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LEGAL APPROACHES FOR COUNTERING FAKE ASTRONOMICAL NEWS ONLINE.

Abstract

Pursuant to Article I and Article XI of The Outer Space Treaty, Space-faring States have continually disseminated general benefits and information procured from space exploration to the public and scientific community encompassing scientific information, photographs and live feeds that have contributed to human understanding of outer space, mankind's extraterrestrial accomplishments and advancements in the field of Astronomy, thereby sparking young scholars into space based careers, and inspiring citizens to credence the space-faring industry. The advent of Internet Media has facilitated Space organizations to utilize digital platforms like Facebook and You-tube to swiftly share such space benefits procured, amass widespread coverage and maximize societal impact. Detrimental to realization of such benefits are Fake Astronomical News that are currently flooding internet media. Such misinformation are often exaggerated, shrouded deceptively under credible news reporting and tend to portray in a manner as officially stated by State Space agencies, thereby luring people into trust. They deteriorate public confidence in space industry, escalate panics and causes irrational contemplation on earth, leading to anxiety, Cosmo-phobia and rise of Pseudo-scientific groups including Flat Earth Societies. Further with younger generation growing up with such fake news as introductory astronomical education, the implications of such dissemination draw grave concerns. Profound examples include inter-alia "Apollo program was faked" "Planet Nibiru hitting earth", "NASA predicts 15 Days of Darkness in 2015", "Japanese Astronaut's 9cms growth in Space". Barring news articles even modified photographs of Planets and Fake live videos of ISS operations are flooding social media. International organizations including UNHRC, UNESCO, OAS, ACHPR and OSCE, have deplored prohibition on publication of false news, towards protecting Freedom of Expression, as guaranteed under Article 19 ICCPR and other regional conventions. Similarly the application of human right treaties, to deter Fake Astronomical news becomes challenging as such publications hardly defame, threaten national security and public order or incite hatred. Further, pursuant to the mere-conduit principle, Online intermediaries are immunized from liability arising from third party publications. Thereby addressing these challenges, this paper examines the possible recourse available to states for recommending effective legal measures to 1) Regulate Online intermediaries in developing ideal algorithms, content monitoring methods, offering copyrights protection to Space agencies and companies from illicit use of photos and videos, 2) Ascertain liability for such publications to protect such information derived from Space explorations from false manipulations.