

## Written Representation 89

Name: Liu Ching Man  
Manager

Received: 28 Feb 2018

---

### Summary

There are three areas where I take issue with even the setting of this committee and the work that the committee claims it's is trying to achieve. Firstly, on the definition of "falsehood". The underlying assumption behind the birth of this committee is that truth vs false is something that can be established 1) promptly, 2) by a committee consisting of a small number of representative, and 3) what this committee establish can be taken to be fair, just, and objective. Secondly, the underlying assumption behind the keyword "deliberate" is that on top of being able to without a doubt distinguish clearly between the supposed truth vs false, it is also possible to establish whether the person spreading the message 1) knows at that point when he decide to spread the message, 2) that his message is "true"/"false", and 3) deliberately chooses to spread the said message even if he knows that is "false". Thirdly, the committee is picking a pointless fight against the dissemination of "falsehood" when the dangers and harms of "falsehood" is not in the deliberate broadcast of the supposedly "false" message, but the real danger is in the ability of those who are on the receiving end of the message to process and evaluate the "falseness" of the message and how they choose to act on it. I am quite skeptical of the reasons this committee is coming together, and I am deeply concerned that it is actually convened to design more mechanisms to rob our society off our already fast shrinking freedom of speech under the hood addressing "falsehood".

---

Phenomenon of using digital technology to deliberately spread falsehoods online

Why are we considering "falsehood" being spread using digital technology as a separate animal on its own? No matter whether the "falsehood" is spread through word of mouth, by snail mail, by printed pamphlet or on social media platforms or communication apps, we can't run away from the three questions I raised in the first place, who gets to decide what is true vs false; how do you establish the intention of the messenger; and is it more about the person spreading the message or about how people are empowered to independently and critically assess the information they receive?

Motivations and reasons for the spreading of such falsehoods

Again I think it is ridiculous to assume we can determine the motivations and reasons behind why people spread falsehood. We can only at best postulate the possible scenarios, based on the (false) assumption that firstly it is possible for us to conclude what is truth vs false, and under this assumption if we have a piece of information which we deem as "false", then there are four situations: A) the messenger actually believes their message were the truth and wishes to spread that truth. B) the messenger actually knows their message is false but intentionally wish to spread that message -- we conventionally call this lying. C) the messenger does not know if the message was true or false at the moment but for some reasons wishes to spread the message because just in case. D) the messenger has very poor communication skills or are unable to put together a coherent message as he or she actually had intended.

As for whether the messenger is local or foreign, I find it bizarre that we need to distinguish between the two, almost like this question is for the committee to fish for certain responses you already have in mind - if the "falsehood" belongs to A, C and D, why does it matter if

---

---

the message comes from within Singapore or from other country - did we suddenly regress from first world into a communist state where we dismiss all external perspectives and choose to trust and value more of those perspectives that stems from similar angle as ours? So does the words and thoughts of a man on the street who lack the literary fluency weigh less than one who has the literacy skills or a learned scholars or a lawyer?

If the falsehood belongs to B, why does it matter if the message comes from other countries or from within our own community? If people are telling lies, are lies by our own people more benign than lies from people outside the country?

Consequences of online falsehoods on Singapore society

I am more worried about the clamp down on free speech, the loss of transparency than the spread of "falsehood". Again go back to the three issues I have pointed out at the start.

How Singapore can combat online falsehoods

Truth versus false is not something anyone can lay claim to. To proclaim that one has monopoly over truth is rash, reckless and egoistic, and to proclaim that one can combat "falsehood" is foolish.

"Falsehood" thrives on lack of transparency, lack of conversation and lack of access to information. Only when the society as a whole keep the channel of communication open and allow people to talk things through and gain larger perspective of things, can truth prevail.

The role of our mainstream media and our ministries and government agencies play in promoting a healthy environment for "truth" to prevail, is in fact very important

---

because i think Singaporeans are generally sensible enough to still wait and look to official news sites, or government agencies for news sources that are verified, and reliable, and most Singaporean do distinguish between official news vs "grapevine news".

It is important that these agencies keep their ears to the ground and if there are messages that are spreading that are contrary to the official perspective, or have dire consequences, these agencies need to step in quickly to provide the official point of view and data to allow people to decide. Share more info. Instead of trying to kill off the "falsehood", by putting your perspective out there, people will definitely choose to share your messages instead of the "false" ones.

An additional point in case anyone in the committee is entertaining the thought of legislating "falsehood" out of the way: it is even more dangerous if we as a society chose to go down this path because mankind has never been able to eradicate sinister lies and if you use the law hoping it will help you beat down messages that you do not like, these sinister lies do not go away, they simply find ways to spread under your radar, and that's worse off for all of us because then you will find yourself having trouble tracking what kind of messages are making it's round on the ground.

Principle that should guide Singapore's response

If anything we should looking into how we can enhance our mainstream media and government agencies' ability to fill the information vacuum in times of crisis, in a trustworthy, timely yet appropriate manner. We must not be foolish to think we can use law as a tool to shut people up, or stop messages we do not like from spreading.