14th CONFERENCE OF THE ASEAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR INFORMATION (AMRI)

FRAMEWORK AND JOINT DECLARATION TO MINIMISE THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF FAKE NEWS

Background

1.   ASEAN, and the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI) in particular, acknowledge that the media and information consumption pattern of society has undergone significant changes with advances in technology and the availability of information on online and social media platforms. This has undoubtedly had an impact on the new information landscape for governments and societies.

2.   The 12th AMRI meeting held in Myanmar in June 2014 adopted the '*Declaration on Social Responsible Media for a Peaceful and Prosperous Community*' which agreed to work towards supporting the development of a socially responsible media in ASEAN and further strengthen cooperation in fields of information and media through undertaking programs and joint activities, and by leveraging on all forms of media.

3.   The 13th AMRI meeting held in Philippines in March 2016 discussed the challenges posed by social media and agreed that it was important for ASEAN Member States (AMS) to collaborate by sharing policies and experiences related to social media.

4.   The 2nd Working Group on Information, Media and Training (WG-IMT) also discussed the *Core Values on Digital Literacy for ASEAN* which has since been endorsed at the 15th Senior Officials Responsible for Information (SOMRI) meeting in the Philippines in March 2017.

5.   The '*AMRI Roundtable Discussion on Fake News and Communicating the Right Information*' held in Philippines in September 2017 discussed the problems posed by fake news, noted that this was a challenge faced by all AMS and brainstormed possible measures of cooperation among AMS such as sharing of best practices, capacity building and promoting media literacy and public awareness programmes.

6.   The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 also provides a context for AMRI to discuss the issue of fake news as the Blueprint aims to work *"towards an open and adaptive ASEAN"* with strategic measures such as to *(vii) strengthen capacity and capability of both the ASEAN civil service and public sectors to respond to emerging challenges and the needs of the peoples through efficient, effective, transparent and accountable public services, participatory and innovative approaches, and collaboration; (viii) provide opportunities for relevant stakeholders for knowledge sharing, which include exchange of best practices and studies; and (xi) promote*

measures to ensure a caring society, social harmony and values of humanity and the spirit of community to guide ASEAN towards these goals."

Social Media and Fake News

7.   Social media enables information to be created and exchanged at an unprecedented scale and speed. This has brought benefits to a large number of people in our societies, as information can be accessed and shared easily, and has changed the way we live. Statistics show that there are 2.07 billion and 330 million active Facebook[1] and Twitter[2] users per month respectively worldwide. Every minute, 300 hours' worth of content is uploaded to YouTube[3]. The new infrastructure of the information superhighway has also shifted news consumption to online and social media platforms. According to a Pew Research Centre study, 62% of the adults in the United States get their news on social media[4]. As Internet penetration rises in ASEAN, there is no doubt a similar shift in media consumption pattern is taking place in ASEAN.

8.   The creation of information on social media is decentralised, unlike on traditional media structured around licensed media organisations. While content is more immediate and better reflect the diversity of views and interests in society, the quality of content varies as creators are not necessarily subject to traditional regulation or journalistic standards. In addition, studies have shown that algorithms used by social media platforms tend to create filter bubbles and echo chambers by giving information to a user based on what the user would want to see. This encourages isolation and polarisation as people are less often confronted with conflicting ideas[5]. As a result, this new media environment poses new challenges to governments as well as the wider community.

9.   In particular, one key challenge is the use of social media as a platform for the promulgation of fake news. As social media platforms seek to command the attention of users for monetary benefit, they may inadvertently facilitate fake news transmission. For example, the use of automated bots, which relies on software to create accounts on social media platforms that act like and interact with accounts of real persons, can spread spam and fake news on social media networks. In addition, these technologies may also lead to an eco-system where clusters of like-minded are suspicious of dissenting views or facts.

