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Peace, truth and the digital public sphere: A Wesleyan postcolonial theology

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Digital platforms shape public meaning in the Philippines, where social media is deeply embedded in political, cultural and religious life and where struggles over truth and visibility are reflected in postcolonial conditions. This study develops a theological account of peace, truth and moral speech for digital public life in response to limited Wesleyan and postcolonial theological engagement with online misinformation. The study is situated in the Philippine digital public sphere as a context for theological reflection on how public judgement is formed through digitally mediated communication. This study uses a constructive public theology research design. The study combines analysis of digital misinformation and postcolonial theory with theological interpretation of Isaiah 32:17, John 8:32 and James 3, and engagement with John Wesley's writings on holiness and social responsibility. The study finds that misinformation causes moral harm by distorting truth, weakening shared judgement and amplifying unequal voices. These processes are described as digital colonisation, in which digital platforms and organised influence reshape control over public narratives and damage the conditions needed for peace. The study concludes that churches require a formation-centred approach that treats digital participation as a moral practice rather than a technical activity, guiding Christians towards truthful speech, responsible communication and peacebuilding through digital holiness.

Contribution: This article interprets misinformation in the Philippine digital public sphere as digital colonisation, develops a biblical–postcolonial–Wesleyan account of peace, truth and moral speech and proposes digital holiness – structured as practices of seeing, discerning, speaking, building, protecting and transforming – as a framework for church formation and peacebuilding in postcolonial digital contexts.

Keywords: Wesleyan theology; digital misinformation; digital colonisation; public theology; postcolonial theology; peacebuilding; Philippine Christianity.

Introduction

Digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and messaging applications have become key gatekeepers of public meaning. They shape what people see, what becomes visible or popular and what enters public debate. Political communication therefore increasingly works through hybrid media systems, where actors combine social media and traditional media to gain attention and shape public issues (Paatelainen, Kannasto & Isotalus 2022). Research on moral framing also shows that social media does not only transmit information; it often turns moral arguments into short, emotionally strong messages that influence public judgement and deepen moral division (Wentzel et al. 2024). These conditions make digital spaces easier to manipulate through targeted advertising, influencer networks and personalised feeds that guide attention and behaviour (Bessi 2016:319–324; Darius 2022).

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic made these risks especially visible through an infodemic, where false and misleading information harmed public trust and public decision-making (Okan et al. 2020:5503; Park, Park & Chong 2020:e18897). Empirical studies further show that false information often spreads faster and wider than accurate reporting, partly because of network dynamics and users' preference for new and emotionally charged content (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral 2018:1146–1151; Zollo et al. 2015:e0138740). Misinformation is therefore not only a technical problem; it raises moral questions about truth, freedom and the formation of public attitudes.

In postcolonial societies, these questions become sharper because conflicts over information connect with older power imbalances about who is heard, whose stories are trusted and how

collective memory is shaped. Digital systems were not neutral tools; they can support new forms of control, especially when global platform designs shape local culture and public discussion (Couldry & Mejias 2019:10–14; Jin 2025; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986:16–33). In the Philippines – where debates about authority, legitimacy and historical memory remain politically charged – misinformation can be understood not only as failed communication but also as moral harm that reshapes visibility, credibility and belonging in public life. This article examines digital misinformation in the Philippine digital public sphere as a theological problem of truth, moral speech and peace under postcolonial conditions. More specifically, it argues that misinformation should be interpreted not only as failed communication but as a patterned struggle over narrative authority, public judgement and communal life.

In this article, I use *digital colonisation* to refer to a patterned form of narrative domination where unequal power – enabled by platform infrastructures and coordinated influence – shapes what becomes visible, credible and socially actionable in the public sphere. It is 'colonising' not simply because falsehood circulates, but because public judgement is reorganised: Some actors gain stronger capacity to set agendas, normalise moral frames and shape collective memory, while other voices are pushed to the margins. Digital colonisation differs from misinformation in general, which may be accidental or episodic, and from ordinary political persuasion, which assumes contestation within shared norms of accountability. The term is used analogically rather than equivalently: It does not claim identity with the violence of classical colonial rule but points to continuity in logic – domination through control of meaning and credibility – now exercised through data extraction, attention and algorithmic visibility (Couldry & Mejias 2019:10–14; Jin 2025; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986:1–6).

