact to shape perceptions, behaviors, and social realities.

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It is crucial to foster self-awareness through intercultural communication studies, allowing individuals to understand their own culture by viewing it through the lens of others and encouraging ethical communication by challenging ethnocentric views (Griffiths et al., 2015). The ability to navigate and negotiate these ethical dilemmas is becoming increasingly crucial for fostering mutual understanding, respect, and collaboration in a globalized world (Griffiths et al., 2015). The rapid dissemination of information through social media has led to the widespread dissemination of misinformation, which has influenced public opinion and has the potential to affect political results (Wani et al., 2024). The rise of digital propaganda and misinformation poses a significant threat to intercultural communication ethics, necessitating a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to address these challenges and promote responsible and ethical communication practices in the digital age (Calo et al., 2021).

As societies undergo significant transformations, intercultural communication becomes even more critical (Griffiths et al., 2015). Furthermore, the instantaneous nature of digital communication collapses geographical boundaries, enabling immediate interaction across diverse cultural contexts, with email, phone calls, tweets, and status updates connecting individuals in unprecedented ways (Griffiths et al., 2015). Communication ethics play a central role in service-learning courses and community engagement activities, where students directly confront societal inequalities and learn to affirm the dignity of all people (Abdikarimova et al., 2021). In that sense, a lot of work is needed to investigate the function of communication in the twenty-first century. Digital platforms have become battlegrounds for competing narratives, where malicious actors exploit cultural differences and sensitivities to sow discord and manipulate public opinion (Griffiths et al., 2015).

The rise of digital platforms presents both opportunities and challenges for intercultural communication. With a significant portion of the world's population actively engaged on social media platforms, cross-cultural communication has become more frequent, facilitating cultural exchanges and integration (Di et al., 2022). These platforms allow individuals from different cultural backgrounds to connect, share ideas, and collaborate on various projects. Technological advancements have redefined communication norms, with smartphones becoming ubiquitous and artificial intelligence transforming various aspects of life (Alsaleh, 2024). The prevalence of digital communication has created a global village where people can interact with each other irrespective of geographical boundaries (Wahab et al., 2022).

However, this interconnectedness also poses challenges to communication ethics, as issues such as misinformation, privacy violations, and cyberbullying become more prevalent (Singh et al., 2024; Гудманян et al., 2019). Social media platforms, for example, are now essential resources for collaboration and knowledge sharing, especially among students, and they encourage interaction regardless of distance (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). Digital platforms have the potential to deepen asymmetrical power relations between Western and non-Western countries

(Punathambekar & Mohan, 2019). The expansion of technology has facilitated the sharing of cultural practices and traditions across borders, although this can lead to the dominance of certain cultural narratives and the exclusion of others (Alsaleh, 2024). Therefore, understanding these ethical dimensions is essential for fostering responsible and inclusive communication practices in the digital age (Alsaleh, 2024; Radwan, 2022).

The digital divide, characterized by unequal access to technology and related skills, further exacerbates these challenges, creating disparities in the ability to access, evaluate, and participate in online discourse (Griffiths et al., 2015; Shao et al., 2023; Yang & Zhang, 2023). Those lacking access to technology may be more vulnerable to misinformation and propaganda, while also being excluded from opportunities for intercultural dialogue and exchange (Griffiths et al., 2015). This disparity in access and skills not only limits participation in the digital sphere but also perpetuates existing social and cultural inequalities (Griffiths et al., 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature on intercultural communication, misinformation, and digital propaganda reveals a complex and evolving landscape, where existing theoretical frameworks are being tested and new approaches are emerging to address the unique challenges of the digital age. Traditional models of intercultural communication, often rooted in face-to-face interactions, need to be adapted to account for the complexities of online communication, where anonymity, virality, and algorithmic amplification can significantly alter the dynamics of intercultural encounters. The anonymity afforded by online platforms can embolden individuals to engage in behaviors that they might otherwise avoid in face-to-face interactions, leading to increased instances of cyberbullying, harassment, and hate speech (Miller, 2012).