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[1] *Company Info – Facebook,* https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/
[2] Salman Aslam, *Twitter by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics and Fun Facts*, (Jan 1, 2018), https://www.omnicoreagency.com/twitter-statistics/
[3] *Youtube Company Statistics*, https://www.statisticbrain.com/youtube-statistics/
[4] Jeffrey Gottfriend and Elisa Shearer, *News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2016*, http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/
[5] Quattrociocchi, Walter and Scala, Antonio and Sunstein, Cass R., *Echo Chambers on Facebook* (June 13,2016), https://ssrn.com/absract=2795110

10.   The World Economic Forum has identified misinformation going viral online as one of the biggest threats to society[6]. ASEAN is also not immune to the phenomenon of fake news going viral. There have been instances where information has been distorted to create fake news stories with the intention to provoke violence, sow hate, fear, distrust and discord among the people. Such cases have the potential to undermine confidence in political institutions and erode social harmony of a country. As fake news clearly seeks to mislead and crowd out truth, it is important for ASEAN to be aware of these challenges brought about by fake news so that citizens are empowered to participate in constructive discourse, free of external influence.

11.   Nevertheless, while there are no clear solutions to the problems posed by fake news, it should not overshadow the benefits that can be reaped in the new media age. As new media is relatively nascent, companies such as Google and Facebook have come forward to address some of the concerns related to fake news through media literacy campaigns, building on community guidelines, as well as banning sites that peddle false stories from their advertising networks. In addition, Facebook has used artificial intelligence to detect and delete bots, fake accounts and pages. Google too has taken steps to modify its search ranking systems to prevent fake news from entering the top results for particular search terms. In addition, Google has partnered with the International Fact-Checking Network to fight against fake news in ensuring accurate articles are being posted. Such industry led initiatives are important in building trust and credibility in social media platforms. In the same vein, governments are also actively looking into countermeasures against the spread of fake news and its potential harm onto society. Startups and social activists are also looking to deploy technological solutions or crowdsourced efforts to filter fake news.

Objectives

12.   Given the potential negative impact of fake news on society, this paper proposes a broad framework for ASEAN to minimise of the harmful effects of fake news. The framework seeks to:

a. Provide a common frame of reference for AMS to strengthen cooperation, share ideas, collectively address the proliferation of fake news and its negative impact, and propose lasting solutions to the benefit of the ASEAN Community;

b. Build on the discussions and concerns arising from the AMRI Roundtable Discussion on Fake News and Communicating the Right Information. To this end, Singapore also intends to organise a workshop so that AMS can share best practices and experiences concerning fake news countermeasures;

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[6] Lee Howell, *Global Risks 2013 Eighth Edition: Digital Wildfires in a Hyperconnected World*. http://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2013/risk-case-1/digital-wildfires-in-a-hyperconnected-world/

c. Promote awareness of the problems caused by fake news to the peoples of ASEAN and fostering a commitment to prevent the dangers of fake news;

d. Encourage AMS to stand united against fake news whilst individual AMS adopt measures according to its specific national circumstances, laws and regulations.

Framework to Minimise the Harmful Effects of Fake News

13.	Summarised in the table below is the framework for ASEAN to minimise the harmful effects of fake news. It includes four broad strategies that AMS can reference in their efforts to address fake news so that AMS can tailor the strategies according to the unique circumstances of each AMS. It therefore provides a way to structure future work programmes for ASEAN to discuss, share experiences and engage with other stakeholders.

Strategy	Description	Strategy	Description
Education and Awareness	The first line of defence has to be a discerning and well-informed public that is able to detect fake news when it is presented to them. There must also be awareness of the dangers posed by fake news, and specifically awareness on the responsible creation and dissemination of information. The Core Values on Digital Literacy, aimed at creating an Internet that is safe and conducive for online engagements also supports this cause, and is a key complement to this strategy. There must also be efforts to educate the public to be responsible when creating and disseminating information.	**Community and Ground Up Participation**	Cooperation between the government and citizenry is important in the timely detection of fake news. Citizens who actively report fake news allow governments to issue clarifications efficiently. In addition, civil society groups are also key in spreading digital literacy and awareness of the dangers posed by fake news to the wider community, and may improve community participation in minimising the spread of fake news. They may also be useful
Detection and Response	The detection of and response towards fake news is the responsibility of everyone, including governments, organisations and private individuals. Governments should conduct regular monitoring of news and issues and quickly act on information that requires		

