

THINK BEFORE YOU POST ON THE NET

IN the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, information thrives and leans heavily on digital space. People share information about anything and everything online.

From food reviews to unboxing of a new luxury handbag, and conspiracy theories to burnt cheesecake recipes, the tsunami of messages at times makes it impossible for one to make sense, digest and grasp the information.

According to studies, the decision to share information is generally based on an internal drive.

In particular, the need to portray a certain online identity, inflating one's self-esteem, and the attempt to be unique are some elements which have been found to cause people to click the share button, repost or retweet an information.

This has led to the spread of vast unverified information, some of which are false and have caused indelible harm.

The latest victim is the popular OldTown White Coffee franchise.

A supposedly concerned netizen shared a video via WhatsApp, warning Muslims against eating curry noodles at one of its restaurants by alleging that the meat was pork.

This led officers from the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry to investigate the claim, which were then verified to be false.



Using false information will make people come up with wrong assumptions and biased generalisation. FILE PIC

Subsequently, OldTown White Coffee has been reported to be considering legal action against parties that made the false allegations.

Previously, McDonalds fell prey to a netizen who shared a picture of its fried chicken covered with maggots. These malicious acts can be quite overwhelming for the organisations involved, besides causing a significant uproar.

As a journalism lecturer, I have often reminded my students to speak their minds, to not be undermined by authority and champion their rights in freedom of speech.

However, there is a distinctive line between relaying credible, unbiased, balanced and fair information, and accusatory, malicious, scandalous,

unverified and baseless messages.

Undeniably, there will always be that one person who is too caught up in trying to be a hero or being the first to publish a "scoop".

Therefore, it is important to remember that false information or one that is used in the wrong context has the potential to make people come up with wrong assumptions and

biased generalisation.

I cannot help but wonder, is the ability to easily share information equivalent to being part of an empowered society?

Off late, social media is quickly turning into a platform where people air their dissatisfaction about anything — from double parked cars to poor customer service and cheating spouses.

But, is voicing your grievances on social media the best way to get the necessary call of action?

In my opinion this can sometimes be seen as a case of self-righteousness. Readers are often left to form their opinion based on a one-sided story. Is this fair?

I believe society needs to be exposed to the various ways in which they can reach out to organisations or government agencies before writing an "exposé" in social media.

Transparency of various communication channels is pivotal. Social media is, after all, a powerful tool and unequivocally has the ability to empower society. However, users must be smart and judicious when sharing information.

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