The Philippines provides an important context for examining these dynamics. Social media use is widespread, and moral and religious language strongly shapes public life. Social media has also become a primary source of political information and engagement, especially among young people (Sacramento 2020:305–329; Uyheng & Montiel 2021:84–99). In these conditions, organised messaging and emotionally powerful narratives can sustain polarisation even when fact-checking mechanisms exist (Zollo et al. 2017:e0181821). Digital publics also raise ethical challenges: Many users struggle to assess credibility, bias and trustworthiness online (Stamenković & Đukić Živadinović 2023:49–63), and low levels of digital and eHealth literacy may increase vulnerability to misinformation and harmful decision-making (Okan et al. 2020:5503; Yang, Luo & Chiang 2017:e15).

Although media studies increasingly explain how misinformation spreads, theological engagement with misinformation, truth and digital communication is beginning to emerge in practical theology, public theology and Christian ethics (Douglas 2018:61–73; Schlag 2019:420–429; Thacker 2022:39–50). These studies raise important questions about truth communication, faith-based information cultures and Christian responsibility in digitally saturated settings, yet they do not adequately develop a theological account of truth-telling, moral speech and peace as public goods in postcolonial digital public life. In addition, although Filipino theologians have engaged questions of postcolonial discourse, contextual theology and new media (Brazal 2023:95–109; Pilario 2006:9–51), sustained theological work on digital misinformation as a postcolonial problem in the Philippine digital public sphere remains limited, especially from an explicitly Wesleyan perspective. This article therefore aims to develop a constructive public theology of peace, truth and moral speech for the Philippine digital public sphere in response to misinformation as moral harm.

To meet this aim, the study pursues three objectives:

- To interpret misinformation in the Philippine digital public sphere as a form of digital colonisation, understood as a struggle over narrative authority, credibility and moral imagination shaped by platform systems and organised influence (Couldry & Mejias 2019; Jin 2025; Uyheng & Montiel 2021:84–99).
- To develop a biblical–postcolonial–Wesleyan account of peace, truth and moral speech through readings of Isaiah 32:17, John 8:32 and James 3.
- To propose digital holiness as a Wesleyan framework for peacebuilding through shared practices of truthfulness, careful judgement and public responsibility.

The argument proceeds in three parts. The section 'Postcolonial and digital context of the Philippines' examines misinformation and narrative power in Philippine digital public life. The section 'A biblical–postcolonial–Wesleyan theology of peace, truth and narrative' develops a biblical–postcolonial–Wesleyan theology of peace, truth and speech. The section 'A peacebuilding digital holiness framework' presents digital holiness as a practical theological framework for peacebuilding and public trust.

Research methods and design

This study employed a constructive public theology approach. It was conceptual in nature and did not involve empirical data or human participants. The research combined contextual analysis of the Philippine digital public sphere with document-based theological analysis.

Sources included peer-reviewed scholarship on digital misinformation and postcolonial theory, selected biblical texts and John Wesley's writings on holiness and social responsibility. In addition, selected reports from reputable Philippine and international news organisations were used to illustrate public debates and contextual dynamics related to misinformation. These reports were used for contextual illustration and did not replace scholarly sources.

The analysis proceeded through theological–hermeneutical interpretation and conceptual synthesis. Existing research on digital misinformation was interpreted through a postcolonial lens attentive to Philippine histories of power and moral formation and brought into dialogue with Scripture and Wesleyan theology. On this basis, the study developed a normative framework of digital holiness for peacebuilding and public witness. Empirical testing was intentionally deferred to future research.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Results

Postcolonial and digital context of the Philippines

This section presents the study's contextual findings by synthesising scholarship on digital misinformation, narrative power and public authority in the Philippines. It shows that misinformation functioned not only as incorrect information but also as a struggle over credibility, visibility and moral imagination in a postcolonial setting.

