Ethical Implications of Fake News: A Meta-Analysis Through the Lens of Islamic Teachings

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ABSTRACT

The consequences of spreading fake news posess significant challenges to individuals, communities, and societies that could harm many aspects of lives. Although the impacts were made obviously visible in the media, this irresponsible conduct continues to happen in many forms, especially with the emergence of social media. While the consequences of such news have been extensively studied in previous researches, Islam offers an ethical framework provided in its teachings that offers unique insights that encourage deeper exploration. This study conducts a meta-analysis to examine the consequences of fake news through the lens of Islamic ethical principles supported with Quranic verses and hadiths. The findings revealed five key themes; (1) truthfulness, (2) harm and mischief, (3), reputation and image, (4) reputation and image, and (5) life in the Hereafter. Islam emphasizes the importance of truthfulness (sidq) that information received needs to be verified before spreading to others. Fake news is potential to harm or mischief (fasad) the social harmony of a society that could lead to violence. The prohibition of backbiting, slander and such actions could tarnish individuals or groups' reputation and image which might end up in tragedies. Islam too underscores the grave sin of lying that could lead to erosion of trust, weakens the social and moral in a society. Finally, the consequence will last to the life in the Hereafter that will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment, with severe consequences of spreading fake news.

Keywords: *Fake news, Ethics, Islamic perspective, Meta Analysis, Social Harmony, Truthfulness*

INTRODUCTION

Fake news is strictly forbidden in all religions including Islam. The spread of fake news in the modern era has serious effects on political processes, social cehesion, and public debate. It has become a global concern. Of course, this issue can be considered as severe in multicultural societies like Malaysia, where narratives propagated by fake news is potential to exploit racial and religious dividions to the fullest extent possible in order to cause havoc.

In the field of information sharing, there is a disturbing inclination to cite sources that are not entirely trustworthy without thoroughly confirming the veracity of the material. Misinformation, disinformation, or malicious information may spread as a result of this activity. It basically means forming and expressing opinions based on information that was obtained quickly, without doing comprehensive research or consulting reliable sources (Menelaou, 2018). Such a disorganized approach could unintentionally or intentionally lead to the production of what is widely known as "fake news."

'The rise of the misinformation society' (Pickard, 2016) and the era of 'alternative facts' and 'post-truth' (Benkler et al., 2018; Madrigal, 2017) have been names given to this period in recent years. The public's growing awareness of the possible inaccuracy of the news they encounter is highlighted by this observation. It's critical to understand the differences between "misinformation" and "disinformation," as they have different connotations. 'Misinformation' is the unintentional distribution of erroneous information, whereas 'disinformation' is the intentional and planned spread of misleading information (Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019).

In Islam, there is a strong focus on honesty and truthfulness. As mentioned in surah Al-Baqarah (2:42), Allah SWT states, "And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know [it]". This is only one of the many times the Holy Quran urges for honesty and integrity. This shows that Islam forbids the production and distribution of false information, viewing it as a grave sin and a mark of hypocrites (al-munafik).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fake News

The media landscape has changed dramatically, giving up its former hegemonic status to the people and technology. The phenomenon of citizen journalism has emerged as a result of this transition (Erwin Kartinawati & Rahmat Wisudawanto, 2020). But people' enthusiasm to participate in information sharing might not be matched by their deep

understanding of the fundamentals of responsible journalism (Chadha and Bhat, 2022). This disparity could be one of the reasons behind the ongoing problem of fake news.

In the Malaysian context, several unique indicators of fake news dissemination have been identified. Kamarudin et al. (2021) stated that racial and religious narratives are often exploited to trigger tensions and polarize communities. Misinformation related to government policies, political figures, and economic issues can also be weaponized to undermine public trust (Mastura & Azizuddin, 2020). Additionally, the use of vernacular languages and local cultural references can make fake news more relatable and credible to specific target audiences (Ariffin & Ismail, 2019).

The media landscape's constant change is a major role in the growth of fake news. Rapid and extensive information sharing has been made possible by the Internet and social media particularly, frequently without the stringent fact-checking procedures of the traditional media (Lazer et al., 2018). This has made it possible for rumours that are untrue or deceptive to spread rapidly and widely.

Researchers have also discovered psychological elements that lead individuals to accept and disseminate false information. These include the human propensity to spread new or sensational information (Vosoughi et al., 2018) and confirmation bias, the tendency for people to look for and accept information that supports their preexisting ideas (Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

On the other hand, false information can affect politics, public opinion, and even have practical repercissions, therefore fake news can have a big impact. According to studies, being exposed to fake news can distort political opinions, undermine faith in authorities and the media, and even affect how people vote (Grinberg et al., 2019; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Research and policymaking are actively focused on stopping the spread of false information. Enhancing media literacy, launching fact-checking campaigns, and creating technological interventions to identify and restrict the spread of misleading information online are only a few of the suggested remedies (Guess et al., 2020; Shu et al., 2017).

