

## Written Representation 131

Name: Kwok Siang (Guo Xiang)  
Student

Received: 7 March 2018

Fake news is a phenomenon in Singapore as netizens are able to access websites that publish non-credible news, that are fuelled by views from the public. According to the report by We Are Social in 2014, compared to other countries, Singaporeans are one of the most active consumers on social media (Mohd, 2014). This showed that Singaporeans spend a lot of time on social media, where consumers can easily access fake news shared by their friends or relatives. Such news not only mislead people but in certain situations, may also cause serious consequences. Sites that publish fake news may be fuelled by less savvy consumers who are easily aroused by interestingly scandalous information. By blocking access to fake news or punishing publishers who post such news, may threaten the citizens' 'freedom of speech' in Singapore. However, measures can be taken to curb this phenomenon without compromising this liberty.

One of the causes of an individual spreading fake news may be due to misinterpretations of facts or confirmation bias against authentic news. Misinterpretation of authentic news may be due to the lack of understanding of the context of the news. For example, when Senior Minister of State Josephine Teo said that "you need a very small space to have sex" (Tai, 2016), some people may interpret this information without the consideration of the context in which this statement was inferred from. In a few comments from Twitter that were featured in an article from Asian Correspondent (2016), interpreted the statement as it is, with the minister trying to say that they can have sex anywhere they want, as long as there is just sufficient 'space'. Taking the context of the statement into consideration, she actually made that remark in the context of the Parenthood Priority Scheme, with some citizens saying that they would need a home before they can have children (Tai, 2016).

Confirmation bias may cause an individual to evaluate evidences differently so that they support one's prior belief instead of challenging these judgements (Kaptchuk, 2003). Using the same example about Josephine Teo's statement regarding the 'no flat, no child' belief, another netizen commented in an article written by Zannia (2016), "Cant imagine a PAP minister talking sex openly. Her logic is again insensitive, not understanding and absurd. All PAP care about is more babies for Singapore's future economy. But do they care for the well being of the child without a proper house to grow up in?". This comment showed that the netizen may had a pre-antagonistic belief of the political party in which Josephine Teo was in. This may had lead him or her to believe that what the minister said was illogical, and her political part is only concerned with the citizens' offspring as it favours to the economic growth of Singapore.

Mr Rajaram, who was quoted in TODAYonline, said that some people publicise fake news with the intention to mislead viewers in order to create disruption or sow distrust (Ng, 2017). Such news may interfere with domestic affairs such as racial harmony. The multiple years of relative peace in Singapore is due to the multiracial and multi-religious society (Koh, 2016). Fake news about negative occurrences between

Singapore residents will cause disarray to this peace. Administrators of a sociopolitical website once falsely claimed that a Filipino family complained about the noise of a Thaipusam procession (Lee, 2016). In another occasion, they claimed that Filipino managers employed in Singapore will give special treatments to those of the same nationality at the expense of their other colleagues. Such information threatens the public interest and national harmony of Singapore (Koh, 2015). Professor Ang Peng Hwa from the Nanyang Technological University's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, said in TODAYonline that these contents fuel the hostility between the Singaporeans and foreigners (Ng, 2017).

While media literacy is one of the solutions the government has implemented to be taught in primary and secondary schools (Ng, 2017), critical thinking can also be part of secondary schools' curriculum. Critical thinking involves skills of identifying, assessing and producing rationales for claims (Kwek, 2018). Such skills can enable individuals to critically evaluate news spread by people, to determine if they are credible news. Schools can facilitate in critical thinking by providing multiple types of news for students to evaluate the evidences cited from the claim of the news, whether the news was cited with credible sources of information to support the claims, whether the evidences could be interpreted differently and whether it was presented objectively (Williams, 2005).

Information are readily available as long as we have access to the Internet. However, the important question to ask is whether they are credible and reliable. Fake news has the ability to successfully sell its contents to its viewers, and potentially cause repercussions. Therefore, it is important for everyone have the skill to evaluate critically news shared around by relatives, friends and on the Internet so as to not be deceived by such news.

## References

- Asian Correspondent. (2016). 'You don't need much space for sex', Singapore minister tells young couples. Retrieved from <https://asiancorrespondent.com/2016/10/singaporeminister-young-couplespace-sex/#OzS4zY24FJ46uelo.99>
- Kaptchuk, T. J. (2003). Effect of interpretive bias on research evidence. *BMJ*, 326(7404), 1453-1455. doi:10.1136/bmj.326.7404.1453
- Koh, K. S. (2016, 15 September). Taking Singapore's multiracial, multi-religious harmony to next level. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/taking-singapores-multiracial-multi-religiousharmony-to-next-level>
- Koh, V. (2015, 3 May). Govt orders shutdown of The Real Singapore. *TODAYonline*. Retrieved from <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/mda-suspends-licencesocio-political-website-real-singapore>
- Kwek, A. (2018, 1 March). To fight fake news, build character and critical thinking skills. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/to-fightfake-news-build-character-and-critical-thinking-skills>
- Lee, P. (2016, 25 June). The Real Singapore trial: Co-founder Yang Kaiheng 'controlled bulk of ad revenue earnings'. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/co-founder-controlled-bulk-ofthe-ad-revenue-earnings>
- Mohd, A. A. (2014, 14 January). Singapore among the most active on social media: Report. *TODAYonline*. Retrieved from <https://www.todayonline.com/tech/singapore-amongmost-active-social-media-report>
- Ng, K. (2017, 4 June). The big read: In an era of fake news, the truth may not always be outthere. *TODAYonline*. Retrieved from <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/bigread-era-fake-news-truth-may-not-always-be-out-there>
- Tai, J. (2016, 12 October). You don't need much space to have sex: Josephine Teo on 'no flat, no child' belief. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/ministers-rejoinder-to-no-flat-no-child-belief>
- Williams, R. L. (2005). Targeting critical thinking within teacher education: The potential impact on society. *The Teacher Educator*, 40(3), 163-187. doi:10.1080/08878730509555359
- Zannia, N. (2016). Netizens on Josephine Teo's remarks on having babies before flats. *The Online Citizen*. Retrieved from

<https://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2016/10/14/netizens-on-josephine-teos-remarkson-having-babies-before-flats/>