Postcolonial roots of narrative power

Control over public stories in the Philippines has been shaped by long histories of colonial and postcolonial power. Studies on land reform and political economy showed that colonial systems helped produce powerful elites whose influence continued beyond land and wealth into public meaning – who was believed and who was ignored (Adam 2013:232–245). Within such structures, some voices became 'credible' by default, while others were pushed to the margins.

Research also showed that media institutions have long shaped political legitimacy and public order by enabling the state and elites to frame issues and guide public debate (Suswanta et al. 2021:35–48). In contemporary politics, actors still compete for attention through hybrid media systems by combining social media and traditional media to amplify messages and set agendas (Darius 2022; Paatelainen et al. 2022). This suggests that communication power remains uneven and often benefits those who already have influence.

Digital platforms may reinforce these patterns. Platform imperialism theory argues that global platform systems can extend inequality through algorithmic visibility and profit-driven design (Jin 2025). Research on images and memes further shows how short, emotional messages can strengthen dominant stories while sidelining other viewpoints (Mascarenhas, Friedman & Cordes 2024:1087–1103). These studies support a basic point: Contesting public meaning is not new in the Philippines, but digital systems change its speed, reach and intensity.

Digital misinformation as narrative domination

Misinformation becomes more powerful online when platforms reward engagement more than accuracy. Studies of COVID-19 misinformation suggest that visibility often depends on platform mechanisms such as engagement rankings and network clustering rather than on truth (Cheng et al. 2021). In the Philippines, where political discussion takes place heavily on social media, these dynamics create conditions open to manipulation and narrative takeover.

Research on online political influence shows that state and non-state actors can run coordinated campaigns across platforms. These efforts often rely on emotional framing, repetition and organised networks to shape public opinion (Martin, Shapiro & Ilhardt 2023:868–876). Studies on fact-checking also show that emotionally compelling misinformation can remain influential even when corrections are available (Zollo et al. 2017). Misinformation should therefore not always be treated as an innocent mistake. In some cases, it is used strategically to maintain certain interpretations of reality.

Under these conditions, control over visibility becomes control over credibility. Digital misinformation therefore functions as narrative domination that shapes what people trust and how they interpret public reality.

Narrative control in Philippine political life

Research suggests that online political influence in the Philippines is often organised rather than random. Studies on digital political engagement show that online activity increases during elections and is often linked to organised networks rather than ordinary civic participation (Sacramento 2020:305–329). Other studies suggest that platform systems reward fast-spreading content, even when it is misleading or divisive (Seckin et al. 2024). When speed and emotion matter more than accuracy, coordinated actors gain an advantage.

Investigative journalism and public reports have also described coordinated misinformation networks during Philippine elections (Gascon 2025; McPherson 2025). These reports do not replace peer-reviewed research, but they illustrate that misinformation is recognised as a public problem beyond universities. Read alongside academic studies on networked influence, these reports support the view that digital political discussion is often shaped by actors with technical skills and organisational resources rather than by equal public participation. This kind of narrative control affects more than election outcomes; it weakens public trust and accountability and shapes what many people accept as 'true'. In everyday life, many Filipinos encounter political claims not through official news outlets but through family group chats, influencer pages and short-form videos shared across platforms.

Cultural and religious dimensions of the digital public sphere

The Philippine digital public sphere is strongly shaped by moral and religious language. Research on populism shows

that political support is often built through moral stories about discipline, order and citizenship, and these narratives are amplified online (Arguelles 2019:417–437). Studies of online drug war discourse also show intense debates about guilt, justice and compassion – moral issues often shaped by religious imagination (Uyheng & Montiel 2021:84–99). This means that digital conflict is not only about facts; it is also about moral identity and moral judgement.

Research on misinformation shows that emotional content spreads faster than careful public discussion, increasing polarisation and symbolic conflict (Zollo et al. 2015). Research on conspiracy messaging also suggests that identity-based and emotionally charged claims are difficult to resist unless communities develop stronger interpretive and moral strategies (Bessarabova et al. 2024). In a society where moral language carries public weight, platform incentives may deepen cultural and ethical division.