Fake News from Islamic Perspective

Disseminating inaccurate or deceptive information has long been considered a serious moral and social sin in the Islamic tradition. Islam's Holy Quran, forbids the spreading of lies outright, saying that "[On the Day of Resurrection] those who consume interest cannot stand except as one who is being beaten by Satan into insanity" (Quran, 2:275).

This Quranic idea has been elaborated upon by Islamic scholars, who highlight Muslims' obligation to confirm knowledge before disseminating it. Numerous proscriptions against the dissemination of unverified rumours or gossip; which are viewed as a sort of 'backbiting' that might injure people and split the community; which can be found in the hadith, or recorded sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Islamic scholars of today have adapted these age-old precepts to the contemporary issue of fake news. Well-known Muslim scholars like Tariq Ramadan have issued warnings that the mindless sharing of false material on social media platforms goes against the fundamental Islamic principles of truthfulness, social duty, and honesty (Ramadan, 2017).

In fact, some Islamic scholars have gone so far as to call the intentional dissemination of false information 'information warfare' that threatens the unity of the ummah, or Muslim community worldwide. They contend that in order to protect their communities against manipulation, Muslims have a religious duty to stop the propagation of lies and to advance media literacy (Al-Qarni, 2018).

However, experts have shown that some Muslim-majority nations have been especially susceptible to the negative effects of fake news, with political and sectarian tensions occasionally making the issue worse. Research has indicated that more digital literacy programmes and fact-checking materials specific to Islamic cultural contexts are needed (Noor, 2018; Cheema, 2020).

The Quranic principle of seeking truth and verifying information before sharing is a core tenet that Islamic scholars have emphasized in relation to the spread of fake news. The Quran states: "O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful" (Quran 49:6). This verse is interpreted as a clear command to Muslims to proceed with caution and diligence when they come upon new information, as opposed to adopting or disseminating it without due diligence.

As a matter of fact, the Islamic tradition offers a strong ethical foundation for tackling the problem of fake news because of its emphasis on integrity, seeking the truth, and communal harmony. For societies where Muslims make up the majority, incorporating these ideas into current media literacy campaigns may be a useful way to stop the spread of false information.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a meta-analysis on the consequences of fake news from the perspective of Islam. This meta-analysis will synthesize the findings from a comprehensive

review of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly book chapters, and relevant Islamic sources that explore the consequences of fake news from an Islamic perspective. The study will employ a systematic search strategy across multiple databases, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and online newspapers to identify the most relevant and high-quality literature.

The first step in this method include searching and screening for systematic literature to identify and select studies and articles that examine the consequences of fake news through the lens of Islamic perspective. Then, through the data extraction and coding, the main themes or key information was extracted including research design, theoretical frameworks and the findings. In this process, the main points were evaluated to find the closest elements that fit this study.

After that, a meta-analytic synthesis was conducted where the findings from the selected studies and articles were aggreagted and synthesized to find common themes, patterns, and areas of divergence. Finally, for the discussion and interpretation part, the meta-analytic findings were interpreted within the context of Islamic ethical framework, that highlighted the main elements of the consequences of fake news from the perspective of Islam.

From a thorough search, this research referred to five primary articles that clearly stated case studies that could be related to fake news. The first article was a news report about fake news that relate to the sign up for MyDigital ID in Malaysia that was published by The Star online on February 12, 2024 (Yeoh, 2024). The article reflects most about the significance of truthfulness, which is in lign with the teachings of Islamic ethical principles.

The second article used is another news report published by The New Straits Times online on April 22, 2024 (Anjumin, 2024). The article was about a man who was jailed and fined, after he decided to set fire on a car of the owner that was claimed to be the man he believed to have an affair with his wife. Because of the false information he obtained, his actions have caused harm and mischievous that should be avoided in the ethical principles of Islam.

The third was an article published on December 1, 2023 by The Star online of the case of Zakir Naik, an independent preacher who was defamed by statements made by an online news portal which one of it include 'Is Malaysia harbouring alleged fugitive Zakir Naik?' (The Star, 2023). Such false information made to the public has tarnished his reputation and image as an individual and a preacher that may have affected many aspects of his life and career. Such case is also related to the ethical princliples of Islam on the consequences of spreading fake news or false information.

