

The Entropy of Truth: A Philosophical Framework for Information Ethics in Democracy

Vanshika Jain¹

Abstract

In the digital age, the importance of democracy depends on the probity of information that sustains it. The rapid propagation of misinformation and disinformation threatens core democratic values - transparency, accountability, and informed participation -- by distorting public reasoning and undermining trust in institutions. This paper explores the legal, ethical, and cognitive dimensions of this crisis. Focusing on India's experience, it examines statutory frameworks such as the Information Technology Act, 2000, the IT Rules, 2021, and recent proposals for state-led fact-checking, and assesses their compatibility with constitutional principles such as the Doctrine of Separation of Powers and freedom of speech.

The study situates misinformation as both a legal and epistemic challenge -- one that diminishes citizens' capacity for rational decision-making, thereby weakening democratic legitimacy. Drawing on international and domestic perspectives, it argues for a multifaceted approach combining legal safeguards, digital literacy, independent fact-checking, and media ethics. Ultimately, the research contends that building a resilient democracy in the information age demands not only stronger laws but also the cultivation of an ethical and informed citizenry capable of discerning truth from deception.

Keywords: Information Ethics, Digital Constitutionalism, Epistemic Democracy, Regulatory Frameworks, Democratic Resilience.

1. Introduction

Democracy needs accurate information as its fundamental element during the digital period. Misinformation spreads rapidly, which damages essential democratic principles because it disrupts public decision-making processes and creates

doubts about government bodies. The research paper titled "The Entropy of Truth: A Philosophical Framework for Information Ethics in Democracy" investigates the legal framework, ethical standards and knowledge-based aspects of the existing crisis. The study analyses how India implements its legal system through three laws, namely the Information Technology Act 2000 and IT Rules 2021 and current attempts to establish government-controlled fact-checking operations while checking their alignment with basic constitutional rights. The research establishes misinformation as both a legal and intellectual challenge, which lowers voters' ability to make informed choices and thus damages democratic legitimacy. The researchers developed an argument based on international and national viewpoints that supports the need for multiple solutions that should combine legal protections with digital education and independent fact-checking and media ethical standards. The research establishes that to create informational age democracies that withstand challenges, society needs to establish both better legal frameworks and citizens who have ethical training and knowledge to identify what is genuine and what is false. Legitimacy of the democratic system is evaluated through epistemic theory that states democracy depends upon the ability of both fair procedures and better decision-making.

Democracy serves as the fundamental principle through which people govern themselves. The system operates through three essential requirements, which include transparent operations and accountable practices, and active citizen participation. The system operates through two principles, which establish majority decision-making while protecting the rights of minority groups through constitutional laws and judicial

¹Undergraduate student of law, Teerthankar Mahaveer College of Law and Legal Studies, TMU, India.

systems that maintain equal treatment of all citizens.

2. Anatomy of Misinformation

The current age values immediate news and main headlines more than it value precise information. People achieve better access to information through technological progress but these technologies also enable the spread of false information. Misinformation exists as false information, which includes any statement created by a person or institution to damage another person's reputation while spreading untrue information to decrease their public standing. The process of conducting democratic activities becomes extremely challenging during situations that rely on false information as the foundation for official public decisions.

The paper investigates how legal systems support democratic development and maintain their existence while showing the difficulties that arise from false information and the solutions that legal systems and institutional frameworks provide.

Misinformation creates an illusion of diverse opinions in a democracy because it restricts which ideas people are allowed to discuss. Spreading Misinformation operates as a systematic mechanism that uses media filtering, agenda-setting, selective framing and the exclusion of dissenting perspectives. Media institutions are generally influenced by corporate interests, advertising revenue, and political access, which leads to corruption. Misinformation and untrue articulations create multiple legal consequences that damage a person's reputation.

Journalism functions as the fourth estate in democratic systems because it supplies official information, which lets people know their rights, shows corruption, shows government activities, demonstrates illegal activities, and shows societal standards and values. The main purpose of this important law is to stop corruption while giving citizens the power to challenge improper actions by government employees.

