



EXPLORING THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF FAKE NEWS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MANIPUR, INDIA.

Vanlalhruii Khawlhing

Masters of Communication and Journalism
Amity School Of Communication
Amity University, Noida, UP, India.

Guide: *Dr. Kriti Singh*

Associate professor
Amity University, Noida.

ABSTRACT:

Fake news, which is defined as purposefully false or misleading information spread to deceive, has grown to be a significant issue on a global scale. In regions such as Manipur, India, where ethnic or sectarian clashes are well-known, fake news has the potential to intensify hostilities. The clashes that erupted in Manipur in 2023 between the Kuki and Meitei communities offer an interesting case study for thinking about the moral ramifications of misleading information. This research looks at the effects of false information on society, the moral quandaries it poses, and the ways in which fake news has fuelled the war.

Information that has been manipulated to mimic news media content without following journalistic ethics or standards is known as fake news. Propaganda, satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, and advertisement are just a few of the ways it might appear; the veracity and purpose of each form varies. Democratic countries face serious issues as a result of the widespread spread of fake news on digital platforms, which lacks editorial control and distorts public opinion while undermining confidence in credible media sources.

Social media has made it easier for fake news to propagate quickly in Manipur. Users may be largely exposed to material that confirmed their beliefs due to the echo chamber effect caused by the viral nature of fake news and social media algorithms. Fake news that looked and felt like real news increased ethnic and political tensions, which led to social upheaval and widespread violence.

Fake news has ethical repercussions that include eroding public confidence, dividing communities, and warping public opinion. False information being spread during the Manipur war has resulted in moral conundrums, such as the deterioration of moral standards, the escalation of violence, and the manipulation of public opinion.

Keywords: Fake News, Ethical Implications, Manipur, Kuki, Meitei, Social Media

Introduction:

The widespread dissemination of false information has become a noteworthy obstacle in modern society, particularly in areas prone to violence. Fake news has significantly contributed to the escalation of communal hostilities, such those that occurred in Manipur, India, in 2023. The clashes between the Kuki and Meitei communities is an illustration of how false information can exacerbate animosity and widen rifts.

Fake news can spread quickly through social media and other communication channels during emergencies, causing panic and a generalized lack of knowledge. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the moral ramifications of false information during the Manipur clashes by looking at how it affected the beliefs and actions of the impacted populations.

What is fake news?

In their work *"Defining 'Fake news'," Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2017)* offer a thorough examination of the phrase "fake news." The authors define fake news as information that has been altered to resemble news media content in form but not in organizational structure or purpose. Put another way, fake news lacks the journalistic procedures and moral standards that distinguish real news sources, but it nonetheless offers inaccurate or misleading material in a style that looks like real news.

The writers divide up fake news into other categories, such as propaganda, satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, and advertising. The degree of factuality and aim differs throughout each category. For example, parody and satire frequently aim to delight or amuse rather than to trick, but fabrication and manipulation include purposeful lies meant to mislead viewers.

Tandoc et al. not only classify fake news but also point out that it is most prevalent on digital platforms since there is no editorial control or gatekeeping, which makes it easy for false information to spread. Because fake news distorts public discourse and undermines trust in reliable media sources, the problem offers serious difficulties to democratic nations. The authors stress the significance of comprehending the varied definitions and categories of fake news in order to effectively address its effects.

Fake news on social media and its impact:

The writers of *"Fake news on Social Media: the Impact on Society,"* a research published in 2022 by *Olan et al.*, examine the widespread and harmful impacts of fake news on social media. They draw attention to the various ways that fake news affects society, from the level of individual well-being to the level of societal cohesion.

- **Impact on the Individual:**

Fake news frequently causes uncertainty, worry, and mistrust on an individual basis. When people come upon misleading information, it can cloud their judgment on crucial matters and result in bad

choices. Furthermore, being exposed to false information on a regular basis—particularly when it concerns politics, health, or safety—can cause worry or even paranoia.

- **Social Impact:**

Fake news polarizes society, escalating already-existing tensions and igniting violence. The writers point out that false news frequently takes advantage of divisive topics, therefore creating division and undermining societal trust. This may erode ties within the community and impede coordinated efforts to address significant societal concerns.

- **Political Impact:**

By disseminating false information that has the potential to sway elections or policy decisions, fake news politically subverts democratic processes. According to the report, this causes a crisis of legitimacy by undermining confidence in democratic institutions and procedures in addition to distorting public opinion.

- **Economic Impact:**

Fake news can harm companies' reputations and revenues. The authors point forth cases where companies or people have suffered large financial losses as a result of incorrect information, either directly via reputational harm or indirectly through manipulation of stock prices.

In summary, Olan and colleagues underscore the pressing necessity of tackling fake news on social media, considering its far-reaching and detrimental effects on people and the community at large.

Social media networks have made it easier for bogus news to propagate quickly. *Vosoughi et al. (2018)* claim that because false news frequently appeals to emotions or sensationalism, it travels more quickly and reaches a larger audience on social media than real news. Fake news proliferated in Manipur via social media sites like Facebook and WhatsApp, causing confusion and escalating tensions. Social media algorithms that favor sensational material are typically the driving force behind the viral nature of fake news, creating an echo chamber effect where users are predominantly exposed to information that reinforces their preconceptions.

The violent outbreak in Manipur in 2023 is closely related to the description of false news given by *Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2017)*, which stresses manufactured information resembling authentic news. Fake news in this situation heightened already-existing political and ethnic tensions, resulting in massive violence and social unrest. Misinformation that was disseminated on social media platforms took advantage of delicate matters, stoking mistrust and hostility within groups. The scenario in Manipur serves as an example of how false information may skew reality, arouse anxiety, and spark violent outbursts, underscoring the damaging effects of disinformation on social harmony and stability. This emphasizes the necessity of being vigilant and putting in place strong mechanisms to combat false information, particularly in unstable socio-political contexts.