The fourth article entitled 'PM Anwar wants legal action against those spreading lies on casino issue' published by Bernama online on May 1, 2024 (Bernama, 2024). The article reported on accusation of him and the government associating in a purported casino project in Forest City. As much as how people are free to criticize on any issue, but this action is similar to lying that could harm or put individuals or groups into danger towards them legally and at the same time damaged the victim's life and good name. This case is related to Islamic teachings of the danger of lying that is totally forbidden in the religion.

The last article reported on the high number of cases of corruption in Malaysia which was published in The New Straits Times online on September 22, 2022 (The New Straits Times, 2022). As much as these cases were put into concern, this wrongdoing of corruption is related most to being accountable or responsible for own's actions as what has been emphasised in Islamic teachings as Islam teaches people to be responsible for their own actions in the current life that will effect to the life in the Hereafter.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the findings of the research, there were five consequences of spreading fake news from an Islamic ethical perspective; (1) Truthfulness, (2) Harm and Mischief, (3) reputation and image, (4) Danger of Lying, and (5) Life in the Hereafter.

Truthfulness

Islam places a significant emphasis on truthfulness and dishonesty in communication. For this element, Islam strongly emphasises verification of information before dissemination, as exemplified by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's efforts in addressing the widespread of misconception that MyDigital ID would involve implanting chips in human bodies. This highligts the Islamic principle of truthfulness and the need to avoid propagating claims.

According to the same article, a content creator, Adil Hidayat Rosli has observed that misleading narratives about technology are widely disseminated on social media, which emphasises the significance of proactively addressing and refuting them. This is in line with the ethical principles of Islam, which forbid the spread of lies and promote the search for the truth (Ebrahimi & Yasin, 2017; Zubair et al., 2019).

It reflects transparency and reassurance. In the case study of implanting chips in human bodies, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has made efforts to reassure the public about the safety of their personal information and to reiterate that the claims were 'baseless' that shows the importance of transparency and providing accurate information to address the concerns of the community. This reflects the Islamic values of truthfulness and openness.

Finally, the case study highlights the need for each person to independently reconfirm information and refrain from disseminating unsupported assertions, as demonstrated by the falsehoods perpetuated by the social media users. This is also in line with the Islamic teachings that holds people responsible for their deeds including the sharing of knowledge as stated in Surah At-Taubah (9:119) and Surah Al-Hajj (2:30) where the Quran commands the believers to speak the truth and avoid spreading falsehood.

Harm and Mischief

Spreading fake news often leads to unnecessary consequences such as harm (*Darar*) and mischief (*Fasad*) especially in a society. In another case study of a man jailed due to his action (set fire to a car) based on the belief that his wife was having an affair with the car owner's husband. This clearly shows the irresponsible act of vandalism or property damage is the consequence of fake news or unverified information to incite harmful and mischievous behaviour (Jung, 2020).

In Islam, spreading rumours or misleading information is called 'namimah' and is seen as a serious transgression. As the man was triggered by his own assumptions without seeking for evidence or the truth, his actions has cause nothing but damage to his own doings. This is also mentioned by the Quran in Surah Al-Hujurat (49:12), 'O you who believe! Avoid much [negative] assumption. Indeed, some assumption is sin.'

On the other hand, the Islamic principle of '*la darara wa la dhiraar*' which means 'no harm and no reciprocating harm) emphasises the importance of avoiding actions that can harm others or cause mischief in the society. Fake news and unverified information can lead to harmful and mischievous actions, as demonstrated by the man's actions. Such actions violate the Islamic principles of seeking the truth, avoiding assumptions, and refraining from causing harm to others and their property.

In other words, the spread of fake news can have far-reaching consequences, disrupting social harmony, trust, and the well-being of individuals and the community, which is unethical to the teachings of Islam as statedin Surah Al-Baqarah (2:60), 'And do not do mischief on the earth, causing corruption.'

Reputation and Image

The spreding of fake news and misinformation could affect a person or a group's reputation and image. In the case study of a famous Islamic preacher, Zakir Naik previously in Malaysia, he was accused of using provocative statements in his preachings that touched the sensitivity of the non-Muslims community. The accusation was made from an edited video that was cut short, in highlighting his statements that could lead to misunderstanding of his true intentions and messages.

The case study that could be classified as a defamation of a public figure, he was made the target of a coordinated campaign of fake news and rumours with intention to tarnish his reputation and public image. The dissemination of these misleading stories may result in a loss of public trust, harm to their business or career, and possibly legal repercussions. This could be analysed from an Islamic perspective, that focuses on the prohibitions against backbiting, slander, and character assassination.

The case study too reflects on the circulation of false information or stereotypes that negatively portrays a particular religious individual or groups, and at the same time affecting the ethnic minority group. The consequences could lead to an increased prejudice, marginalisation, and a decline in the reputation of Malaysian society in particular.

