Navigating Heated Online Debates & Dealing with Misinformation: An Academic Perspective

DR. SHIRLEY S. HO

Associate Professor and Associate Chair (Faculty)
Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information
Research Director-Designate for Arts, Humanities, Education, and Social Sciences
President’s Office
Nanyang Technological University

IAEA’s Technical Meeting on Using Social Media for Public Communication and Stakeholder Involvement for Nuclear Programmes
Dark Side of Social Media

1. Encourages uncivilized comments
2. Engenders echo chambers
3. Propagates misinformation (e.g. fake news)
Online Spread of Fake News: Does Fact-Checking Work?
Social Amplification of Risk

Sources of Risk Information → Intermediate Transmitters → Receivers
Fact-Checking Sources in Singapore

Factually.gov

The Straits Times
Method

Day 1

- Group 1: No Discussion
- Group 2: Online Discussion
- Group 3: Pre-Discussion Questionnaire

Day 2

- Fake News Only
- Fake News + Fact-Check (Factually)
- Fake News + Fact-Check (The Straits Times)

Day 3

- Online Discussion
- Post-Discussion Questionnaire
- No Correction
- Fact-Check (The Straits Times)
- Fact-Check (Factually)
Findings

Estimated Marginal Means of Risk Perception

Risk Perceptions

No Fact Check | The Straits Times | Factually

Non-discussion group | Discussion group

No fact check vs The Straits Times vs Factually
Fact-checks may have limited effectiveness, depending on circumstances and contexts
How can we encourage civilized discussions?

- Build new products to curb the spread of misinformation and fake news
- Moderate online discussions with house rules
- Empower people with the necessary tools to make informed decisions when they encounter potential misinformation and fake news
THANK YOU!

Dr. Shirley S. Ho
tsyho@ntu.edu.sg
www.shirleysho.com

This project was funded by the Singapore National Research Foundation (NRF), under the Nuclear Safety Research and Education Programme (NSREP) Award No. NRF2014NPR-NPRP001-004.