Review of Literature

‘The Science of fake news’

By Lazer, D., Baum, M., Benkler, Y., Berinsky, A. J., Greenhill, K. M., Menczer, F., Metzger, M. J., Nyhan, B., Pennycook, G., Rothschild, D., Schudson, M., Sloman, S. A., Sunstein, C. R., Thorson, E., Watts, D. J., & Zittrain, J. (2018)

Lazer et al. (2018) explore the problem of fake news, its effects, and possible remedies in "The Science of Fake News." Their thorough analysis provides a solid framework for comprehending the moral ramifications of false information, particularly in delicate situations like Manipur, India. The writers emphasize that the public conversation, democratic institutions, and social trust are seriously threatened by fake news, which is defined as false information that imitates news media material. The research underscores the need of differentiating false news from other types of misinformation and highlights that fake news is especially harmful since it aims to mislead and control.

In their discussion of how social media and technology contribute to the propagation of fake news, *Lazer et al.* point out how algorithm-driven platforms speed up the dissemination of misleading information. In the context of Manipur, where fake news has heightened tensions between communities, this is especially pertinent. The authors stress that echo chambers—places where people are exposed to information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs—are breeding grounds for fake news, which exacerbates polarization.

In order to tackle fake news, the report recommends a multidisciplinary strategy including researchers, legislators, journalists, and technologists. The authors support technological solutions to stop the spread of fake news as well as educational programs to increase media literacy. These answers are relevant to the situation in Manipur, where the complicated sociopolitical environment of the area amplifies the ethical ramifications of fake news. All things considered, *Lazer et al.'s (2018)* paper offers important insights into the difficulties and moral dilemmas surrounding fake news and presents a useful framework for tackling its effects in situations similar to Manipur.

Social media fake news: its effects on society

By Olan, F., Jayawickrama, U., Arakpogun, E. O., Suklan, J., & Liu, S. (2022c).

Olan et al. (2022) conducted a comprehensive study titled "*Fake news on Social Media: the Impact on Society*," which offers a comprehensive analysis of the propagation and consequences of fake news in modern digital environments, namely on social media platforms. The writers draw attention to how social media has evolved into a two-edged weapon. It gives unmatched connectedness, but it also creates an environment that is conducive to the dissemination of false information. This is not just a minor annoyance; there are serious hazards to democracy, public discourse, and the general well-being of society. According to the study, fake

news damages people's confidence in reliable sources and traditional media, fostering an atmosphere that encourages the spread of false information and shapes public opinion.

To comprehend the phenomenon of fake news, *Olan et al.* use a multidisciplinary approach that combines viewpoints from information systems, psychology, and sociology. Their findings highlight the ease with which false information may spread and gain traction on social media sites, where it is frequently encouraged by algorithms that give preference to content that is dramatic or emotionally charged. This is consistent with the larger worries about fake news in Manipur, where disinformation has exacerbated social turmoil and communal tensions.

The study also looks at the motivations underlying the production and spread of fake news, noting that these are frequently influenced by ideological, financial, or political goals. comprehending the moral implications of fake news, where the stakes can be especially high because of the region's complicated socio-political environment, requires a comprehension of this insight. Overall, Olan et al.'s research from 2022 offers a strong framework for investigating the moral consequences of fake news in certain local contexts, emphasizing the complexity of the problem and its significant influence on society.

Pragmatist Media Ethics and the Problems with False Information

By Stroud, S. R. (2019) Journal of Media Ethics, 34(4)

Stroud (2019) explores the ethical ramifications of false news in "*Pragmatist Media Ethics and the Challenges of false News*," providing an analysis of how misinformation subverts conventional journalism norms and society ideals. This point of view is especially pertinent when examining the moral ramifications of fake news in particular situations, like Manipur, India.

Stroud highlights that because false news undermines the legitimacy and trust that are essential to democratic debate, it presents a serious ethical issue to media practitioners as well as society at large. The author makes the case that pragmatic media ethics, which emphasizes the real-world implications of decisions and acts, provides a helpful framework for comprehending and resolving the fake news problem. While taking into account the potential consequences of knowledge dissemination as well as contextual considerations, this ethical framework places a premium on stating the truth.

The study emphasizes how inaccurate or misleading information propagated by fake news can sway public opinion and decision-making, disrupting public debate. This is relevant to Manipur, where clashes and social unrest have been heightened by fake news. The necessity for ethical concerns in managing and limiting the impact of fake news in sensitive locations is in line with Stroud's emphasis on the ethical responsibilities of journalists and media outlets to battle disinformation.

All things considered, Stroud's study gives a sophisticated grasp of the moral dilemmas raised by fake news and presents a useful framework for analysing these problems in particular situations, like Manipur, where the stakes are especially high.

The Unfolding Kuki–Meitei Conflict in Manipur

By Pushpita Das: May 26, 2023

Pushpita Das, a researcher of the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses dives into the unfortunate situation that occurred in Manipur in May 2023, following the 'Tribal Solidarity March' organized by the All Tribal Students' Union Manipur (ATSUM). The march began peacefully but quickly turned into large-scale ethnic violence in the Torbung region of Churachandpur district, including the Meitei and Kuki populations.

The aftermath saw devastating sight, with at least 70 people killed, 231 injured, and 48,000 left homeless. The Union government responded quickly, deploying more troops and issuing curfews etc. However, rare episodes of violence continued.

The controversy stems from the Meitei community's quest for Scheduled Tribe (ST) recognition, which sparked protest through the Tribal Solidarity March. The High Court's judgment asking the Manipur government to examine this claim within four weeks exacerbated tensions.

