

Written Representation 5

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Title: Select Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods - Causes, Consequences and Countermeasures

Dear Clerk of Parliament,

I type in support of Minister K Shanmugam's speech in parliament and with reference to the Green Paper presented to Parliament on "Deliberate Online Falsehoods: Challenges and Implications" (Misc. 10 of 2018). In this voluntary contribution, I declare that I have absolutely no interest, in fact am utterly dispassionate about this subject matter, yet, am contributing within my abilities, limits and means. I am a trained and certified United Nations sustainable development framework specialist, and I have also served in the capacity of a top secret unit at HQ Mindef leading up to the War on Terror.

I reported directly to Mr. Ng Yat Chung, who is now the Chief Executive of Singapore Press Holdings, as well as several key commanders such as Mr. Desmond Kuek as well as my then Commanding Officer Alvin Kek who is assisting Mr. Kuek at SMRT lately, several retired generals such as Mr. Lim Feng and Mr. Hugh Lim U Yang who is CEO Building and Construction Authority, and more poignantly also Mr. Ravinder Singh who was the first minority Chief of Army in Singapore.

Mr. Lee Kuan Yew once said approximately, "Freedom of the press, freedom of the news media, must be subordinated to the overriding needs of the integrity of Singapore, and to the primacy of purpose of an elected government." I have never been a fan of press freedom and will never be.

I enrolled at People's Action Party Community Foundation topping my class hence receiving my first academic award from Minister Desmond Lee's father Mr. Lee Yock Suan,

I grew up reading the Straits Times because the Zaobao did not entice me, my first anecdotes on life were from the Peanuts comic strip starring Snoopy and Charlie Brown, I watched Sesame Street before there was Elmo, I studied Doraemon who inspired me that science and technology was the way forward for a future to be possible.

My first internet connection came when I was in secondary one, it was a 33.6 kbps modem connection, the first website I recall visiting were Yahoo. I saw the first nude blonde in 1994 at around 14 years of age, following which I always preferred AltaVista instead of Yahoo because I felt I was in control of search engine results. My favourite localised search engine was actually <http://www.sg> and this point is the key reason why I bother with sending this email.

www.sg returned me results that were entirely Singaporean. It was operated by the Ministry of Communications and Information, it combed local domain names, and it returned information that were usually simple html pages barely different from an article archived by the National Archives of Singapore. www.sg was useful to me because I was a science student doing history lessons as my only humanities subject, I found that if I needed additional details on Sir Stamford Raffles, I could resort to www.sg if my textbooks were deemed insufficient. There were few webpages then, yet, www.sg would point me to the selected few publications that might have made sense. I kept using www.sg even after google appeared and bing tried too, and with the rise of China that was when I saw www.sg fading away. As I was a national infocomm scholar, during the time I was working at a project with National Archives of Singapore I learned of the need of www.sg being closed. I was depressed. It was a very good gateway to the entire of Singapore, yet, I was grief stricken because the demise of www.sg literally spelled the transformation of one generation beyond reason.

Before I typed this submission, I was at Nanyang Technological University earlier today. I spoke with the hardy clerk on duty at NTU School of Computer Science and Engineering, I wanted to do my masters, in fact I am one of the last in my cohort who still am without one. The urgency is lacking in me, yet, in my pursuit of know how, I figured that it is wise keeping in touch. Ironically, as I have already done enough research before hand, the NTU SCSE told me that coursework masters are suspended in NTU SCSE. I knew that my outlet is now Wee Kim Wee School of Communications and Informations, yet, her response also sums up the very demise of www.sg, because an entire generation of computer engineering adopted by our Republic of Singapore has become obsolete and defunct, so much so that the school sees it irrelevant teaching postgraduate courses to Singaporeans on how to develop a better operating system or search engine, simply because these are ideals of the average Indian or Burmese trying to make sense out of their inferior socio-economic development. In other words, our society has progressed, both socially and economically, so much so that I have to dump my illiterate mother and father aside and rather be an orphan. NTU SCSE had to put a senior clerk there at the back entrance, whose job the entire day was just to tell me that the school is without any active masters programme, and turn off the lights. I have worked at statutory boards before, I am perfectly alright with such arrangements. Yet, where I am coming from, is the simple fact that my generation developed many technologies during our heydays as experimental academics, yet, most of these that I am summing up below are actually obsolete from a technical point of view:

- vBulletin: an expensive product we once experimented with as soldiers, **today it is completely obsolete, yet it thrives because they serve as a familiar environment for spreading of online falsehoods.**
- phpbb, phorum: alternative bulletin boards that gave rise to the open source versions of facebook discussions, totally made obsolete by facebook.

