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# Navigating the Digital Minefield:

## Promoting Media Literacy in the Age of Misinformation



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**I**n an era dominated by digital connectivity, the power of information has never been more pronounced. With a few taps on a screen, we have access to an abundance of news, opinions, and perspectives from around the globe. Yet, amidst this wealth of information lies a growing threat – the proliferation of fake news.

The polarization of worldviews has only served to exacerbate the spread of misinformation, as individuals retreat into echo chambers where their beliefs are reinforced and dissenting voices silenced. In this fragmented digital landscape, the power of hearsay has emerged as a potent communication tool, capable of distorting truth, manipulating perceptions, and sowing seeds of discord.

Social media platforms, once hailed as agents of connectivity and empowerment, have become breeding grounds for misinformation and propaganda. The ease of sharing information, coupled with the viral nature of content, has created a perfect storm where falsehoods can spread like wildfire, unchecked and unchallenged. From doctored images to fabricated stories, the lines between fact and fiction have blurred, leaving unsuspecting users vulnerable to manipulation.



The consequences of this epidemic are far-reaching, extending beyond mere misinformation to the erosion of trust, social cohesion, and democratic values. Urban myths, fake news stories, and inflammatory comments on social media feeds have the power to shape public opinion, influence policy decisions, and even incite violence. In this hyperconnected world, where information travels at the speed of light, the stakes have never been higher.

The Malaysian Communications And Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has been inundated with complaints regarding fake news, highlighting the urgent need for action. However, the challenge lies not only in combating the spread of misinformation but also in addressing the root causes that fuel its proliferation. Dr. Noor Nirwandy, a Senior Lecturer at the Centre of Media and Information Warfare Studies, UTM identifies youth as particularly vulnerable to the allure of fake news. The competitive nature of social media, coupled with the adrenaline rush of sharing sensational information, often blinds individuals to the importance of verifying the accuracy of the information they encounter. This lack of media literacy among the youth perpetuates the cycle of misinformation, exacerbating the problem.

To combat this viral epidemic of fake news, there is an urgent need for a concerted effort to promote media literacy and critical thinking skills. Education and awareness initiatives must be implemented across all segments of society to empower individuals to discern fact from fiction and resist the allure of sensationalism. By cultivating a culture of skepticism and inquiry, we can inoculate ourselves against the dangers of fake news and mitigate its harmful effects.

Media literacy is not merely about teaching individuals to spot fake news; it is about equipping them with the tools they need to navigate the digital landscape responsibly. This includes teaching them how to evaluate the credibility of sources, cross-reference information, and identify bias and manipulation tactics. It also involves fostering a healthy skepticism towards information that aligns too neatly with one's preconceived notions, encouraging individuals to seek out diverse perspectives and engage in critical dialogue.

In conclusion, the prevalence of fake news in the modern internet age demands a proactive response from all stakeholders. It is imperative that we equip individuals with the tools they need to navigate the digital landscape responsibly and critically evaluate the information they encounter. Only through collective action and a commitment to media literacy can we safeguard the integrity of our society and preserve the truth in the face of rampant misinformation.

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