Philippine studies show that misinformation is also a wider cultural and social threat. Research on COVID-19 misinformation describes how false claims spread across language communities and points to the need for responses that include literacy education, media institutions and community action (Isip Tan et al. 2023). Fact-checking initiatives, such as Vera Files' misinformation tip line, show how civil society groups defend shared standards of truth, even while their work also reveals how fragile public trust can be online (VERA Files 2021).

These realities place faith communities in a complex position. Digital platforms create new opportunities for religious communication and moral formation, but they are shaped by commercial goals and algorithms that may not support truth, justice or human dignity (Jin 2025). Cloete (2015:1–7) argues that digital culture requires theological interpretation because it reshapes how communities live, create meaning and relate to one another. Practical theology supports this approach by treating digital symbols and communication practices (such as hashtags) as forms of lived faith that require discernment (Van den Berg 2014).

Synthesis: From digital diagnosis to theological stakes

The literature suggests that misinformation in the Philippine digital public sphere is not only wrong information. It is also a struggle over narrative authority, credibility and moral imagination. When algorithms, coordinated campaigns and emotionally charged content shape what appears 'normal' or 'true', communities can lose shared standards for judgement and public discussion (Martin et al. 2023:868–876; Vosoughi et al. 2018:1146–1151; Zollo et al. 2015). In postcolonial societies, this instability is not neutral. It connects with older inequalities of voice and symbolic power and can further disadvantage less resourced communities (Jin 2025; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986). While research can explain how platform systems and coordinated campaigns shape belief and behaviour, it cannot decide what communities ought to do. The next section therefore develops a biblical, postcolonial and Wesleyan account of peace, truth and responsible speech as a guide for Christian discipleship in contested digital public life.

A biblical–postcolonial–Wesleyan theology of peace, truth and narrative

'Postcolonial and digital context of the Philippines' section showed how organised influence and unequal visibility shaped digital public life in the Philippines. These dynamics affected more than misinformation as incorrect content; they reshaped credibility, trust and public voice. They also shaped public judgement, understood here as the shared ways communities assessed claims, decided whom to trust and formed moral evaluations in public life. Much empirical research on misinformation and digital networks came from Western contexts, but it remained useful because it identified platform-level patterns – such as algorithmic amplification, emotional virality and coordinated influence – that could operate across settings even when local meanings differed. With a postcolonial lens attentive to Philippine histories of power, this section turned to Scripture and Wesleyan theology to frame peace, truth and speech as shared moral responsibilities. Read together, Isaiah, John and James provided a biblical grammar for public life: Peace depended on justice, truth was tied to freedom and speech carried moral power.

Shalom and the postcolonial fracture of narrative peace

Isaiah's claim that 'the effect of righteousness will be peace' (Is 32:17) expressed a vision of public life, not only private virtue. Isaiah 32 contrasted corrupt rule that distorted judgement and exploited the vulnerable (Is 32:5–8) with a renewed social order marked by justice, stability and trust (Is 32:16–18). Peace [*shalom*] was therefore more than the absence of conflict. It was the social fruit of righteousness lived in communal relationships. When public judgement was distorted, peace became fragile; when justice was practised, peace became sustainable.

Wesley read this text as a moral claim about the social consequences of righteousness: Peace grew from right relationship with God and neighbour rather than from power alone (Wesley 1754). This mattered for the Philippine digital setting because unequal control over visibility and credibility could fracture peace by weakening justice in public life. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argued that colonial domination worked not only through force and institutions but also through control of language, stories and public meaning (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986:16–33). When powerful actors captured public narratives – whether through colonial systems or digitally mediated attention economies – communities struggled to recognise one another truthfully, and dignity was diminished.

In Isaiah's terms, this distortion was not morally neutral: It undermined justice and therefore eroded the conditions for

peace. A Wesleyan perspective strengthened this point by treating speech and judgement as morally significant practices. Habits that normalised exclusion, distortion or silencing moved communities away from righteousness and towards injustice.