- Blogger: the pioneer of weblogging alongside movabletype, it gave fame during 2000-03, but after it was acquired by Google, it became synonymous with Singaporeans who had secret daily stories to tell yet hide or manipulate. It is still alive and well today, yet, the reason is because it is too **inconsequential** only those that prefer online anonymity choose Blogger and blogspot.
- Wordpress: Many from my generation helped founded B2, which was the apolitical edition of blogging. B2 is still alive as B2evolution. There was a dispute, and the western world made Wordpress out of B2 source codes which were openly available, and many idiots began using them to run political commentaries. One infamous example was the one by Roy Ngerng, he was one major trigger why I quit computing completely to become a flexi undertaker, because as an arts student he exploited the good name of scientific open-source - where us computer engineers use technology to spread goodwill - in campaigning against the government, till the extent that WP becomes synonymous with Hougang, Serangoon, Aljunied and Workers' Party therefore WP WordPress, till the extent that we rather destroy all products abbreviated WP. In a nutshell, if you have to, BAN and take down WP whether Workers' Party or Word Press. Word Press or Workers' Parties or WP are synonymous with deliberate online falsehoods and if you have attack any, attack WP first and foremost.
- Drupal, Concrete: Drupal is one example of a content management system that we hoped to develop with search engines. There are many others, but the major difference is that a CMS was meant to be a library of information instead of a social media website. Again, they are still **usable** in small groups or intranet, the Africans and Pacific folks actively use them, they are seldom a political threat though a **maintenance hazard** for engineers imho.
- Amazon, eBay: eCommerce brought online falsehoods to a monetary level because cash transactions were involved. **Temasek Polytechnic were one of the pioneers of eCommerce students, I found them suspiciously anti-institution.** I have friends from other polytechnics who swear by Amazon and eBay, I have purchased from them and they took tact, i.e. they were similar to bargaining at markets in South East Asia yet the falseness were usually due to buyer-seller disputes. This brings in the very concept of Customer Relationship Management, because it comes to a point when we actually required dispute resolution as part of ecommerce.
- Siebel, Microsoft, Salesforce, Sugar CRM systems: The CRM systems brought in much needed business processes to eCommerce. They made it possible to institutionalise online dealings hence mitigating online falsehoods, yet the main concerns are user adoption and data integrity. This is less about online falsehoods but corporate auditing, i.e. these are **professional matters that can be solved by dollars and sense in a capitalist world.**
- Enterprise Systems: It's just the money that does the magic, custom make the truths and falsehoods. Read some Dilbert.

- Facebook, Twitter: I hated both. When I was working in the corporate the last thing I would touch was either. It was ridiculous leaving a whole bunch of information on the internet because I can hack facebook with a simple white hack technique. The lame excuse used by the opposition was democracy and freedom of political discussion. As recently as the Presidential Elections Act amendments, the typical denizen were allowed in expressing their views online via Facebook and Twitter yet I found most Facebook accounts usually being agents of foreign influence sometimes from Malaysia, at times from Russia even. Citing examples, there were Malaysians working in Singapore that showed up on SMO's Chee Hong Tat's page to defame Him over Leon Pereira, and there were Russians that would appear at People's Action Party official page to market seemingly ridiculous messages synonymous with those mentioned as part of the Trump Russian probe. These are problems, yet, even I myself with my training from the army - I was part of the pioneering experiments that led to what is now known army "cyber defenders" - first and foremost there are **too many of these agents of foreign influence on Facebook whenever there is a major incident**, furthermore the problem stems from the Gov.sg using Facebook - an American product - as a primary source of interaction with the internet users. It is less about a need to shut down any facebook pages, the paradox is analogous during those days when several statutory boards started using StarOffice instead of Microsoft Office, because it took a lot of effort to train many senior civil servants how to use Microsoft Office, and when they had gotten familiar with MS Office, the switch to Star Office would have felt similar yet everything seemed a mess administratively. Hence likewise, Facebook has become a pseudo monopoly on social media like Microsoft had on office suites, it becomes more ingrained when civil servants adopt Workplace by Facebook, and to complicate matters, now if Facebook is the source of online falsehoods, the problem is that if you switch to a lesser known replica, the **older civil servants will go crazy** - I am alright with that - while the productivity may be affected because a lesser product may look and feel similar yet without the "monopoly" effect it creates another set of helpdesk problems. **The solution is simple, one party government, because whatever that is controversial, at least the government can make decisions and push through with them. Just look at the Aljunied GRC facebook page, the PAP maintains our own page, if come GE2021/22 we win Aljunied, we can continue using the PAP one instead of asking WP for a password.**
- Microsoft 365: Exchange email servers can be improvised, they are better than a private email server that got Hillary Clinton the limelight, I find them trustworthy just like Lotus Notes. **They have a lot of helpdesk issues that can need addressing, yet, they are proven brands this far. With the demise of www.sg as a search engine, Bing took over as my primary search feature because they are stricter in terms of their search results, i.e. less libre but much fewer adult content seeping through.**
- Google, YouTube: Google took over AltaVista's success, but they did something which AltaVista failed i.e. they also sold smartphones that dominated market share. This means that they themselves are literally a major security threat in the first place. **I distrust Google**, yet, for religious and non profit purposes they are good because they can get things done without