The development of journalism practice in today's world shows major changes that impact its ethical standards and organisational framework. The

newsroom maintains its credibility as a trustworthy source for news, although multiple organisational forces now impact its operations. Modern journalism faces censorship from both government agencies and "soft" control systems, which use corporate advertising and philanthropic sponsorships and complicated financial relationships to control media organisations. The primary problem facing journalism today is its transition into a business that generates profits through advertisements and sponsorships, and financial relationships that major corporate trusts currently control. The basis of journalism is now transformed from its original purpose to profit-earning through various corporate entities and government entities.

The television industry spreads and operates around 72 channels, and corporate entities dominate television industry through creating a three-way communication between corporate interests, media content, and political authority. They can reinforce similar perspectives across different platforms, creating an "echo chamber" effect that limits the range of voices available to citizens. This narrowing of viewpoints weakens democratic processes and makes the public more susceptible to systemic misinformation and propaganda. (Umathe, B, 2024)

The main principle of democracy depends on elections because they require voters to make informed choices. Political debates become distorted through false narratives, which also create voter manipulation and electoral outcome control. The system takes advantage of human cognitive errors and psychological weaknesses. The implementation of political educational programs helps people to identify false information related to heated political discussions.

The concept of e-journalism proves to be beneficial because it functions as a platform that enables users to share their contrasting opinions. The research study conducted by Oxford University (Oxford University's COMPROP Data Memo, 2019) between February 14 and April 10 2019, investigates the political information and misleading content that circulated through Facebook and WhatsApp during the Indian Election Campaign, according to COMPROP Data

Memo 2019 (COMPROM Data Memo 2019: Digital Propaganda, 2019). The digital platform enabled political parties to distribute content that contained "false, biased and divisive" information to a massive audience. The research demonstrates how political parties misuse their online platforms to spread false information about their opponents, which damages democratic processes. The research demonstrates the need to establish digital literacy programs and platform accountability mechanisms while controlling the spread of false information.

Digital misinformation spreads at no cost, which leads to an unending process of digital misinformation acquisition. Current information systems focus exclusively on user engagement by choosing to favour attractive content instead of trustworthy content. Misinformation in democratic systems creates various effects that lead to reduced public trust in governmental institutions, media organisations, and scientific bodies. The situation creates a loss of social legitimacy, which results in public community disintegration. The digital distribution, which enables more than 800 million Indian internet users to access online content, creates a major shift in the world's most extensive democratic system. Digital platforms provide users with improved information access, yet they enable an unprecedented spread of false information. The situation has become more difficult because of three factors which include insufficient digital skills of people, different digital abilities among regions and the growing use of artificial intelligence. Deepfakes, AI-generated content and targeted political messages create confusion about what constitutes real information and what constitutes false information. The damaging effects of misleading information go beyond being a minor problem because it disrupts democratic systems and alters how people perceive things. The public needs immediate educational support since false news has the power to change public views, which impacts electoral outcomes

Warfare is now waged in cyberspace instead of traditional front lines. The Example of the Operation Sindoor War (Cobrapost, 2014) between India and Pakistan was an example of how lies are used as weapons by military personnel. Military actions using social media, which flooded the

internet with fake/undocumented reports/images/ and Artificial Intelligence- created images were abundant. Major Media Housing also supported the misinformation campaign by broadcasting the erroneous reports that India's Naval Forces attacked Karachi. News Anchors used video games to present visual evidence of the attack for patriotic means, while showing little regard for the ethical/political ramifications.

The Misinformation War (Chomsky, N., & Herman, E. S, 1988) involved the use of Military Disinformation to promote extreme Nationalism via social media, rather than the truth of the military operations, which were eventually proven to be false. The Fact-Check Unit established by the Indian government disproved the Pakistani propaganda with the use of social media via Non-State Nationalist Troll Groups, where misinformation became the weapon of choice used by both Militaries. As a result of this campaign, an environment was created where the two countries had similar enemies based on perceptions formed online, and both suffered numerous attacks by their respective citizens due to non-state actors promoting terrorism in the name of supporting their country. The 2020 video evidence of the "Pandemic", and the base of misinformation campaigns led by Pakistan versus India, is yet another example of how lies are becoming the norm to conduct business in the cyber-world.

3. Legal and Regulatory Challenges

Misinformation has resulted in actual results, which include community conflicts, electoral fraud and public health emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, was accompanied by an "infodemic" that had false claims about the virus, vaccines and treatment methods. Article 19(1)(a) (Constitution of India, Art. 19, cl) of our Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression, which includes the right to receive information. The system establishes strong protections against misinformation while preserving fundamental rights. The judicial branch of our government has increased the bounds of this entitlement by adding the "right to know" and creating a constitutional framework that governs public access to information.