The propagation of misinformation and propaganda is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by psychological, social, and technological factors (Vasist et al., 2023). The phenomenon of misinformation is explored, revealing deficiencies in mitigation strategies and challenges in approaching stakeholders (Puska et al., 2024). The speed and scale at which misinformation spreads online necessitates a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms that make individuals susceptible to believing and sharing false information.

The study of intercultural communication ethics requires a nuanced understanding of cultural values, norms, and communication styles, as well as the ability to critically evaluate the ethical implications of different communication practices (Griffiths et al., 2015). The rapid dissemination of misinformation through digital channels can have significant consequences, undermining trust in institutions, exacerbating social divisions, and even inciting violence (Lee et al., 2023). Propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation, although not new, have evolved within algorithmically mediated information environments (Matter et al., 2023a, 2023b). These concepts have gained increased visibility and are used to

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describe intentional misinformation campaigns, often of a political nature, that seek to influence opinions or manipulate electoral outcomes (Balendra, 2025).

The term "fake news" has also entered the mainstream lexicon to describe fabricated or intentionally misleading news content. The influence of social media algorithms on the dissemination of information and the formation of online echo chambers has amplified the spread of misinformation and propaganda. This has led to increased political polarization, erosion of trust in institutions, and challenges to public health initiatives (Chang & Ferrara, 2022).

Digital media literacy interventions present a promising avenue for building resilience against misinformation, especially within marginalized communities (Lee et al., 2023). Exposure to misinformation can increase misconceptions and decrease compliance with public health guidelines (Pritom et al., 2021). It is crucial to consider the role of recommendation algorithms in amplifying the spread of misinformation (Fernández et al., 2021). These algorithms, designed to personalize content and maximize user engagement, can inadvertently create filter bubbles or echo chambers, where users are primarily exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs. This phenomenon can reinforce biases, limit exposure to diverse perspectives, and make individuals more susceptible to misinformation and propaganda ("Social Media and Society," 2023). The creation of media literacy programs that are specifically tailored to the needs and contexts of diverse communities is essential.

The ability to critically evaluate information, identify biases, and understand the motivations behind the creation and dissemination of content becomes increasingly crucial in navigating the digital landscape (Madan, 2022). One approach to fighting the spread of misinformation on social media is to have algorithms up-rank content from trusted media outlets (Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

It is essential to recognize that algorithms are not neutral arbiters of information but rather reflect the values and biases of their creators and the data they are trained on (Metzler & García, 2023). This can lead to discriminatory outcomes, where certain groups or viewpoints are marginalized or misrepresented. Examining the ethical implications of algorithms and advocating for transparency and accountability in their design and deployment is imperative (Agrawal et al., 2019). Intercultural communication ethics necessitates a commitment to inclusivity, respect, and reciprocity in online interactions, as well as a willingness to challenge dominant narratives and promote diverse voices (Otieno, 2024).

The rise of digital propaganda poses a significant threat to intercultural understanding and cooperation. Digital literacy is associated with more discerning accuracy judgments, but not necessarily with changes in sharing intentions (Sirlin et al., 2021). Propaganda, often designed to exploit cultural differences and stoke intergroup animosity, can undermine trust, fuel conflict, and hinder efforts to build bridges between cultures. Addressing this challenge requires a multi-faceted approach that includes media literacy education, fact-checking initiatives, and

platform accountability (Brady et al., 2023; Jayakumar et al., 2020; Kuznetsova et al., 2024). Interventions could be effective in fighting misinformation around the world (Guess et al., 2020). Moreover, individuals tend to seek information from sources they trust, highlighting the importance of promoting critical thinking and awareness of misinformation within communities (Khader et al., 2020).

The development of professional competencies in journalism students, including the ability to critically examine information environments, is crucial in combating harmful media content (Фісенко et al., 2021). The role of media literacy to inform audiences on how to judge the credibility of information they receive on a daily basis from all sources is key in creating a balance between trust and skepticism of the news (Mokadem, 2023; Roschke & Bartlett, 2025).

