

Written Representation 141

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Dear Sir / Madam,

Thank you for your time in reading this submission and I hope to share with you some of the strategies that we could use to counter Fake News which is getting more prevalent nowadays. One way to counter Fake News is through legislation and for offenders to face jail time / fine if proven guilty of spreading such news. This might reduce Fake News postings online but unintended consequences might be for this type of messages to go 'underground' and with renewed vigour using abovementioned legislation as justification. Through this submission, I hope to share with you alternative strategies which the Select Committee might want to consider in quest to counter Fake News.

1) Official online (e.g. website, mobile apps, social media) proclamation of government figures

To counter Fake News, a commonly used tactic would be to have a bigger online shout-out (via official website, mobile apps, social media) with aim that official messages would 'drown' misleading postings online. I do not have any statistics whether this strategy would work but based on anecdotal evidence, it is a hit-and-miss at best. The reason why this strategy does not work is because of perceived bias from online audience that official website, mobile apps, social media postings would naturally promote and show government policies in good light. This perceived bias is not helped by the fact that online postings from the population are much larger than what one entity can hope to overshadow and 'trust-of-message' that online audiences have with their family, friends, colleagues re-posts over official government postings.

The country which most often employs strategy of controlling online posting is China with its Great Firewall of China that is widely reported. As China's experience has shown, while technology can create an online border wall which allows China authorities to control messages within and what comes in, the population at large can circumvent this technology by hosting its own private VPN or from China residents who travel abroad to get info that is blocked by the Firewall.

2) More regular dissemination of public information

To counter Fake News, another strategy we could use is to be transparent in order to debunk falsehoods. By being transparent, I do not mean official government figures / policies announcement that we see published on MSM or social media. To be truly transparent means that government figures are published online on a more regular basis (e.g. daily) which is not unlike the stock market index. By doing this, the aim is that residents can see what is progress on a more regular basis such that if there's any Fake News, the online figures can be used as a reference.

An example is train MTBF figures announced by Transport Ministry and instead of waiting for the announcement to come by, would it be possible to publish these figures online on a daily basis so that residents can look at it anytime they want. Another

example would be Singapore Citizenship or Singapore Permanent Residents approvals granted by ICA and it would be good if residents can view this figures online on a daily basis also. It has to be noted that publication of figures online on a daily basis is not to overwhelm anyone's email or Whatsapp but more of an independent reference point which anyone can refer to when presented with Fake News. By doing this, it can also promote greater residents buy-in because residents can see that their own actions can influence published online figures (only possible if online figures are updated real-time).

The disadvantage is that there will be greater pressure for our civil service to perform which should benefit the overall resident population at large. In addition, not all figures should be published and an example would be those which would harm our national interests (e.g. security, foreign affairs).

3) Details of benefits accrued to each resident

On every National Day Rally or Budget, the Prime Minister or Finance Minister respectively would announce national polices which would affect every resident. In most cases, the polices announced would amount to millions / billions of dollars with a fraction apportion to each resident (e.g. SG Bonus). To the person in the street, the fraction apportion to him / her is the most important figure and although there is illustrative breakdown by age, income, housing type etc, it would be good if each resident can see the whole of package (e.g. SG Bonus + GST Voucher + GST U-Save + Edusave) through a secured online website. As of date, we already have SingPass / CorpPass as an authentication mechanism and we could make use of this secured platform to access the online website which would then display a total of whole package that each resident would enjoy. With this measure, the aim is to counter Fake News when residents compare government benefits with each other or receive fake messages that their government benefits had been withdrawn for whatever reasons. In summary, with the prevalence of Internet connectivity and open society of Singapore, Fake News is here to stay and can be generated within or outside our shores. Legislation could be part of the solution but it is my wish that the Select Committee would entertain a more holistic approach as well.

Thank you for your attention.