Manipur, struggles with territorial issues and economic underdevelopment, causing resentment among numerous ethnicities. The author highlights the need of community consensus, arguing that hill tribes managed by the Meitei-dominated state administration should have more autonomy. The Kuki community's proposal for a separate state or autonomous council is discouraged owing to probable intra-tribal disagreements and the likelihood of future violence.

To address the underlying difficulties, the author recommends for state-led growth in industry and services, as well as non-farm economic options and a reduction in land attachment. Furthermore, effective, transparent, and inclusive government is underlined as critical to Manipur's long-term peace and stability. Das' study advocates for a comprehensive strategy to addressing the complex combination of historical, cultural, and economic issues that are fuelling the region's continuous turmoil.

A timeline of events during Manipur violence:

By Afrida Hussain: May 4, 2023 (Published By: Rishabh Sharma, India Today)

The India Today story reports on a decade-old dispute returning in Manipur, resulting in violent protests against a high court order to include Meiteis in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list. Meiteis account for 53% of the state's population yet occupy just 10% of the land. The debate stems from the potential of Meiteis being added on the ST list, which would allow them to purchase land in tribally populated highland areas.

Tensions rose when tribal groups called for a shutdown to protest the government's survey on reserved forests and evictions during Chief Minister Biren Singh's visit.

Violence occurred, resulting in injuries and deaths, and photos of armed protestors spread on social media. The article underlines the difficult situation, continued violence, and the importance of security measures to safeguard vulnerable communities.

Aims

- To investigate the moral ramifications of false information during the 2023 Manipur clashes.
- To examine the effects of false information on society and social media during the clashes.
- To assess how the Meitei and Kuki populations' communal clashes are exacerbated by fake news.
- To comprehend the effects of false information on moral principles and social cohesion.

Objectives:

- To detect and examine instances of false information during the height of the Manipur dispute.
- To investigate how public image was impacted by fake news and how tensions between the communities increased.
- To look at how social media contributes to the transmission of false information and fake news.
- To evaluate the moral dilemmas brought forth by the spread of false information during the war. to assess possible remedies for reducing the dissemination of false information during hostilities.

Methodology:

Due of the sensitivity of the issue, conducting interviews inside the impacted communities is not possible. Therefore the research conducted content analysis on selective news reports and did qualitative research on ethical implications of fake news with special reference to the community clash between the Meitei and Kuki communities of Manipur, India in 2023. As the research is based on limited data and content analysis of selective news reports, it results cannot be generalised.

Content analysis:

News Sources:

To find instances of fake news about the Meitei and Kuki community violence, a thorough examination of both online and offline news sources, such as newspapers, news websites, social media platforms, and community forums, will be carried out.

Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling was used to collect and analysed the news report from trustworthy national and international news outlets, available to the researcher to better understand the timeline of events and the role of fake news in intensifying the violence. Only those fake news were considered which were in English, related to the clashes, and available to the research.

Theoretical Framework:

Information Disorder Theory:

Claire Wardle (2017) developed the Information Disorder Theory, a thorough framework for comprehending the different kinds of problematic information that are disseminated in media ecosystems. Disinformation, misinformation, and mal-information are the three main categories into which the theory divides misinformation.

- **Disinformation:** false information that is intentionally spread to cause harm to an individual, social group, organization, or nation is referred to as disinformation. This kind of content is purposefully false and is frequently created to trick or influence viewers for financial, ideological, or political motives.
- **Misinformation:** False information that is not meant to be harmful but nevertheless has the potential to do a great deal of harm is referred to as misinformation. People who really think the information is true but do not want to mislead or hurt others are frequently the ones disseminating this kind of information.
- **Malinformation:** Genuine information disseminated with malicious intent is referred to as malinformation. This kind of information involves presenting accurate but deceptive information in an inappropriate setting or purposefully disclosing personal information to destroy someone's reputation.

Information Disorder Theory is especially pertinent to the investigation of fake news in Manipur since it facilitates the categorization and comprehension of the various forms of misinformation that fuelled the clashes. Misinformation, on the other hand, would be defined as inaccurate information supplied without malevolent purpose, and disinformation would be the dissemination of knowingly false allegations concerning attacks on Meitei or Kuki communities. The theory illustrates the many motivations and effects of different sorts of false information, and it offers a useful framework for assessing how fake news affects the war.

Media Effect Theory:

Basing itself in the tradition of social cognitive theory, *Albert Bandura (2001)* developed the Media Effect Theory, which looks at how exposure to media material affects attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs. According to the notion, people pick up knowledge by watching other people, and media can be a very effective tool for this kind of observational learning. The Media Effect Theory is composed of various essential elements, such as:

- **Observational learning:** Through seeing media representations, people pick up new attitudes or behaviours. This may result in people copying what they see or hear in the media or forming new opinions as a result.
- **Priming:** Exposure to the media might affect people's interpretations of information or events that happen later. Priming gives people a context for comprehending linked concerns, which might shape their perceptions.
- **Framing:** People's comprehension and interpretation of information can be influenced by the way it is presented in the media. The focus of framing is on how the media highlights and chooses which parts of reality to emphasize.

The influence of fake news during the Manipur clashes can be better understood by applying Media Effect Theory. People's impressions of the opposing group, for instance, may have been shaped by media portrayals of the clashes, which could have heightened fear or hate. Fake news reports might also have prepared people to see future events a specific manner, which would have exacerbated the clashes. Through the use of Media Effect Theory, scholars can examine the ways in which media coverage and fake news shaped the attitudes and actions of the Kuki and Meitei communities. As disinformation can have serious repercussions in clashes situations, the theory emphasizes how the media has the power to influence people's attitudes and perceptions.

Agenda Setting Theory:

The Agenda Setting Theory, which was first introduced by *Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972*, explains how the media shapes public opinion by dictating what subjects are deemed significant. According to the argument, even if the media does not explicitly instruct people what to think, it does so by emphasizing some topics over others. "Accessibility" is the process by which agendas are created; in this process, the media serves as a gatekeeper, prioritizing and screening information. Editors and other gatekeepers in the media are vital in determining which stories are covered and how they are presented. This procedure affects the public's perception of important topics.

