

Fake news: How it spreads in Singapore and elsewhere

Senior Minister of State for Law Edwin Tong showed Parliament yesterday how an online falsehood alleging that Singapore is involved in corrupt 1MDB deals was spread.



Nov 5

The States Times Review (STR) publishes an article "Lee Hsien Loong becomes 1MDB's key investigation target".

Nov 7

The STR article is reproduced on Malaysian website The Coverage. This is picked up by China Press. Singapore's High Commission in Malaysia says the article in The Coverage is fake and "clearly libellous". A number of mainstream media outlets in Malaysia carry the High Commission's statement.

Nov 8

The Monetary Authority of Singapore lodges a police report.

Nov 9

The Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) issues a request to STR to take down the article. STR refuses to do so by the deadline, and IMDA directs Internet service providers to restrict access to the site. IMDA also asks Facebook to deny access to the said post.

Nov 13

In response to media queries, Facebook says it does not have a policy that prohibits alleged falsehoods, apart from in situations where this content has the potential to contribute to imminent violence or physical harm.

7 Facebook users

Shared article 45 times collectively over three days to 39 unique Facebook groups



Approximate number of potential viewers reached:

800,000



Mr Tong also gave two examples which were in a report by the Select Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods: a false claim about the vulnerability of the United States Navy, and a disinformation campaign against actor Morgan Freeman.

Falsehood about Russian technology that could wipe out United States Navy

In 2017, Russian media published a false claim that Russia had developed electronic warfare capabilities that could disable ships.



Obscure website posts falsehood.



Three years later, falsehood is copied by Russian TV station's website.



It is picked up by British tabloids.



It begins trending on social media and alternative media.



Fox News article on falsehood is shared over 27,000 times, mostly on Facebook.

Falsehood against Morgan Freeman



Sept 18, 2017: Morgan Freeman says a foreign country attacked the US using online activity during the 2016 US presidential election.

A troll website initiates a hashtag #StopMorganLie and publishes a claim that he is lying.

Hashtag is amplified on social media by bots.

It is picked up by mainstream media of the foreign country, which claims that the counter-movement against Freeman's assertion is a "big Twitter outcry" although online traffic impact is minimal.