breaking a piggy bank, yet, the dilemma once again is that during Prime Minister Lee's National Day Rally speeches, YouTube channels are usually the target of schisms and disputes usually triggered by weird YouTube accounts. Amos Yee was not capable of wrecking havoc on Facebook because he kept getting suspended, yet his youtube channel that gets him monetary points keeps going on with videos that simply will not have passed our IMDA censorship standards. The problem about Google and YouTube therefore is not that we should condone their liberalisation, but where, when, who, what, why, how, which to draw the line if ever required. The reason why I say this is because in as far as PAP prioritises Asian values, there are loads of religious mantras and prayers on YouTube, it wins votes. Yet, because YouTube monetises, as part of PAP's economic liberalisation apart from YouTube being tricky for IRAS to tax, it wastes taxpayers' resources when we have to mobilise volunteers and internet brigades to take out one Amos Yee. There has to be a better way, and this is a particular one that I suggest we improvise, yet it has to be more than just cyber security, you may have to make the AGC sue more and more, yet again, I am less than sure where to draw the line at times.

- Sina, Youku, QQ: Even though I disassociate myself from Communism, the PRC is a good example of establishing hegemonic rule with enough suppression of press freedom. I trained myself with Sina since 2001, they are very strict, and their strictness is because the average Chinese resident is very fearful of their regime. This is mental, it could be cultural, it could be social, yet, censorship on Chinese social media platforms are extremely effective. If I were Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, I will adopt useful aspects of Chinese ideologies in mitigating online falsehoods. The reason is because while Sina, Youku and QQ is less than free from falsehoods, the autocratic stance of the PRC government simply means that it is manageable for their rulers to take down political opponents. To the typical Singaporean opposition they may frown at this because their liberty is constricted, yet, because of my prior upbringing and training, I find this system most delectable. In Chinese we say 'propriety' i.e. 礼, I totally loved how brutal the Communists are against dissidents, of course I do my best erring on the side of caution often too and am fearful of punishment, yet, when I recall the many Asian teachings I have studied, I find that the Chinese does it in a manner that I am willing to agree with.
- People's Daily: Mdm HO Ching uses the People platform of China, I got interested in it and I strongly recommend it over Sina, Youku, and QQ, because it is cleaner and more politically adjusted to balance communist China with modern globalised Chinese trade partners. The news are good, the tips and informations are what Zaobao can use also, the only thing is that they are heavily influenced by the Chinese government so if one is less than literate or travelled they can be a turn off. In my case because Mdm HO Ching is quite scientific, She selects certain articles that catches her eye, shares on her facebook, so I follow her profile instead like a proxy or news agency.
- UN News Centre: This is one news source that the gossip mongering world usually skips, simply because all it tells are news of human suffering which

turns many away. Yet, I myself as a [UN participant find that it is a much better news source](#) than Wall Street Journal any time.

The above is basically my personal insights or the lack of it on the many technological till business causes and consequences the modern day digital economy, while I am able to suggest the implications of using the above selected web-based appliances, there is no one size fits all as far as I am concerned where online falsehoods are concerned, simply because what to be is the truth e.g. "President Halimah is my President" might not be the case in as far as opposition supporters are concerned, this is why I am NOT against IMDA making more stringent checks as well as being given more specific law enforcement powresses the past few weeks, I am NOT a fan of press freedom, and I have always believed that state sponsored propaganda is NOT to be compromised in favour of increasing democratic opinion.

I cannot tell you even more specific details of how we mitigate falsehoods at Ministry of Defence, because the specific details you are better off speaking to Party Whip Chan Chun Sing or Speaker Tan Chuan Jin about them; Minister Ng Eng Hen is a very solid Defence Minister, He knows some tricks at mitigating online falsehoods ranging from feigning ignorance till smiling it off, it is not easy and I do not see how it can be fully articulated in an email because it takes a lot of life experiences as well to tell what is real from what is false and fictitious, what I can however offer as a contingency measure is that in most statutory boards we have a knack of hiring women: women despite them being chatty are quite meticulous and they can do what guys can NEVER achieve, e.g. rationalising emotions with information. It is NOT always about science even though we do what we can being as scientific and mathematical as possible, because there are times in life when experiences count, and it is akin to being in complete darkness when we are utterly blind, there are times when we pay attention, we listen, and we need a second opinion that may not be a God or a Buddha, yet, the two factor authentication or woman's sixth sense can be highly reliable in differentiating what is real from what is false.

If you have ever watched a Beautiful Mind about John and Alicia Nash who passed away several months ago, this is precisely the point, the greatest countermeasure of online falsehood ironically yet effectively is the WIFE.

In Hokkien as a pioneer grandmother saying we say, "Listen to your wife's wise words, great fortune lies ahead of you".

This ends my submission.