

## Understanding more on the meaning of “Fake News”

“Alternative facts and fake news are just other names for propaganda”

— Johnny Corn

Along with the development of internet infrastructure, and privatization of the telecom industry in 2012 in Myanmar, there had been a tremendous rise in internet usage from the users. Its effect is prominently seen on the usage of social media particularly Facebook, which had permanently changed the landscape of media and information flow. The mainstream media and newly found alternative media have to compete with the informal ones alongside those of personal expressions posted and engaged by users, lobbyists, populists, observers and theorists alike. The result was the abundance of controversial viewpoints on singular topics; facts and fiction tempered with influence. This also led to altering the information to gain financially or politically.

While some fake information was spread around on offline and online media accidentally or without any malicious intention, some were intentionally inserted or circulated to achieve a certain result. Such kind of information was commonly referred to as “Fake News” in layman’s term and this word became more prominent after the US President, Mr. Donald Trump, accused the media of using fake news. To understand it, we first needed to check the definition of it. Cambridge Dictionary defined Fake News as:

“false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke”

This definition covered 3 main points – false information, spread on internet or media, and created with the intention to influence political view or as a joke. By looking at it, 2 importance points could be noted. First, as long as the information was true, it could not be regarded as fake news even if it was used to gain financially or politically. Second, if the information was not spread on internet or other type of media, it could not be regarded as fake news.

Now, let explore more detail on the different aspect of information from academic point of view. There are 3 different types of information relevant to fake news:

**Disinformation:** Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country

**Misinformation:** Information that is false but not created with the intention of causing harm

**Mal-information:** Information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organization or country.

(Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training – published by UNESCO)

By looking at these definitions, we could see that whenever we said “Fake News”, we referred to Disinformation. The components of Disinformation were matched with Fake News. Some said

Misinformation was also Fake News but Misinformation was more similar to rumors because of the lack of critical component of having a malicious intention. Misinformation was usually spread around on media accidentally by unaware users instead of someone doing it on purpose. For Mal-information, the information itself was true so it does not match with the component of Fake News.

In our day-to-day life, we regularly encountered such information but we usually did not aware of the impact of them on us. Therefore, we did not try to verify the authenticity of the information and we even shared it with our friends and colleagues. Understanding different kinds of information was crucial as one of the basis of Media Information Literacy because one could not verify an information without understanding it.