

Written Representation 16

Name: Yeo Boon Eng
Tutor

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Causes/Consequences/Solutions

1) Slow correction of distorted information by ill-intentioned or ignorant people. This allows time for the fake news to spread like wild fire.

e.g. Change in CPF policy to allow deceased to leave CPF money to mentally disabled children in monthly instalments has been circulated as all CPF money of all deceased will not be given to nominees in cash. I received that whatsapp message quite a few months earlier before an ST editor explained that myth/misunderstanding. Imagine how many Singaporeans have received that fake/misinterpreted news over that period.

If fake news is detected, take actions to rectify it in ways that Singaporeans can trust. like through the Straits Times, almost immediately. Everyday counts.

2) Poor dissemination of policies to the masses. Every Singaporean needs to know changes in policies but most of the time, we have to go to the relevant websites to get the details. There is a large proportion of Singaporeans incapable of doing so either due to lack of knowledge or lack of time. It is the duty of the policy-makers to think of ways to ensure that the correct information is disseminated to all Singaporeans, regardless of age, educational background, race etc. as soon as possible. It should not be assumed that all Singaporeans will get the intended message and it is their duty to do so.

Do not be in a hurry to implement policies. The different ways of dissemination of information to the wide varieties of Singaporeans should be considered and carried out, if possible, before its implementation.

e.g. A quick check from CPF website will reveal the truth. But those without mentally disabled children will not do it for reasons already cited. They will conveniently take the fake news as true and will be concerned with not leaving cash for their children upon their deaths.

3) Government agencies, especially front desk staff or telephone operators, must be well informed of policies to clarify doubts of Singaporeans. They also must encourage Singaporeans to seek clarifications from them. Only patient and polite people can be employed for such duties.

In my few encounters with such staff, either through telephone or face-to-face interactions, I was less than satisfied speaking to them to find out details on issues concerning me, what more to seek clarification on fake news.

They should be trained to speak in a polite tone and show a smiling face to the public and be reminded that those Singaporeans speaking to them to seek information are not stupid. They are actually incapable of getting information needed from the websites. If staff from government agencies dealing with the public can be more friendly, they can be the best people to disseminate policies/information to the public, emphasising on its objectives, in a direct, favourable manner. No fake news can thus be created or fake news can be verified as Singaporeans will trust government staff.

At other times, I was given the wrong information. Can it be considered fake news? Staff in contact with the public should be well-trained not only in attitude, but also in information, before they are allowed to do the job. They represent the government in the eyes of the public.

4) Set up a committee/website for clarification of news, fake or genuine., at all times, not only before setting up a law on fake news. Singaporeans can email to the committee on all matters as a form of feedback from the ground. It is up to the committee to decide whether it is sincere feedback to be acted on. As the writer can be identified, likely feedback is sincere though sometimes it can be an opinion and not a fact as the writer might not be sufficiently well-informed though his intention is good. The email should be ignored and the writer should not be punished in any way. This is to encourage feedback from the ground.

For all e-mails to the committee, the identity of the writer should not be revealed. This is one reason why fake news online is seldom challenged.

5) The majority of retirees are poor in IT knowledge. They can be easily tricked by dubbing and camera tricks too. They will not be able to differentiate fake and true news but they have the time to spread fake news which they sincerely believe is true through whatsapp, out of concern for others.

They should not be punished in any way as they are being made use of by others.