There are two stages to creating an agenda. The media's priorities are identified at the first level, and the issues' particular characteristics are the focus of the second level. The way the media presents these problems can sway public perception by emphasizing particular aspects of a narrative. The theory also touches on ideas related to framing and priming in communication. While framing refers to how the media presents an issue, influencing how viewers interpret and comprehend it, priming refers to the media's influence on the criteria by which the public judges issues.

The theory's detractors contend that it ignores those who have already made up their views and thinks media consumers are passive. Furthermore, although the media can shape priorities and public awareness, they are unable to invent problems. Agenda Setting Theory is relevant in a variety of communication contexts and is extensively applicable, especially in the contexts of political campaigns, business news, and public relations.

Fake news to an extent influenced the agenda during the Manipur clashes by emphasizing and misrepresenting particular problems, which heightened tension.

Cultural Context Theory:

Edward T. Hall (1976) developed the Cultural Context Theory, which looks at how people understand information and communication differently depending on their cultural background. The hypothesis makes a distinction between cultures with high and low contexts:

- **High-Context Cultures:** Implicit signals, non-verbal clues, and the context of the conversation are important components of communication in high-context cultures. When comprehending information, relationships and mutual understanding are crucial.
- **Low-Context Cultures:** Information is immediately communicated through words in low-context cultures, where communication is more explicit. These cultures place greater value on straight, unambiguous communication than they do on contextual clues.

In multicultural societies like India, where various cultural groups may receive information differently depending on their cultural background, Cultural background Theory is especially pertinent. Given their diverse cultural upbringings, the idea sheds light on how the Meitei and Kuki groups may have processed false information differently in the context of the Manipur clashes. The idea offers a framework for comprehending how cultural variations may have an impact on the dissemination and consequences of false information. A low-context culture might place more emphasis on explicit assertions, whereas a high-context culture might depend more on non-verbal clues and implicit messages, leaving them more open to some forms of misinformation.

Researchers can examine how cultural backgrounds affected the perception and impact of fake news during the Manipur clashes by using Cultural Context Theory. The hypothesis emphasizes how crucial it is to take cultural variations into account while researching misinformation because these variations can have a big impact on how people perceive and react to it.

Origin

There are two primary regions in Manipur: The Imphal Valley and the hills that surround it. The Hills have ten districts, compared to five in the Valley. The Hills make up 90% of Manipur's area, with the Valley making up about 10% of it. The Meiteis, Nagas, and Kukis make up the three main ethnic groups that comprise the population. The majority of Meiteis, or 53%, reside in the Valley, whereas Nagas and Kukis, or 26% and 17% respectively, live on the Hills. Kukis are mainly found in the southern Hills, whereas Nagas are found generally in the north.

The Meiteis believe they are cramped onto a little amount of land in the Valley, which is why they are having this problem. Additionally, the fact that tribe members can purchase land in the Valley but non-tribal members cannot under Article 371(c) of the constitution, worries them. The idea of foreigners settling on their territory

worries them as well. For the protection of their homeland, customs, and language, the Meiteis want Scheduled Tribe (ST) designation. The Tribes, on the other hand, disagree, claiming that Meiteis already have political power and enjoy superior social and economic standing. They worry that by granting Meiteis ST status, they will be able to seize land intended for tribal communities and government benefits.

The Meiteis have demanded the Inner Line Permit (ILP) in order to safeguard the rights of indigenous Manipuris since they are so afraid of losing their land. In December 2019, the Union government decided to prolong ILP. Tribal groups who lack the required documentation to show residency are against the state government's June 2022 decision to use 1961 as the basis year for determining native residents. There are historical reasons for the separation of the Hills and the Valley. The administrative separation between the two regions was imposed by the British and was further highlighted by religious disparities. Following the end of British authority in 1947, the Council of Ministers was tasked with overseeing the Hills.

What is happening in Manipur, India (2023):

Early in May 2023, clashes were reported in Manipur ethnic groups, following a march throughout the ten Hill Districts of Manipur on May 3, 2023, dubbed the "Tribal Solidarity March," organized by the All Tribal Students' Union Manipur (ATSUM), violence broke out. After an armed group attacked members of the Meitei community in the Torbung area of Churachandpur district, the initially peaceful protests descended into violence. This sparked reprisals against the Kukis and intensified the clashes throughout the state. 4,766 normal FIRs were submitted up until July 30 of 2023, according to a status report that the State government of Manipur filed on August 1, 2023. 6,621 of the 11,414 Zero FIRs were changed to regular FIRs, according to the report, which also stated that "there is an overlap of offenses." After 71 more deaths, the total number of deaths from the violence rose to 221 as of May, 2024 after 150 in the first three months of it (May-June 2023). Thirty-two members of the Meitei group and fifteen members of the Kuki-Zo community have gone missing in the last year (2023).

Response of the Indian Government:

The Indian government, in conjunction with the Indian Air Force, increased the number of soldiers from the Indian Army and the Assam Rifles in order to diffuse and subsequent measures like curfews, internet service suspensions, etc. were all implemented by the state administration.

Causes at Hand and Lawsuits:

The Manipur government was ordered by the High Court on April 19, 2023, to recommend the inclusion of the Meitei population in the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list within four weeks. This ruling sparked the protest march. The Meitei Tribe Union (MTU) petitioned for the injunction, which was granted. But this order was delayed by the Supreme Court. The Meitei community has long been in favor of ST classification, and their desire dates back to 1981.