Truth, freedom and digital misinformation as postcolonial domination

John 8:32 – 'you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' – was often used as a slogan, but its context was communal and contested. Jesus spoke to those who claimed belief yet resisted the demands of abiding in his word (Jn 8:31–33). In John, truth [*alētheia*] was not only factual accuracy. It was faithful disclosure of reality that reoriented life towards God. Freedom was therefore not only inner release; it was liberation from forms of bondage that distorted judgement and allegiance (Jn 8:34–36). Read in context, the saying resisted over-spiritualisation: Truth mattered publicly because untruth sustained domination, misrecognition and captivity to false loyalties.

Wesley likewise interpreted truth as formative and liberating, shaping belief and practice in ways that enabled responsible life before God and neighbour (Wesley 1755). This connection helped explain why digital misinformation was more than an informational problem. When algorithms, coordinated influence and emotionally charged narratives destabilised shared reference points, communal discernment weakened and moral agency narrowed. In Johannine terms, untruth became a kind of bondage: It eroded trust, constricted imagination and made communities easier to dominate than to liberate.

Postcolonial analysis deepened this point by naming continuity between older and newer regimes of meaning-control. Where colonial powers shaped schools, print culture and official histories, contemporary actors could shape what appeared credible and urgent through digital infrastructures. Platform imperialism highlighted how inequality could persist through algorithmic control of attention, legitimacy and visibility (Jin 2025). When truth was displaced in these ways, freedom was reduced, and the social conditions for peace were damaged.

Speech ethics, manipulated narratives and political harm

James warned that 'the tongue is a fire' (Ja 3:5–6). Using images of a small rudder steering a ship and a spark igniting a forest, James portrayed speech as a force that could direct or devastate shared life. The warning was not limited to personal self-control; it concerned the moral ecology of community life. James addressed dispersed communities facing pressure and conflict, where destructive speech threatened cohesion and moral integrity.

Wesley echoed this communal reading by treating speech as a site of holiness and harm: Words could build neighbour-love or corrode societies through deception and cruelty (Wesley 1755). In the Philippine digital public sphere, coordinated manipulation and inauthentic amplification could distort political discussion by creating a false sense of agreement, legitimacy and moral certainty. In James's imagery, such practices functioned like fire: They inflamed suspicion, corroded trust and weakened the conditions needed for communal peace.

Wesley's General Rules located this within a wider moral vision. The first rule – 'do no harm' – treated love of neighbour as the guiding norm for Christian practice (Thompson 2013:9; Wesley 1989:70). Digital deception violated this norm by treating persons as targets rather than moral agents. When manipulated narratives damaged trust and public judgement, they weakened the moral foundations needed for justice, reconciliation and social healing.

Cultural and religious meaning-making in digital communities

Philippine digital publics often intensified moral and religious language. Populist mobilisation could rely on moral narratives about discipline, order and citizenship, amplified online (Arguelles 2019:417–437). Discourse around the drug war also revealed public struggles over guilt, justice and compassion shaped by religious imagination (Uyheng & Montiel 2021:84–99). At the same time, research showed that emotionally resonant content spread faster than careful deliberation, strengthening polarisation and symbolic conflict (Vosoughi et al. 2018:1146–1151). Studies of conspiracy narratives likewise suggested that identity-based messages remained influential unless communities developed strong interpretive and moral resources (Bessarabova et al. 2024).

Wesley's account of holiness offered a theological response. Holiness was social and was expressed through love practised in an accountable community (Wesley [1766]1966:§27). Digital communication therefore became a moral practice. The question was not only what people posted but also what habits of speech, trust and attention were formed through digital life. Digital spaces could support Christian witness, but they could also deepen division and harm peace unless they were governed by truthfulness, humility and love of neighbour. This biblical–postcolonial–Wesleyan framing prepared the ground for the next section's proposal of digital holiness as a peacebuilding practice within a contested digital public sphere.