Several laws are enacted to regulate information and counter misinformation. The Information Technology Act of 2000 gives the government power to restrict online content that endangers national security and public safety. Social media platforms must remove illegal content according to the Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code Rules of 2021 (Information Technology Rules, 2021). The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita of 2023 makes it a crime to share false information that people use to create public disorder and incite violence. The Press Council Act of 1978 establishes ethical journalism standards. The laws create a platform to fight misinformation problems, while people raise worries about government overreach and potential abuse of power, through which they want to create equilibrium.

The Right to Information Act 2005, which originated from grassroots movements, represents the most significant turning point in India's democratic evolution. The law became effective through the Majdoor Kisan Shakti Sangthan Movement in Rajasthan, which established Humara Paisa Humara Hisab as its system that grants every citizen the right to access information according to section 3. The Act implements the constitutional right to information by allowing citizens to obtain government documents. The act enables fact-checking by reducing secrecy and promoting transparency, which enables public involvement in governance while strengthening institutional accountability. The system requires agencies to disclose information within specific timeframes, while they must actively share information to eliminate situations where information shortages lead to public misinformation.

RTI Act serve as antidot to misinformation. Section 4 (Right to Information Act, 2005) states the right to access information on Suo motu within 30 days and make organisation liable to provide verified information in a public domain. It deals with major obstacles include bureaucrats who refuse to comply with the law and people who misuse national security exemptions and physical threats against RTI activists.

Courts through their judicial activism serve as, a means to challenge government secrecy and their conduct during political and electoral activities. Information consists of data together with facts and knowledge because it transforms how people understand different situations. Citizens have the right to access confirmed information because it serves as a legislative milestone for their better understanding of verified data. The judiciary established a transformative role after passing a landmark judgement of the State of Uttar Pradesh v. Raj Narain (State of Uttar Pradesh v. Raj Narain, 1975), which states the right to know as a fundamental right, emphasising that transparency is essential for democracy.

The court decision in Romesh Thappar v State of Madras (Romesh Thappar v. State of Madras, 1950) established an important precedent when it declared that Cross Road Journal distribution inside Madras State was unlawful because it violated basic rights of free speech and free expression. The case challenged this cross-road case because Article 19(1)(a) (Constitution of India, Art. 19, cl) provides protection for free speech rights. The first judge case of SP Gupta v UOI (S.P. Gupta v. Union of India, 1981) extended its scope to include the right to know about government activities while establishing that all proceedings must follow established procedures of confidentiality. The RTI Act 2005 (Right to Information Act, 2005) grants citizens access to information about government operations as a primary right. The government needs this system because it helps reduce corruption and makes political decisions more open to the public.

The People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India (People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India, 2003) and Union of India v. Association for Democratic Reforms cases served as exceptions to establish electoral transparency because they confirmed that voters possess the right to access candidate data. The Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India, 2020) case established internet access as a digital right which protects freedom of expression while showing that digital information systems serve as essential components of modern communication. The judicial principles work together to establish a strong legal system that

protects against false information and improves governmental responsibility to citizens.

The landmark judgement of 2025, *Amar jain v UOI* (*Amar jain v UOI*, 1984), serves as a significant decision by stating that digital access is not a luxury but a necessity under Article 21 and ensures universal digital accessibility and reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities.

3.1 Amendment

2023's IT Act amendment (Information Technology Amendment Rules, 2023) drew a significant turning point that recommended that the government should create a Fact-Check Unit (FCU), which would verify the truth of information that pertains to Central Government operations. The rules mandated social media intermediaries to delete that type of content which resulted in the loss of "safe harbour" protection for platforms.

4. Comparative analysis

The democratic crisis today is a chronic problem caused by the systemic effects of misinformation within our information ecosystem. The concept of "systematic entropy of knowledge" corrupts our public square, making the pursuit of the truth in democracies essential for our society. As we consider the distinction between the epistemic value of a particular democracy and its capacity to maintain a unified society by producing "smart" choices based upon a shared, accurate perception, we can better understand the root causes of the current democratic crisis. An analysis of the respective legal frameworks of law in various countries highlights two ways the governments control speech and information.

