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Battling Falsehoods on China's Short Video Platforms

By Xue Zhang

SYNOPSIS

The rapid rise of short video platforms in China has created a fertile ground for creating and spreading falsehoods. This commentary explores the nature of falsehoods on these platforms, examines existing countermeasures, and discusses the challenges, barriers, and potential solutions.

COMMENTARY

Short video platforms, such as Douyin and Kuaishou, have become popular in China as a medium for information consumption. In 2023, short video platforms had the highest user engagement among audiovisual applications, with an average daily usage rate of [151 minutes](#) per user. By June 2024, the number of short video platform users had reached about [1.05 billion](#), representing 95.5 per cent of all internet users in China.

However, the rise of short video platforms has fostered a conducive environment for creating and spreading falsehoods. With media technology advancements and low barriers to posting, individuals can easily film, produce, and publish videos containing falsehoods. Moreover, people are [more likely](#) to be deceived by fake news presented in video form, as they place greater trust in what they see than hear or read.

Falsehoods on China's Short Video Platforms

Falsehoods on China's short video platforms deceive users through [rational or emotional appeals](#). Those employing rational appeals often centre around fabricated professional identities or knowledge, targeting areas of public interest such as current affairs, medicine, and science.

For instance, [fake news accounts](#) can pose as authoritative news outlets by fabricating news studio settings, imitating professional news anchors or misusing AI-generated virtual hosts. Through editing techniques, others create disinformation with sensational bold headlines, eye-catching visuals, and atmosphere-enhancing background music.

[Some doctors](#), whose credentials have been verified as genuine by the platforms, appear professional on camera but are profit-driven, instilling fear to get followers to become their patients through pseudo-science scripts.

Emotionally appealing falsehoods are typically reflected in a broad range of social news, amplifying social and family conflicts or fabricating tragic experiences. In August 2023, an influencer with 40 million followers [directed and acted](#) in a self-scripted scene during his live-streaming session in which he was shown being kidnapped by a gang leader. Then again, [the delivery rider persona](#) has been frequently used to stage dramatically tragic scenes, such as one showing him (or her) “delivering food while carrying a sick child” to evoke sympathy.

As user engagement continues to rise, e-commerce on short video platforms has steadily developed. [One report](#) showed that in 2023, over 70 per cent of users made purchases after watching short videos or live streams, and over 40 per cent felt that these had become their primary shopping channels. More followers and higher traffic can easily be monetised into greater profits, which is the [fundamental driver](#) behind the falsehoods on these platforms.

Through their sensory and emotional stimulation, falsehood videos could thrive by capturing more user attention and gaining higher traffic, taking away opportunities for high-quality videos. Over time, this could lead to a decline in the overall quality of platforms.

Moreover, falsehoods circulated online through these platforms could lead to public misunderstandings of important political and social issues, escalate conflicts, and erode social resilience. For example, fake and staged videos depicting “miserable lives” severely undermine the government’s poverty alleviation efforts. False claims such as [“plastic” seaweed](#) being produced for consumption have caused significant losses to food producers and caused unnecessary public anxiety about food safety. Fake videos about social conflicts can trigger public concern about social security, fuelling mistrust and unrest.

Countering Falsehoods

China enforces some of the [world's strictest laws](#) against falsehoods, with [related articles](#) in its supreme law (the Constitution), general laws (e.g., Criminal Law and Civil Code), and internet laws (e.g., Cybersecurity Law).

The government enacted the [Provisions on the Governance of the Online Information Content Ecosystem](#) in March 2020. These provisions prohibit network information producers from creating, copying, or publishing illegal content, including rumours, and require platforms to govern such content.

The [Notice to Strengthen Management of Self-Media](#) issued by the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) in July 2023 explicitly mandates social media platforms to verify accounts, label and debunk rumours, improve the reach of corrections, and address violations by self-media, i.e., accounts managed by individuals who create and share their content on these platforms. The notice also obligates platforms to ensure self-media cite their sources, hold accountability for content authenticity, and flag fictional, dramatised or technically generated content.