A peacebuilding digital holiness framework

This study develops digital holiness as a normative framework for Christian discipleship in the digital public sphere. It is offered as a theological grammar for peacebuilding and public witness, not as an empirical model based on field data. Building on the 'Postcolonial and digital context of the Philippines' and 'A biblical–postcolonial–Wesleyan theology of peace, truth and narrative' sections, the framework treats digital life as a site of moral formation: Online environments shape habits of attention, trust and speech and are influenced by power, narrative control and emotional manipulation.

In Wesleyan theology, holiness is practised through truthfulness, love of neighbour and social responsibility; digital participation therefore belongs to discipleship. Any constructive ecclesial response must therefore remain self-critical, recognising that churches are not automatically innocent of the structures of domination they seek to resist. In the Philippines and wider colonial history, churches have at times been entangled with unequal power, shaped public memory and reinforced imaginaries in which the body Catholic and the body politic are too closely fused, with exclusionary and politically distorting effects (Francisco 2016:61–69). Digital holiness must therefore be framed not as ecclesial innocence, but as a practice of repentance, accountability and truthful witness within a contested public sphere.

Digital holiness is presented as a set of shared practices that orient Christian participation towards peace, truth and justice. The framework is organised into six connected movements – See, Discern, Speak, Build, Protect, and Transform. These movements function as a theological grammar rather than a technical checklist, and can guide preaching, catechesis, leadership formation and public witness in contexts marked by unequal narrative power.

See: Recognising digital power through prevenient grace

Digital holiness begins by noticing how power and emotion shape what people see, trust and share online. Platforms are structured by algorithms, attention economies and unequal access to visibility, often amplifying sensational or emotionally charged content even when it is inaccurate (Vosoughi et al. 2018:1146–1151; Zollo et al. 2015:e0138740). In postcolonial contexts, these dynamics can intensify older inequalities of voice and authority (Jin 2025).

Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace frames this movement. Prevenient grace is God's prior action that awakens moral awareness and opens persons to truth before conscious response (Wesley [1766]1966:§85–86). Applied to digital life, it supports moral perception – recognising harm, deception and injustice before reacting – and aligns with 'do no harm' (Wesley 1989:70).

Discern: Truth, holiness and sanctifying judgement

The second movement is discernment. Scripture links truth with freedom (Jn 8:32), peace with justice (Is 32:17) and speech with moral responsibility (Ja 3:5–10). Wesleyan theology holds these themes together through grace, which shapes judgement as well as belief. Justifying and sanctifying grace do more than forgive; they gradually transform perception, desire and moral reasoning (Wesley [1766]1966:§19–23).

Discernment is therefore more than fact-checking. It forms a judgement oriented towards love of God and neighbour. In digital settings, this includes resisting impulsive sharing, slowing down polarising narratives and practising prayerful evaluation. Discernment is also communal. Wesley insisted that holiness is formed through teaching, accountability and disciplined practice within the Christian community (Field 2015; Wesley 1989). Applied online, communities learn to test claims, name manipulation and redirect attention towards peace and justice.

Speak: Neighbour – Love and the ethics of digital speech

The third movement concerns speech. In networked environments, ordinary words can circulate rapidly and widely, shaping public perception at scale. James's warning that 'the tongue is a fire' (Ja 3:6) has special force in digital publics, where harmful speech spreads easily and intensifies division.

Wesley treated speech as central to Christian obedience. In the General Rules, 'do no harm' functions as a guiding standard for communication (Wesley 1989:70). Mockery, deception and careless repetition violate neighbour-love by treating persons as targets rather than moral agents. Ethical digital speech is measured not only by accuracy but also by its effects on trust, dignity and peace (Thompson 2013).

Build: Social holiness and digital community formation

The fourth movement shifts from personal discipline to communal design. Church-related digital spaces – pages, group chats and livestream comments – extend ecclesial life and shape the church's public witness. Without guidance, these spaces can reproduce polarisation, misinformation and hostility.

