

# Balancing Truth and Pragmatism -- Media Ethics in the Age of Fake News

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**Abstract:** In the rapid development of the information age, The goal of this paper is to explore how the media can cope with the ethical challenges when reporting news, especially the responsibility and moral dilemma when dealing with fake news and false information. By comparing and analyzing Kant's and Machiavelli's two completely different ethical views, this paper aims to explore how the media can find a balance between maintaining moral standards and practical operation in the current environment. We will discuss how the media should adhere to moral principles in the face of temptation and pressure, and explore how to effectively deal with the spread of fake news and false information in practice.

**Keywords:** News reporting; Responsibility; Ethical perspective

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## 1. Explore how the media addresses the ethical challenges of reporting the news

In the rapid development of the information age, the media, as a key force for information dissemination and shaping public opinions, can not be ignored. With the progress of technology, we are also facing a new challenge: the popularity of fake news. This phenomenon not only misleads the public, but also fundamentally challenges the credibility and ethical standards of media organizations. The goal of this paper is to explore how the media can cope with the ethical challenges when reporting news, especially the responsibility and moral dilemma when dealing with fake news and false information. In order to deeply understand this problem, we will introduce the thoughts of two philosophers: Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy and Nicolo Machiavelli's political philosophy. Kant's philosophical theory, especially his "Absolute Command of Practical Reason", provides a framework for evaluating the morality of media behavior. His theory emphasizes that moral behavior should be based on the principle of universality, which sets a high standard for the authenticity and objectivity of media reports. On the other hand, Machiavelli's realistic view provides a perspective for us to understand the practical strategies that the media may adopt when pursuing influence and readers' attention. His thoughts remind us that the media may sometimes take morally suspicious measures in pursuit of certain goals. By comparing and analyzing Kant's and Machiavelli's two completely different ethical views, this paper aims to explore how the media can find a balance between maintaining moral standards and practical operation in the current environment. We will discuss how the media should adhere to moral principles in the face of temptation and pressure, and explore how to effectively deal with the spread of fake news and false information in practice.

## 2. Kant's moral absolutism and Machiavelli's political pragmatism are analyzed

Kant's ethics, especially his "absolute command of practical reason", set a high standard for media behavior. In the context of news media, this means that reporting should be based on facts and authenticity, not on manipulating the audience or meeting the needs of a specific agenda. The "Pizzagate" incident in 2016 is a vivid example of this principle. As reported in the BBC news, there was no victim, no investigation and no physical evidence to support the incident. However, thousands of people still believe in this fictional conspiracy theory (Wendling, 2016). This incident shows the possible consequences when the media fails to adhere to the principles of authenticity and objectivity. Kant's philosophy emphasizes the universality and immutability of truth, which is a core principle for the news industry. News organizations have the responsibility to ensure that their reports are not only accurate, but also fair and impartial. This responsibility means that media organizations should avoid distorting facts, exaggerating reports or deliberately ignoring important information, because these behaviors cannot become universally accepted standards of behavior, and just as Pizzagate Time News even makes false propaganda in order to gain more people's attention, and the media industry has more and more serious impact on society today, In addition, Kant's moral philosophy also emphasizes the importance of motivation and intention behind individual behavior. For news organizations, this means that their reports should be motivated by seeking truth and providing reliable information, not by pursuing profit or influence. This aspect of Kant's theory is particularly important,