Content Analysis of selective Fake News prevailing in Manipur Clashes causing Ethical implications:

1. Poll-related violence was covered up as "police brutality" against Kuki:



Fig 1

According to a Facebook video, unarmed Kukis in Manipur are rounded up and beaten by law enforcement officials, and this is used as proof of state-sponsored atrocities against them. The Hindu (newspaper), however, linked the film to unrest in 2022 relating to polls. The same video, posted on Facebook on March 6, 2022, depicts police retaliating against those who tampered with electronic voting machines (EVMs) at a polling station in Saibol, Tengenoupal. A reverse image search and keyword search turned up the post. This draws attention to the moral ramifications of disseminating false information, which can increase distrust of the government, exacerbate interpersonal clashes, and threaten social stability.

2. The Manipur Congress president refused to assign blame to his own group:

A video from a national television news show (India Today) has been making the rounds on X (previously Twitter) on July of 2023, amid the political impasse over the Manipur crisis. It purports that the Congress chairman in Manipur has blamed his own party for the violence in the northeastern state. According to the post, the president of the Manipur Congress wrote to Rahul Gandhi, accusing him of being responsible for the problem by pushing for the illegal immigration of Bangladeshis and Rohingyas into Manipur for political reasons.

On closer examination of the video, though, it becomes clear that the letter's author was not a member of the Congress but rather a local party. The author of the social media post mistook the anchor of the video's initial reference to "a Manipur regional party leader" for the Manipur Congress leader.

Fig 2

This instance emphasizes the moral ramifications of disseminating false information, underscoring the necessity of responsible communication for maintaining social cohesiveness. Misinformation has the power to skew political narratives, erode public confidence, and intensify already-existing tensions.

3. Violent acts targeting women in society:

During the riots in Manipur at the beginning of May, 2023 there were many incorrect and misleading rumours circulating all over the state. In an effort to stop the dissemination of false information and misinformation on social media, authorities shut down mobile internet on May 3. A day later, they closed down all internet access. But a horrific photo of a woman's body wrapped in a plastic bag went viral, purportedly showing the murder and rape of a Meitei nurse by Kuki men. The picture belonged to Aayushi Chaudhary, a lady who was murdered in Delhi in November of last year.

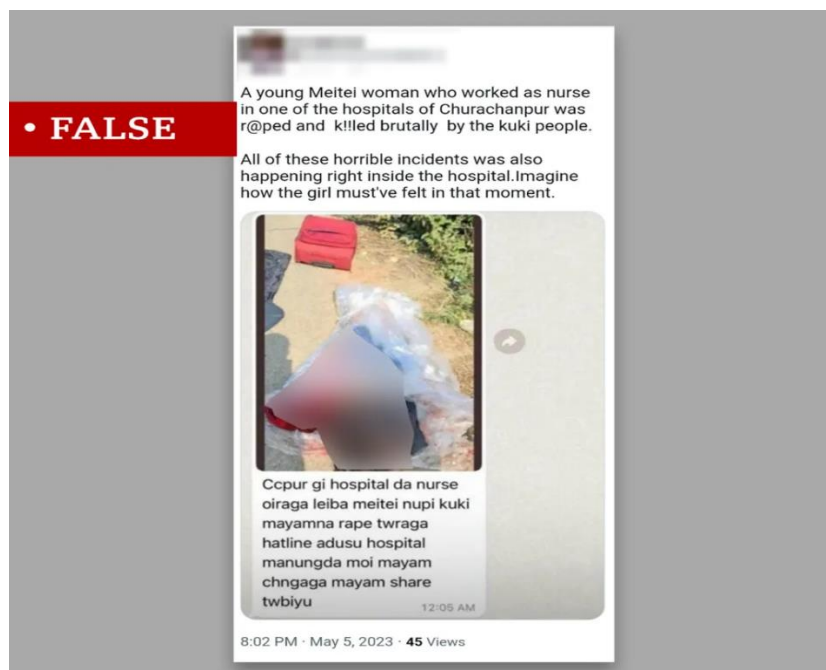


Fig 3

4. Meitei women were sexually assaulted in Churachandpur:

On May 5 2023, there was a false report that said the bodies of a 37 Meitei woman and a Meitei child, aged 7, were being held for post-mortem examinations at Shija hospital in Imphal after they had been raped and slain. It was untrue what people kept saying in texts and on Twitter.

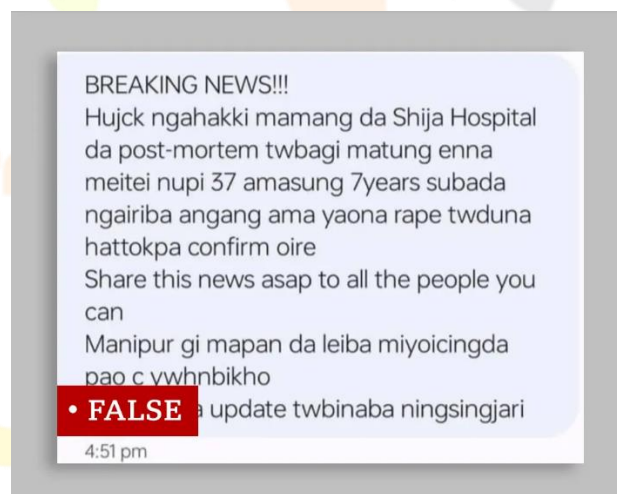


Fig 4

Picture above shows the Fake News mentioned above translating to:- “BREAKING NEWS!!!

After the post-mortem at Shija Hospital, the body was found to be 37 years old and 7 years old, but it was confirmed that it was a rape.

Share this news asap to all the people you can”

According to Shija Hospital, it never happened and they are not allowed to perform post-mortems since they are a private hospital. These incidents bring to light the moral ramifications of disseminating false information, which exacerbates interpersonal clashes and undermines confidence. Precise reporting is essential to averting injury and preserving social peace.