The CAC launched the [China Internet Joint Rumour Debunking Platform](#) on 29 August 2018. This platform and its reporting centre have established accounts on WeChat and Weibo featuring regular updates on “Today’s Rumour Debunking”, “Today’s Science Popularisation”, and “Today’s Reminder”.

The CAC also launched a series of initiatives to ensure a “clean and healthy” cyberspace. This included the campaign “[Regulating Online Communication Order in Key Traffic Segments](#)”, held from 6 April to 15 May 2023, during which platforms shut down 107,000 fake accounts impersonating news organisations or news anchors and removed 835,000 pieces of false news content.

A two-month campaign on “[Rectifying Self-Media’s Bottomless Pursuit of Traffic](#)” was also launched by the CAC in May 2024 targeting fabricated content, exploitation of “hot” topics, biased narratives, socially questionable personalities, and inappropriate “new yellow journalism”, i.e., reporting that emphasises sensationalism over facts.

Short video platforms have also adopted countermeasures of their own. For example, Douyin set up its official rumour debunking account in March 2019, posting self- and jointly-created content with government authorities. In 2023, it updated [several regulations](#) to address falsehoods systematically and introduced features like removing followers to disrupt the monetisation chains. On January 3, 2025, Douyin announced [plans](#) to enhance algorithms recommending debunking content to users, expand fact-checking partnerships, strengthen manual review of hot topics, and engage users in identifying and labelling controversial content.

Similarly, in August 2022, Kuaishou created an official debunking account and set up a dedicated section to prioritise rumour refutation videos created by authoritative institutions. It also announced the launch of [a special rumour-combating campaign](#) to improve multi-party collaboration and co-governance mechanisms. It also disclosed its six-step work process: monitoring, identifying, verifying, labelling, debunking, and handling. On January 7, 2025, Kuaishou stated its [commitment](#) to enhancing algorithm transparency and strengthening rumours and illegal content management.

Challenges, Barriers and Potential Solutions

Despite the countermeasures implemented by the government and short video platforms, these efforts remain constrained due to challenges and barriers that hinder their full effectiveness.

First, the vast volume of short videos makes it challenging to identify falsehoods. Furthermore, detecting them automatically has [unique difficulties](#), including high

information heterogeneity, distinguishing non-malicious artistic editing, and addressing new propagation patterns on recommendation-based platforms.

Second, information literacy education, widely regarded as the [fundamental way](#) to prevent the spread of falsehoods, faces challenges in achieving scalability for the large population, particularly in reaching vulnerable groups such as [older adults living in rural areas](#) who are engrossed with watching short videos and susceptible to rumours.

Third, in sharing profits with content creators, short video platforms play a [dual role](#) as both “player” and “judge”, leaving room for insufficient or superficial content moderation.

What Should Be Done

To address these issues, the Chinese government should improve related laws and regulations by clarifying the responsibilities of platforms, content creators, and those who deliberately circulate falsehood videos. Law enforcement agencies should intensify actions and strengthen routine governance with more frequent random checks on platform content.

Short video platforms should take full responsibility for content moderation, collaborate with academic and research institutes to integrate AI technologies with manual reviews to swiftly detect and flag falsehoods, improve algorithms to increase the visibility of corrections, and rigorously crack down on fake identities and rumour creator accounts.

The government, educators, and platforms should jointly enhance netizens’ information literacy skills and knowledge of the relevant laws. The government and platforms could leverage the public by increasing their awareness of reporting channels and consider providing recognition or incentives to those who report wrongdoing.

Netizens should heighten their awareness and act responsibly by critically evaluating video content, promptly reporting deceptive videos, properly labelling staged as well as AI-generated falsehoods, and refraining from creating or spreading falsehoods.

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