In countries such as the United States, we have a legal framework rooted in the First Amendment, which protects false speech as well as truthful speech. Thus, in cases such as *United States v. Alvarez* (*United States v. Alvarez*, 567 U.S. 709, 2012), courts have said that the key to remedying false speech is to provide "more truths" rather than engage in the censorship of false speech by the government.

On the other hand, India's legal framework under Article 19(2) (Constitution of India, Art. 19, cl) provides an expansive basis for the government to

place restrictions on the right to freedom of speech, including providing for reasonable restrictions deemed necessary for maintaining public order and national security.

The differences between these two legal frameworks are significant. For example, when assessing the constitutionality of the establishment of government-sponsored "Fact-Check Units," courts will need to balance the interests of individuals versus the interests of the state i.e., providing the public a means to evaluate claims made by another individual as either true or false. Also, examining the development of consent gives us insight into how the production of consent has changed from the old media to the new technology-based media. With regard to old media, traditional news filtering through ownership of corporations and their advertising dollars, new media filters based upon emotions via the "attention economy". In addition, algorithmic prioritisation puts emotional response ahead of fact-based accuracy, creating echo chambers and thus, creating a greater potential for amplification of any lies or misinformation. With misinformation being around as long as the beginnings of our republic, rising exponentially in recent times due to the nearly free scale and micro-targeting capabilities of technology, constituting a major global security threat to the eroding foundation of democratic legitimacy.

The Indian democratic system provides citizens with the right to access information however, the public information available to citizens lacks accuracy because social and political factors and corruption lead to governmental disinformation, which political parties use to discredit their opponents who spread false information through media channels. Misinformation about the issues leads to public diversion because people believe deceptive news.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) (The Global Risks Report, 2024) has declared that "misinformation and disinformation pose significant dilemmas" for global society in 2024 and 2025. Thus, the WEF has also determined that "the greatest difficulties in contemporary governance are rooted in the problems associated with misinformation." Given the ongoing

"emergency," it is clear that many potential solutions need to be implemented that can combine legal frameworks with media literacy, as well as the need for transparent leadership by governments. Among the current legal and legislative recommendations to develop a democratic society through proper laws and accurate information, there are several important components. The education system needs to implement information literacy education to help combat "deep fake" technology and artificial intelligence (AI) generated lies that threaten people's understanding. In addition, society must provide people with training so that they become aware of false information and develop critical thinking skills in order to evaluate digital cultural products.

In order to ensure that democracy is further legitimised via mechanisms other than the current courts and legislation, a foundation for a philosophy of information ethics must be established and developed. Information Ethics (IE) is based on the premise that information has intrinsic value and that people create ethical behaviour when they handle information. According to Floridi, there are four ethical principles that must govern the use of information: organisations must not generate entropy; organisations must cease generating future entropy; and organisations must develop.

5. Conclusion

Social media amplifies both the benefits and risks associated with free speech. The platform enables citizens and journalists and activists to raise vital issues while holding authorities accountable. The system enables users to defame others and conduct cyber harassment and spread false information. People need to verify data before they trust information according to verification requirements. Research indicates that when creating digital platforms to provide public access to government information, public agencies must comply with Section 4 of the RTI Act (including creating new digital platforms). When citizens are able to access government data digitally through verified digital platforms, it will eliminate "information vacuums" because they will no longer have to rely on third parties to provide them

with information. Digital platforms must comply with international human rights standards which require them to publicly disclose how to access their algorithms and provide accountability for the handling of user-generated content. According to the UNESCO (UNESCO, 2023) recommendation, digital platforms and governments are encouraged to create a co-regulatory system that provides the ability for human rights-based operational control over shared operation of platforms and governments. Democracies also need to support independent journalism through public funding and legal protections for regional language journalism and for fact-checking, which is necessary to overcome biases created by the propaganda model. Where there are laws limiting free speech, they should only be using authorised and lawful methods that fulfil lawful criteria and ensure a proper balance. Establishing democracy today requires more than simply combating false information, but also ensuring that public space continues to be a source of fundamental knowledge. We are moving into an era of "post-factual" existence globally that requires strengthening the legal structures that will combine with improved information-handling practices.

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