	clarification. This requires strong and trusted government communications. Organisations and media can contribute by fact-checking content and adhering to a strict code of ethics.		advocates for community centred norms and guidelines when dealing with fake news.
Norms and Guidelines	The creation of norms and guidelines will empower and protect citizens in their consumption of information in the new media and will also promote responsible generation and sharing of online information. In addition, civil society, telecoms and media organisations and other private companies could contribute towards developing industry norms and guidelines against fake news. While some countries (notably Germany) have opted to develop legislative responses to fake news, each country is encouraged to consider their own circumstances for the creation of laws, norms and/or guidelines.		

JOINT DECLARATION ON THE FRAMEWORK TO MINIMISE THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF FAKE NEWS

WE, the Ministers Responsible for Information of the ASEAN Member States on the occasion of the 14th Conference of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI) held on 10 May 2018 in Singapore;

RECALLING the Declaration on Social Responsible Media for a Peaceful and Prosperous ASEAN Community adopted at our 12th conference held on 12 June 2014 in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar;

NOTING the views expressed at the AMRI Roundtable Discussion on Fake News and Communicating the Right Information held in Manila, the Philippines on 9 September 2017;

ACKNOWLEDGING the ASEAN Chairman's Statement at the 31st ASEAN Summit held on 13 November 2017, which looked forward to AMRI's cooperation with relevant stakeholders in countering misinformation and communicating the right information on all forms of media;

WELCOMING the achievements in implementing the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 and the action lines to work towards an open and adaptive ASEAN;

ACKNOWLEDGING the convenience brought about by online and social media in propagating information and enhancing communication;

NOTING that online and social media will continue to play a bigger role in the lives of its users, given its many benefits;

BEING COGNISANT of the challenges posed by the propagation of fake news on online and social media;

REAFFIRMING the need to address the proliferation of fake news and its negative impact to ensure that the Internet remains a reliable source of information and a safe space for all users;

HIGHLIGHTING the need to continue the sharing of best practices among ASEAN Member States on sensitising citizens to the harmful effects of fake news;

RECOGNISING that countermeasures against fake news must respect national sovereignty and the central role of governments, and be implemented nationally according to the political and social circumstances of individual ASEAN Member States;

WELCOMING the endorsement by the Senior Officials Responsible for Information (SOMRI) for the formation of the 'Framework to Minimise the Harmful Effects of Fake News';

CONSIDERING that adopting a common framework for exchanging perspectives, best practices and capacity building, will encourage more effective cooperation towards creating a more media responsible generation;

DO HEREBY AGREE TO

1. Further strengthen cooperation in the fields of information and media, and support the development of a socially responsible media in ASEAN;

2. Capitalise on the potential of online and social media and ensure that the internet remains a safe space for users in order to reap maximum benefits;

3. Work together to raise awareness on the potential problems posed by fake news to prevent its proliferation;

4. Strengthen efforts to improve digital literacy based on the '*Core Values on Digital Literacy for ASEAN'* to encourage a discerning and well-informed public that is able to detect fake news when it is presented to them and responsible enough not to propagate false information;

5. Strengthen national capacity to detect and respond to fake news, including through media monitoring, fact checking, and building up strong and trusted government communications;

6. Encourage all relevant stakeholders to build on industry norms and guidelines against fake news, while respecting the unique circumstances of each ASEAN member state, its laws and regulations.

7. Share best practices and experiences among ASEAN Member States on responses to the challenge of fake news, which includes, but not limited to:

   a. Initiatives to improve education and awareness building efforts;
   b. Effective strategies to encourage community and ground-up efforts in the fight against fake news;
   c. Measures and institutions for media monitoring and fact checking;
   d. Capacity building for improving the reach and effectiveness of government communications on online and social media;
   e. Development and implementation of national norms, codes, laws and regulation;
   f. Initiatives to involve civil society and the private sector and other stakeholders in responses to fake news.

8. Encourage all ASEAN partners and relevant stakeholders to cooperate and join hands in the implementation of this Framework.

ADOPTED in Singapore, on 10th May 2018.

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