From this, Islam emphasises the significance of upholding everyone's rights and dignity, regardless of their background, as emphasised in the Quran and hadith of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); 'Do not harm the Muslims, and do not revile them, nor pursue their defects' (Narrated by Ibn Majah).

Danger of Lying

Islam forbids lying (*Kadhib*), and disseminating false information is a type of lying since it requires dishonesty. For example, on May 1, 2024, it was reported that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has emphasised that any party associating him and the government with a purported casino project in Forest City must face legal action. It was due to certain individuals that had been making accusations and spreading slander regarding the issue.

It shows a clear violation of Islamic teachings, where people have been engaging in the spreading of such false information or lies. In Islam, the act of lying is considered sinful (Huda et al., 2016; Abdullah, 2017). The Quran states, 'And whoever disputes with you concerning him, after [this] knowledge has come to you, say, 'Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then supplicate earnestly [together] and invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars.''

Based the accusation that might lead to facing legal action, demonstrates the potential and social consequences that could happen from the spread of fake news and lie, that could harm individuals, institutions, and overall the well-being of the society. From an Islamic perspective, fake news could also lead to the loss of trust, social harmony and the undermining of the principles of justice and truthfulness.

It is also mentioned in a hadith, where the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasised the importance of truth; 'Truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise. And a man keeps on telling the truth until he becomes a truthful person. Falsehood leads to wickedness, and wickedness leads to the Fire, and a man may keep on telling lies until he is written before Allah, a liar' (Sahih al-Bukhari).

Life in the Hereafter

The last element of consequences found in this study is the life in the Hereafter. It is a matter of fact that in Islamic belief, one will be held responsible for their actions in the Hereafter. The action of spreading fake news and information may lead to bad consequences that could harm both in the current life and the afterlife.

Referring to a news reported on September 22, 2022, Sultan of Perak, Sultan Nazrin Muizzudin Shah has raised concern over the dangerous level of corruption in Malaysia that shows the country has yet to embrace accountability. In other words, these people neglected their responsibility not just to the others, but even themselves. In Islam, corruption is considered a sin that could harm not only individuals and the society, but has consequences in the afterlife (Ahmed, 2018; Obe et al., 2016).

An example of a high-profile corruption scandal such as the 1MDB case, such corruption case often involve the spread of false information, cover-ups, and the manipulation of public perception to conceal the wrongdoings of those in power. The propagation of false information and fake news might support and sustain these dishonest activities, shielding those responsible from punishment.

From an Islamic perspective, those people and organisations engaged in these cases of corruption and the dissemination of fase information that goes along with them will eventually pay a price for their deeds in the Hereafter. As mentioned in Surah An-Nisa, verse 10, the Quran and Islamic teachings emphasise that people who participate in power abuse, corruption, and the spread of misleading information will be held accountable on the Day of Judgement; 'Indeed, those who consume the wealth of orphans unjustly are but consuming fire, and they will be burned in a Blaze.'

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have uncovered five main consequences of spreading fake news which include (1) Truthfulness, (2) Harm and Mischief, (3) reputation and image, (4) Danger of Lying, and (5) Life in the Hereafter. The case studies and meta-analysis conducted have highlighted that the action of spreading false information, slander and lies violates the core Islamic teachings that emphasise and upholds the importance of honesty, truthfulness, and the prohibition of deception. This could be considered as

the basic ethics and moral foundation for the Muslim community. The instance of the purported casino project that have been discussed demonstrates how the spread of fake news can result in real harm, both socially and legally.

It shows the detrimental effects that these lies may have in the real world on people, organisations, and society at large. Fake news and corruption too often gp hand-in-hand, as the spread of disinformation might enable the concealment of wrongdoings and the tarnishing of reputations that could become a threat to the principles of justice and good governance as emphasised in Islamic teachings. Lying is another sinful action as Islam emphasises the importance of truthfulness and the severe consequences of deception, both in this ife and in the Hereafter. Those who are engaged in these wrongdoings will be held accountable for the harm they have caused and will face severe consequences in the afterlife.

The implications of these findings may focus on strengthening Islamic education in Malaysia. It is to ensure a better and deeper understanding of Islamic principles that relate to truthfulness, honesty, and avoidance of falsehoods and deception. Secondly, promoting media literacy by providing them with skill trainings and tools. Perhaps, this could encourage to normalise fact-checking before sharing with others on unsure issues. Finally, it could be more relevant by elevating the voices of Islamic scholars, leaders, and influencers who could promote truth, justice, and ethical conduct, in inspiring the society to uphold the principles of honesty and transparency.

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