

WHY INFORMED CONSENT FORMS ALONE CANNOT PROTECT US FROM FALSE INFORMATION?

The advancement of communication technology allowed us to have quick access to relevant information as much as we are constantly bombarded with false information. Some theorists argue that this was the result of the optimization of greed and profit, overtaking how we create trust between and among the agents of social media. In particular, this study will show that how we frequently encounter disinformation and misinformation has so much to do with the algorithmic operations behind social media, as these are the main instruments that social media companies use to highly personalize content through its stimulating recommendation of options that users are to take for themselves. Crucial to this issue is the fact that algorithms used by social media are merely serving as cold conduits of data based on “highly engaging content” to optimize the exposure time of users, which, in turn, becomes a profiling tool to place targeted advertisements.

If we treat this whole scheme as internet research for the operation and development of social media platforms, I argue that this should be subject to ethical considerations. Coming from the purview of research ethics, I will explain why informed consent forms of various terms and conditions of digital platforms are not enough to effectively guard the trust that we value in human connection. This paper will ultimately elucidate, using Onora O’Neill and Neil Manson’s theories, why trust in human interaction is so complex that this will entail rethinking how we appreciate the value of informed consent. Rather than siding with the misconception that informed consent forms must include all information that social media users, as research participants, might encounter in the use of social media to merely create a cover for legal liabilities and a ready-made response for any negative feedback and critical remarks from various participants and stakeholders of the research, I argue that we must pay attention to the inherent complexity of human communication. Trust can only be secured in any type of human communication when we acknowledge that it is ambiguous, inferentially rich, and always presume shared background conditions of epistemic and practical commitments. As a propositional act, consenting is always limited in its knowledge but is never abusive. This agentic commitment to meet the problems of uncertainty in ever-changing algorithmic operations in social media can be established by creating more robust communication and transparency of services between social media administrators and their users. Furthermore, I will argue that social media companies that tolerate deception and manipulation must be accountable for the diminishing trust in their platforms rather than merely saying that users have the choice to abandon the platform anytime they want, as in the case of any research endeavor that leaves the harmed participants without any form of reparation and indemnification, much less expect any significant societal change regarding the spread of misinformation and disinformation. This essay attempts to give hope for us to agentively redirect our lives towards trust-building across social media.