

## Written Representation 23

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Self-trading in financial markets

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Dear Members of the Select Committee,

I fully support this initiative to fight against fake news, or news which is factually wrong. This point is very clear; no one wishes to receive factually inaccurate or misleading information.

However, I would like to highlight a grey area that is in effect, a form of fake news. This is the misleading angle at which certain media organizations present the news. I have been an avid reader of the Straits Times for about 20 years. The Straits Times is without doubt the leading media company in Singapore. I am also a 'somewhat regular' viewer of Fox News on the cable channel. As such, I am able to observe and discern between the liberal and conservative view points, especially with regards to the political landscape in the US. I have observed that the Straits Times often presents a liberal point of view, especially in painting US President Donald Trump and his administration in a somewhat negative light. There is little, or no conservative counter view point. In fact, the Straits Times often reprints entire news articles from the very liberal New York Times and the equally liberal Washington Post, both of which make a habit of condemning President Trump and his administration. There are frequently multiple such articles from these two liberal sources on an almost daily basis (though I must qualify and say that not all of these articles relate to US politics, but a fair number do). This would result in readers of the Straits Times developing a distorted and one sided liberal view point, especially with regards to the world's biggest economy and the world's most powerful man. This distorted and unbalanced presentation is really, effectively, a form of fake news that most people would not be able to discern, especially coming from such a popular media company, one that is highly trusted by Singaporeans.

On the Fox News channel, discussion points are frequently done by the host with both a liberal guest and a conservative guest, so viewers can take in the views from both camps. This is even though Fox News is well known to be a conservative leaning media organization, yet they make the effort to present both view points on many of their programs.

It is the main responsibility of a media company to present the facts and only the facts, not points of view. Articles written with liberal or conservative viewpoint should

be labelled under 'Opinion', 'Viewpoints' and similar such headings. If there is to be an 'Opinion' article with a liberal viewpoint, then the paper should balance the reporting with a counter article offering a conservative viewpoint, and vice versa. News articles should be factual and neutral. It is up to the reader to then read the factual reporting and form his or her points of view.

I hope this committee would consider coming up with media guidelines to ensure balanced and fair reporting, as part of your efforts to eradicate all forms of fake news in Singapore.

I have included several examples (out of many) just to illustrate my point:

Example 1:

The Straits Times, 30 Jan 2017, Life Section. Article: 'Six Nods for Bruno Mars' by Music Correspondent Eddino Abdul Hadi. In the final paragraph, Mr. Hadi referred to the US President as a divisive president. This... coming from a Music Correspondent? This is purely this particular reporter's view point and not a fact. Liberals may generally hold the view that President Trump is divisive, but conservatives generally do not feel that way. They see strong leadership, admire his strong stance on border security and immigration, and respect his pro-business policies. This is an example of biased reporting painting a misleading narrative upon undiscerning readers, and I dare say that it is a form of fake news.

Example 2: The Straits Times, 1 Feb 2017, Top Of The News ( page A8), 'Trump's Appeal for Unity Unlikely to Heal Political Divide' by Nirmal Ghosh. While this article is labelled News Analysis which does allow Mr. Ghosh the right to make his own analysis, it would be better if he had included quotes from both sides of the political divide. All the 3 people he quoted are from the liberal side, hence all negative comments regarding President Trump's State of the Union speech. This again would mislead an undiscerning reader to view the event in a more negative rather than positive light. It would have been better if Mr. Ghosh had also asked for comments from an equal number of guests from the conservative side, so as to have more balanced reporting.

Example 3: The Straits Times, 1 Feb 2017, Top Of The News ( page A8), 'China Urges US to Work for Beautiful Future Together' by Goh Sui Noi. In the last two paragraphs, Ms. Goh reported that commentators said that the speech continued Trump's penchant for bending or disregarding the truth, and then went on to give a quote by a US Watcher on ABC's website to justify this point. ABC is a liberal media company which rarely (if ever) has anything positive to say about President Trump. 'Disregarding the truth' is very strong language, and Ms. Goh should offer some

evidence of this rather than justifying such reporting by attributing the comment to a liberal commentator.

Example 4: The Straits Times, 7 Feb 2017, World (pageA15), 'Democrats' rebuttal of FBI abuse claims could be released' by Agence France-Presse, New York Times. In paragraph 6, the article quoted a Democrat Congressman, and referred to the Republican memo as a 'misleading memo'. In paragraph 13, another Democrat Congressman referred to the Republican memo as a 'false memo'. There were no quotes attributed to Republican politicians, nor any coverage that explains the Republican memo in the first place, which is that the FBI and the Department of Justice abused their powers by using a report (later widely acknowledged as inaccurate) funded by the Clinton campaign to get the courts to issue a warrant to spy on the Trump campaign. Basically the incumbent party abused its executive powers to use state institutions to spy on the opposition campaign team for its own benefit, which in my view is scandalous and highly troubling. Why is there no explanation on this? Why does the Straits Times choose to portray only the Democrat narrative and conveniently 'not report' the real scandal of the abuse of power?

I hope the above examples illustrate the lopsided reporting that regularly comes from one of our country's leading media organizations. Such misleading reporting misleads readers in exactly the same way that fake news does. Hence, I trust your committee to seriously look into this, and hopefully to incorporate this issue of biased reporting into the campaign against fake news.

Please do not hesitate to write to me should you require any clarifications. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Edwin Ho