Wesley's claim that 'there is no holiness but social holiness' offers direction (Wesley [1766]1966:§24). Holiness is expressed by ordering communal life towards love, justice and peace. Digital communities therefore need practices that shape interaction, accountability and care. Research suggests that active moderation and credible information-sharing can reduce misinformation and hostile speech (Zollo et al. 2017:e0181821).

Protect: Pastoral care, prudence and communal safeguarding

The fifth movement frames protection as pastoral responsibility. Misinformation often exploits fear and uncertainty, weakening trust and increasing vulnerability. Studies suggest that verification and delayed sharing can reduce harm (Cheng et al. 2021; Okan et al. 2020:5503).

Wesley emphasised prudence and watchfulness as marks of Christian maturity. Applied to digital life, protection is not censorship but care: It strengthens shared discernment and limits the spread of harmful narratives (Wesley 1989).

Transform: Public holiness and peacebuilding witness

The final movement extends digital holiness into public witness. Peacebuilding includes responsibility for the moral

shape of public life. In postcolonial contexts, this witness challenges narrative domination by treating truth as a shared moral good rather than a strategic resource.

Wesley understood Christian perfection not as withdrawal from society but as love perfected in action, including responsibility for justice and reconciliation (Wesley [1766]1966:§27). Churches participate in digital transformation by naming injustice, resisting manipulation and modelling truthful discourse marked by humility and courage. Partnerships with civil society and education can support efforts to rebuild trust and defend shared standards of truth (VERA Files 2021).

Integrating the movements: Digital holiness as a Wesleyan grammar of peace

These movements describe digital holiness as a Wesleyan grammar of moral formation oriented towards peace. Seeing corresponds to prevenient grace (moral awakening). Discerning draws on sanctifying grace (formed judgement). Speaking expresses neighbour-love in communication. Building and protecting enact social holiness by shaping communal life and safeguarding the vulnerable. Transforming names public holiness as peacebuilding witness (Field 2015; Wesley [1766]1966, 1989).

The framework avoids two reductions: Treating misinformation as a purely technical problem solvable by fact-checking alone and treating Christian ethics as private virtue detached from public responsibility. Philippine theology on digital life argues that digital media reshape participation, authority and communal discernment and therefore require ecclesial practices that widen inclusion and responsibility rather than reproduce exclusion (Brazal 2023). In a postcolonial digital sphere marked by unequal narrative power, digital holiness becomes a shared, grace-shaped practice of peacebuilding.

Implementing digital holiness in church life

Because platform pressures are continuous, digital holiness should be embedded in ordinary church practices rather than addressed only through occasional training (Cloete 2015:1–7). One pathway is worship and preaching, where biblical themes are connected to online habits of sharing, commenting, correcting and repairing.

A second pathway is catechesis and formation. Churches can translate the six movements into short formation cycles that connect theological claims with weekly practices, such as pause-and-pray routines, verification norms for sensitive claims and communal repair through correction and apology. Small groups can periodically reflect on how online habits shape trust, judgement and neighbour-love.

A third pathway concerns governance of church-related digital spaces. If congregational pages, chats and livestreams extend ecclesial life, then moderation and correction are forms of pastoral care. Churches can set clear norms, appoint trained moderators and prioritise the protection of vulnerable members as care rather than censorship.

These dynamics are already visible in Philippine church life: Congregational Facebook pages, livestreamed services and prayer group chats often carry political content alongside devotion. Digital holiness makes these practices more intentional, accountable and peace oriented.

Discussion

This study yields three main findings. Firstly, misinformation in the Philippine digital public sphere functions not only as incorrect information but also as narrative domination. Through algorithmic visibility, coordinated influence and emotional framing, digital systems shaped credibility, trust and public judgement in ways that echo postcolonial patterns of unequal voice and authority.

Secondly, the study develops a biblical–postcolonial–Wesleyan moral grammar for digital public life. Read together, Isaiah, John and James frame peace, truth and speech as shared moral responsibilities rather than private virtues: Peace depends on justice, truth is tied to freedom and speech can heal or harm communal life. Wesleyan theology strengthens this reading by treating judgement, speech and public responsibility as practices formed through grace and accountable community.