because it requires news organizations to reflect on their internal motives and values and ensure that their work not only obeys moral standards on the surface, but also reflects their commitment to truth and justice on a deeper level. Generally speaking, Kant's moral philosophy provides an important ethical framework for the media industry. Nicolo Machiavelli, famous for his masterpiece *The Prince*, advocates a kind of political practical constructivism, which has a far-reaching influence on the behavior mode of news, especially in dealing with authenticity and pursuing influence. Machiavelli believes that in order to achieve higher goals According to the BBC report in 2019, although the investigation by special prosecutor Mueller failed to confirm the criminal collusion between Trump's campaign team and Russia, the media reported this incident in large numbers, showing the strategies that news organizations may adopt to exaggerate or distort the facts when pursuing political influence (BBC, 2019). This behavior reflects Machiavelli's pragmatic thought that the purpose determines the means, even though these means may deviate from the truth. The application of Machiavelli's pragmatism in the media is also reflected in the selectivity and angle of news reporting. This kind of selective reporting may be to enhance the appeal of the story, or to be consistent with the political position, rather than out of the responsibility of reporting the facts. In addition, Machiavelli's pragmatism can also be observed in the media's strategies in dealing with political disputes. In the pursuit of readers' and viewers' attention, some news organizations may exaggerate or deliberately create disputes in order to stand out in the fierce media market. Although this strategy may be effective in the short term, it may have a negative impact on the credibility of the media and the public's trust in the news in the long run. To sum up, Machiavelli's political pragmatism has obvious influence on modern news organizations.

After analyzing Kant's moral absolutism and Machiavelli's political pragmatism, this paragraph turns to discuss how these theories are applied to modern media practice, especially in dealing with fake news and maintaining media responsibility. Modern news organizations are faced with the balance between moral responsibility and practical operational challenges, and need to find effective strategies that can not only maintain the authenticity of news but also cope with market pressure. First of all, the application of Kant's moral absolutism in modern media means emphasizing the authenticity and objectivity of reports. This requires news organizations to not only rely on facts and data when reporting, but also remain neutral when presenting news, avoiding prejudice and exaggeration. At the same time, Machiavelli's pragmatism provides a realistic perspective, emphasizing the flexibility and strategic thinking that may be needed in pursuing goals. Machiavelli's point of view suggests that news organizations should also consider its long-term influence on brand reputation and public trust when pursuing the attraction and wide dissemination of reports. Therefore, modern news organizations need to find a balance in practice. This may involve maintaining the accuracy and depth of the facts in the report, and also need to consider the presentation of the story and its appeal to the public. not only reflects Kant's emphasis on universality and fairness, also satisfies Machiavelli's pursuit of influence. By providing multi-angle reports, news organizations can attract a wider audience while maintaining their loyalty to the truth. Finally, modern media and education need to actively participate in public education to improve the audience's ability to identify fake news and misleading information. In a word, applying Kant's and Machiavelli's theories to modern media practice requires news organizations to find a balance between maintaining moral responsibility and adapting to market reality. By implementing comprehensive strategies and practices, news organizations can not only meet the challenge of fake news, but also maintain their trust and respect among the public.

### **3. The difference between Kant's moral philosophy and Machiavelli's political philosophy**

In the context of the rapid development of the information age, the media, as a key force in information dissemination and shaping public opinion, faces ethical challenges, particularly the responsibility and moral dilemma when dealing with fake news and false information. This paper compares and analyzes the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant and the political philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli, revealing the application of these two completely different ethics in modern media practice Kant's moral philosophy emphasizes that news reports should be based on universally accepted moral laws, prioritizing authenticity and objectivity. In contrast, Machiavelli's pragmatism highlights the flexibility and strategic thinking necessary to achieve goals. In news organizations, these two views create inherent tension: on one hand, there is a need to uphold truth and justice; on the other hand, there is the pressure to attract public attention and cope with market demands.

### **4. Epilogue**

This paper analyzes specific cases such as the Trump-Russia investigation to illustrate the conflict and balance between these two ethics. We find that although Machiavelli's pragmatic strategy may be effective in the short term, it can damage the media's credibility and public trust in the long run. Meanwhile, Kant's moral absolutism provides an ideal model for news ethics oriented toward truth and justice, though it may face challenges in practical application. The conclusion is that modern media organizations need to find a balance between maintaining moral principles and adapting to market realities when dealing with fake news and fulfilling their responsibilities. By implementing comprehensive strategies, including strengthening fact-checking, providing diverse content and opinions, and engaging in public education, news or-

ganizations can effectively meet the challenge of fake news while maintaining public trust and respect in the long term. Through this balance, the media not only demonstrates its responsibility to society but also proves its indispensable role in upholding democracy and justice.

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