5. Myanmar woman death depicted as murder of a Kuki woman

In another incident, a highly graphic video depicting the attack and death of a lady on a road went viral in late June and was shared with the hashtag #Manipur. The video gained thousands of views despite being erroneously claimed to show the murder of a Kuki woman by armed Meitei men. It reappeared recently, making the same untrue assertion. The footage originates from Myanmar, and the incident happened in June 2022, which is quite some time before the Manipur clashess. An Indian fact-checking website has refuted this false content.



Fig 5

6. Video of violence against woman of minority group in Madhya Pradesh depicted as violence against women in Manipur

In another case, A video of a lady being beaten and tied to a tree is making the rounds on social media amid claims of violence against women in Manipur. The video purports to show that the incident happened in the northeastern State. However, The Hindu (newspaper) discovered that the video depicted an event that happened in Madhya Pradesh, two years prior to ethnic unrest breaking out in Manipur. The victim was a

Madhya Pradesh Bheel (tribal) woman, according to social media posts found using a reverse image search of the video's keyframes dated July 2021. A news report claimed that she was beaten by her family because of a disagreement inside the family.

7. Unrelated photo presented as a protest in favour of victims of alleged sexual assault:

In the midst of a social media backlash against a widely shared video that purported to show Kuki women being paraded nude and sexually assaulted in Manipur, an image of a demonstration appeared, purporting to depict marchers who belonged to the majority Meitei community. By August 2, 2023 the post had received over 141,000 views. Even though the demonstration was organized during a crisis, The Hindu discovered that it was not in favor of those who commit acts of sexual violence.

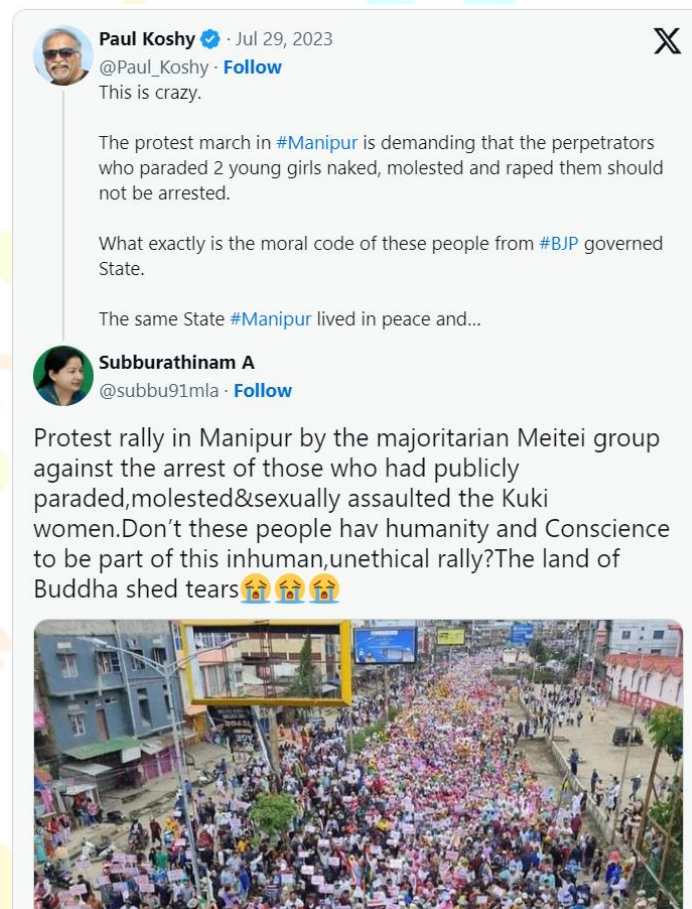


Fig 6

"MASS RALLY AGAINST CHIN-KUKI NARCO TERRORISM" was written on the rally banner. Reverse image search results showed that the civil society organization Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) was responsible for organizing the July 29 event. According to WION, the rally's objectives were to address ethnic clashes and defend Manipur's territorial integrity in the face of proposals for a separate administration from the Kuki-Zo-Chin tribe.

8. False information regarding an arrest:

Misinformation continued even after the Manipur violence came to the attention of the world on July 19, 2023 when a video showing a mob attack on two Kuki women was released. The following day, misinformation about the arrest of a person from minority group for his role in the attack was disseminated supposedly by one of the lawmaker for the ruling party.



Fig: 8

The individual was called the "primary accused of [the] Manipur case" as per the lawmaker tweet, which received thousands of shares and over twenty thousand re-tweets. But this was a false statement. That day, a person from minority group was indeed taken into custody by Manipur police, but for a completely other reason. The arrests, according to the police, happened in various places and had nothing to do with the women's attack. The mistake was addressed by news agency ANI, which had originally linked the arrest to the mob attack. They attributed it to a misinterpretation of police tweets.



Fig: 9

This emphasizes the moral ramifications of disseminating incorrect information, which can erode confidence and exacerbate rifts in society. It also emphasizes how important it is to communicate responsibly in order to preserve social cohesiveness.

9. The Manipur Indigenous Tribal Forum Alleges the Kukis Statement of Apology Is False:

In light of the ongoing ethnic hostilities in Manipur, a falsified letter purporting to be from the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) has generated ethical concerns. The letter, which erroneously said that the Meitei community was using violence against the Kuki tribe, was refuted by the fact-checking organization Boom (Alphonso & Boom, 2023). This false material highlights the moral ramifications of fake news on delicate subjects and heightens societal tensions while undermining attempts at peaceful resolution. This type of fake news can act as a trigger to exacerbate already-existing clashiness and increase animosity amongst communities. Here, the false accusations made against the Meitei people ran the risk of making the already precarious situation worse and putting lives in jeopardy. False information erodes trust and incites fear and wrath, which is bad for community relations and social peace.