Thirdly, the study proposes digital holiness as a constructive framework for peacebuilding. Organised around six movements – See, Discern, Speak, Build, Protect, and Transform – the framework translates these insights into shared practices that orient Christian participation towards truth, justice and reconciliation.

Relation to existing scholarship

The findings extend misinformation research by moving from description to normative theological interpretation. Media and communication studies clarify how misinformation spreads through platform dynamics, emotional virality and coordinated campaigns (Martin et al. 2023:868–876; Vosoughi et al. 2018:1146–1151; Zollo et al. 2015:e0138740). This study builds on that work by asking a distinct question: *What moral responsibilities do communities have under these conditions?*

Postcolonial theory helps explain why misinformation can cause deeper harm in contexts shaped by historical inequality. Scholarship on narrative power and data or platform colonialism shows how digital systems can reproduce domination through control of attention, legitimacy and visibility (Couldry & Mejias 2019:10–14; Jin 2025; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986:16–33). This study adds a theological reading of those dynamics by framing them as threats to peace, truth and shared moral judgement, not only as communication breakdowns.

The study also contributes to Wesleyan theology by extending its emphasis on social holiness into digital public life. While Wesleyan ethics has been applied to social justice and public responsibility, it has been less developed for digital misinformation. By framing discernment, speech and public witness as practices of holiness, the study shows how Wesleyan theology can engage digital challenges while retaining its focus on grace, accountability and neighbour-love.

Strengths and limitations

A key strength of the study is its integrative approach. By bringing together media studies, postcolonial theory, biblical interpretation and Wesleyan theology, it treats misinformation as a moral and communal problem rather than a purely technical one. The Philippine context grounds the argument in a setting where digital power, religion and politics intersect.

The study also has clear limitations. It is conceptual and non-empirical: It does not measure the scale of misinformation, test behavioural outcomes or evaluate specific interventions. Digital holiness is therefore normative and aspirational rather than predictive. In addition, 'digital colonisation' is used analogically; it highlights continuity in domination through meaning-control without claiming equivalence with historical colonial violence. These limits define the scope of the contribution and highlight priorities for future empirical and contextual work.

Implications and recommendations

For public and practical theology, the study suggests that digital life is a site of moral formation and theological concern. Questions of truth, peace and speech cannot be separated from platform design, narrative power and public judgement. Theological ethics therefore needs to address digital systems through communal practices and public responsibility.

For church practice, digital holiness offers a way to integrate digital responsibility into discipleship. Practices such as slowed sharing, communal discernment, accountable speech, moderation and protection of the vulnerable can be embedded in worship, catechesis and leadership formation. Churches are not called to control digital publics but to model truthful, peaceable and just participation within them.

For future research, empirical work could examine whether practices associated with digital holiness – such as delayed sharing, communal correction and moderated church spaces – affect trust and polarisation. Comparative studies could test how the framework functions in other postcolonial or highly mediatised contexts. Further theological work could refine digital holiness by engaging other traditions and digital-ethics frameworks.

Conclusion

This article argues that the Philippine digital public sphere should be understood not merely as a technical environment where misinformation circulates but as a postcolonial struggle over truth, narrative authority and social peace. Against accounts that treat misinformation chiefly as a problem of content accuracy or platform management, it contends that digital misinformation is also a moral and theological problem that distorts public judgement, weakens shared standards of truth and amplifies unequal voice.

Biblical texts from Isaiah, John and James clarify what is at stake in digitally mediated public life. Peace depends on justice, truth is inseparable from freedom and speech carries power to heal or to harm communities. Wesleyan theology strengthens this insight by locating digital participation within social holiness, accountability and love of neighbour, rather than treating it as a morally neutral activity.

On this basis, the article proposes digital holiness as a Wesleyan framework for peacebuilding and public witness. This framework offers a theological grammar for truthful communication, communal safeguarding and responsible participation in digital life shaped by unequal narrative power. Future research should explore how digital holiness is practised within Philippine congregations and how it may be adapted in other postcolonial contexts.

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