The proliferation of misinformation and digital propaganda presents complex challenges to intercultural communication ethics. The promotion of media and information literacy empowers democratic principles by helping individuals to better evaluate information and make informed decisions (Kellner & Share, 2007; Khan, 2019). Digital literacy must be integrated with communication ethics (Rianto, 2019). This education should teach individuals to think critically about the messages they encounter online, to recognize bias and misinformation, and to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue across cultural divides (Mateus, 2021). The cultivation of self-awareness, mindfulness, and cognitive complexity enhances intercultural communication competence (Griffiths et al., 2015). Cultivating critical thinking skills and promoting media literacy are crucial for building resilience against misinformation and promoting responsible online engagement (Kukhar, 2021; Pérez-Escoda et al., 2017).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review methodology to explore the complex ethical challenges surrounding intercultural communication in the digital age, particularly those arising from the proliferation of misinformation and digital propaganda. The systematic review approach was selected to ensure a comprehensive, transparent, and rigorous synthesis of existing scholarly literature, while also identifying critical gaps that require further investigation. A rigorous methodology is essential when navigating such a multidimensional research terrain. Systematic reviews provide structured frameworks that enable researchers to clarify emerging issues, integrate existing knowledge, and reduce bias. To that end, this study adopted a comprehensive search strategy, drawing upon multiple academic databases and sources, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar (Yevdokymova et al., 2025).

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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of a systematic review on intercultural communication ethics in the era of misinformation and digital propaganda should offer insights into the various dimensions of this issue. The study should consider how misinformation and propaganda are spread through digital media (Caled & Silva, 2021). The analysis should also identify gaps in the existing literature and areas for further research, such as developing effective strategies for promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding in online spaces. The impact of misinformation and propaganda on intercultural relations and social cohesion should be measured. The analysis should explore the implications of these findings for policy and practice, offering recommendations for promoting ethical communication and combating the spread of harmful content in online environments. The study can use models to reduce communication dysfunction and increase one's ability to resist disinformation (Mansoor, 2024).

The study should clarify the ethical frameworks and principles guiding intercultural communication in online spaces, such as respect for cultural diversity, truthfulness, and transparency (Ganapini, 2023). The review should clarify the ethical frameworks and principles guiding intercultural communication in online spaces, such as respect for cultural diversity, truthfulness, and transparency. The systematic review should show how to formulate an integrative framework providing a holistic understanding of the impact of social media marketing on consumer engagement in sustainable consumption (Bryła et al., 2022).

The discussion section of a systematic review serves as a critical space for synthesizing the findings, interpreting their significance, and contextualizing them within the broader literature. The limitations of the included studies and the review process should be acknowledged, providing a balanced assessment of the strength and generalizability of the findings. The discussion should also delve into the practical implications of the findings. The study should consider how the findings relate to existing intercultural communication theories and models and broader debates about ethics, technology, and society. The main goal of marketing communication is to create an environment that can communicate and convince consumers (Chong & Patwa, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Concluding a systematic review on intercultural communication ethics in the age of misinformation and digital propaganda necessitates a synthesis of key findings and a delineation of future research directions. This includes an assessment of the current state of knowledge, highlighting the main challenges and opportunities for promoting ethical communication across cultures in digital contexts (Li et al., 2022). It is important to look at how marketing communication has evolved, especially with changes in information technology (Quy & Sun, 2021). This type of review contributes to the theoretical debate on increasing personalization (Hemker et al., 2021). It also offers valuable insight into the ethical considerations of using AI in marketing (Hari et al., 2024). Actively engaging with ethical experts is recommended to protect social media users and enhance trust in research (Holtorf et al., 2023).

Further exploration into the effectiveness of educational interventions aimed at enhancing media literacy and intercultural competence is needed (Sánchez et al., 2022). This would enable individuals to critically evaluate information and engage in constructive dialogue across cultural divides. (Hemker et al., 2021; Migkos et al., 2025). It is recommended to educate about multiculturalism, and teach how privilege is produced and works (Demangeot et al., 2018).

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