Fig: 9

The spread of false information at pivotal times presents moral dilemmas about the obligations of journalists and the possible effects on disadvantaged populations. This instance serves as a reminder of the necessity of media responsibility and the value of fact-checking material before disseminating it. The repercussions highlight how important moral media conduct is to maintaining social cohesion in the face of the clashes. The incident also emphasizes how important fact-checking organizations are to maintaining social cohesiveness and ethics by shielding the public from false information and battling fake news.



Fig: 10

10. The drone strike footage originates from Myanmar, not Manipur:

In another fake news incident, drones were allegedly bombarding a locality in a video that is making the rounds on social media, depicting "Kuki terrorists" attacking Meitei communities. Over 15,000 people had viewed the tweet as of August 2, 2023, which claimed that over 40 explosions had happened in Manipur's Bishnupur district. Reverse image search results, however, pointed to a Telegram post attributed to the Mandalay Free Press—a news organization covering Mandalay and Sagaing—that claimed this was an attack by rebel forces against Myanmar's military government. The Mandalay Free Press's YouTube channel had the identical footage, along with a description stating that it was a rebel attack on the Myanmar Army.



Fig: 11

This case emphasizes the moral ramifications of disseminating misleading information, which can inflame clashes and skew public opinion. It emphasizes how crucial fact-checking and ethical reporting are to averting harm and preserving social peace in delicate situations.

11. False statements made by UN experts and India's response:

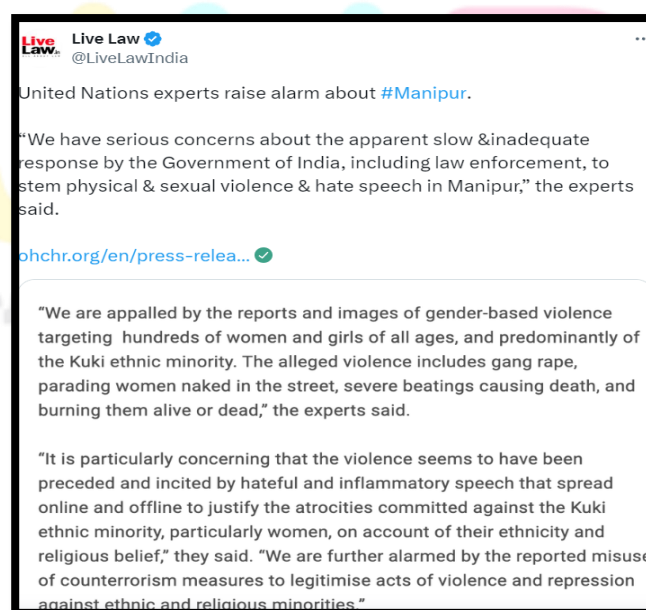


Fig: 12

The Indian government has called the remarks "unwarranted, presumptuous, and misleading" in response to worries expressed by UN experts over human rights breaches in Manipur, India. The experts voiced concern over instances of gender-based violence against the Kuki ethnic group and emphasized concerns like forced relocation, extrajudicial killings, and sexual violence. The Indian government chastised the experts for not waiting for the government's reaction before making their comments, countering that the state is now tranquil. The Indian representation at the UN asserted that the northeastern state is experiencing peace in a letter verbale sent to the Special Procedures Branch of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The UN experts expressed particular worry about the proliferation of inflammatory and abusive discourse that they regarded to be justification for the crimes committed against the Kukis, both offline and online. The Indian government, on the other hand, reaffirmed its commitment to bringing peace and stability back to Manipur and expressed the hope that the experts would avoid from making comments on matters outside of their purview.

Analysis:

Repercussion of Fake News on Ethics:

Ethical concerns were highlighted by the fake news that circulated during the Manipur clashes. It emphasized the perils of false information and the moral obligation of the media and people to confirm information before disseminating it. By spreading lies and encouraging violence, fake news eroded moral principles. The fact that a large portion of the fake news was disseminated on purpose with the intention of swaying public opinion and escalating clashes added to the ethical dilemmas.

Repercussion of Fake News in Society:

Ethical concerns were highlighted by the fake news that circulated during the Manipur tensions. It emphasized the perils of false information and the moral obligation of the media and people to confirm information before disseminating it. By spreading lies and encouraging violence, fake news eroded moral principles. The fact that a large portion of the fake news was disseminated on purpose with the intention of swaying public opinion and escalating clashes added to the ethical dilemmas. So people have to be kept alert and aware of the possibilities that what is being circulated in a society may be disseminated with ill intent.

Involvement of social media in spreading of Fake news:

During the Manipur clashes, fake news was largely disseminated via social media. Misinformation spread quickly and frequently without verification because in apps like Facebook and WhatsApp which are applications that is accessible to majority of the population. This emphasizes how important social media

moderation and ethical standards are. It is crucial to educate individuals about the risks and repercussions of blindly sharing and taking at face value any post found on social media.

Results and Findings:

According to above analysis, fake news significantly exacerbated tensions and increased bloodshed during the Manipur clashes. The results highlight how crucial media literacy and moral principles are to the fight against false information. Social media's involvement in disseminating fake news is especially worrisome because it allows for quick distribution without independent verification.

Actions that can be done to stop fake news and its Ethical implication:

The Meitei-Kuki clashes of 2023 was a very sensitive issue. With the availability and accessibility of social media to almost everyone in modern world, fake news could easily inflame tensions which is why the state government took measures to shut down the internet hoping to slow down the rapid out flow of information. But this in turn could violate the citizens' rights to 'Freedom of Speech and Expression' and cause disadvantage for the people residing in the area from having access to important academic or employment examinations which require online applications or internet access in general. In this case, one must note that verifying the information before sharing is necessary. Not depending just on news stories or messages on social media and verifying information before sharing it by using reliable sources, such as reputable news organizations or fact-checking websites like (<https://www.factchecker.in/>).

Upon discovering a story on the internet, it is vital to locate reports on it from additional credible media sources. One must try to locate many sources and use caution if the information is limited to just one, particularly on social media. It's also critical to remember that fake news frequently aims to arouse strong feelings like fear or rage. Thus, tales that appear to be intended to arouse feelings and emotions should be approached with care.

The Manipur police have launched a 'Rumour Free Number' in reaction to the misinformation in order to confirm information and stop the spread of false information. Even with their best efforts, the situation is still difficult, and it could take some time before the state's internet is entirely restored.

Here are some steps that can be taken in order to prevent the spread of fake news:

- **Media Literacy Programs:**

Putting in place media literacy initiatives in communities and schools to educate people on how to spot false information, assess news sources critically, and comprehend the effects of fake news on society. This entails teaching individuals the value of double-checking material before disseminating it and the need to be aware of journalistic biases.

- **Fact-checking initiatives:**

Establishing fact-checking groups or projects that can promptly confirm the veracity of news reports and disprove misleading material is known as "fact-checking." The public should have easy access to these activities through partnerships with local media outlets and online channels.

- **Ethical Reporting principles:**

To promote responsible journalism, media organizations and journalists should develop and enforce ethical reporting principles. This includes guidelines like cross-referencing material, staying away from sensationalism, and giving news articles context in order to stop the spread of false information. Regulation of Social Media Platforms: To stop the spread of false information, social media platforms should be subject to rules or regulations. This could entail taking steps like identifying and eliminating misleading material, endorsing reliable sources, and enhancing openness on the algorithms that give particular content priority.

- **Community Engagement:**

Fostering communication and interaction within the community to enhance mutual understanding and peace amongst various ethnic groups. This may entail setting up forums, workshops, and community gatherings where people may interact freely, exchange viewpoints, and develop trust.

- **Government Accountability:**

Keeping public servants and agencies responsible for distributing factual information and thwarting the spread of false information. This entails encouraging openness in government correspondence, giving prompt event reports, and skillfully dispelling myths and misleading narratives.

- **Civil Society:**

To address the underlying causes of false news and encourage responsible information sharing, government agencies, media outlets, civil society organizations, and grassroots initiatives should be encouraged to work together. Partnerships for fact-checking initiatives, media literacy campaigns, and community engagement initiatives might all fall under this category.

- **Regarding technology:**

Investing in technological solutions, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence, can automatically identify and flag false information. These technologies can assist in spotting disinformation tendencies, examining social media trends, and giving people the means to confirm the accuracy of content.

- **Further Investigation and Assessment:** encouraging ongoing study and assessment in order to track the success of initiatives aimed at combating false information and make necessary adjustments to tactics. This entails gathering information on the frequency of false information, its effects on society, and the effectiveness of several countermeasures.

In order to restore peace and stability in the region, it is imperative that the spread of false information and rumours be addressed as Manipur deals with the fallout from the continuing clashes.

Awareness regarding the dangers of fake news and the consequences that follows needs to be spread amongst the people. It is important to teach one another how to use social media responsibly. One must learn how to spot fake news and report the post on the platform it has been posted on. There are options provided by many platforms to report misleading and false information.

Conclusion:

The 2023 Manipur skirmishes serve as a stark reminder of the moral ramifications of fake news in escalating disputes and eroding social cohesion. This paper underlines the necessity for ethical standards in the media and social media platforms, while highlighting the negative impacts of disinformation on society through analysis of selective case studies. The results imply that combating fake news necessitates a multifaceted strategy that includes ethical standards, media literacy, and active moderation on social media sites. Understanding the moral ramifications of false information can help society better prepare to dispel false information and advance harmony.

References:

- Stroud, S. R. (2019). Pragmatist media ethics and the challenges of fake news. *Journal of Media Ethics*, 34(4), 178–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2019.1672554>
- Tandoc, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2017). Defining “Fake news.” *Digital Journalism*, 6(2), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>
- Parthasarathy, A. (2023b, August 4). Fact check | Misleading social media posts add fuel to the fire in Manipur. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/fact-check-misleading-social-media-posts-add-fuel-to-the-fire-in-manipur/article67149442.ece>
- Olan, F., Jayawickrama, U., Arakpogun, E. O., Suklan, J., & Liu, S. (2022). Fake news on Social Media: the Impact on Society. *Information Systems Frontiers*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-022-10242-z>
- Call for papers | IGI Global. (n.d.). <https://www.igi-global.com/publish/call-for-papers/>
- Hussain, A. (2023, May 4). How Manipur violence unfolded: A timeline of events. *India Today*. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/manipur-violence-tribals-protest-meiteis-kukis-clash-timeline-of-events-2368651-2023-05-04?onetap=true>
- Ellis-Petersen, H. (2023, July 24). Manipur: why is there conflict and how is the government responding? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/21/manipur-india-why-is-there-conflict-and-how-is-the-government-responding?ref=upstrack.com>
- Online, E. (2023, July 24). How fake news and videos inciting violence in Manipur. *The Economic Times*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/how-fake-news-and-videos-inciting-violence-in-manipur/articleshow/102065845.cms>
- Dispelling some misleading claims about the violence in Manipur - Bing. (n.d.). Bing. <https://www.bing.com/search?q=Dispelling+Some+Misleading+Claims+About+the+Violence+in+Manipur&form=ANNT11&refig=f9ec01f1d0474b02ac25cf926d65bcc7&pc=W130>
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/fact-check-misleading-social-media-posts-add-fuel-to-the-fire-in-manipur/article67149442.ece>
- Krishnan, M. (2023, August 9). India: Biased media coverage compounds Manipur’s woes. *dw.com*. <https://www.dw.com/en/india-manipur-media-violence/a-66473187>

- Jazeera, A. (2023, October 27). In India's strife-torn Manipur, narrative battle is fought on social media. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/27/in-indias-strife-torn-manipur-narrative-battle-is-fought-on-social-media>

