

BREAK OUT SESSION: MANAGING INFORMATION IN A POST-TRUTH ERA	
Date:	Day 2 - 5th April 2018
Time:	15.35 - 16.35
Moderator:	Tara Joseph, President of Amcham Hong Kong
Speakers:	Richard Hornick , Director of Overseas Partnership Programs for the Center for News Literacy. Stony Brook University. Melissa Idris , Executive Producer for the Morning Run show , BFM 89.9 Juergen Keitel , Chief global Affairs & Development Officer Air Asia

The Topic Overview: Social Media has made companies hypervigilant but the emergence of the alternative facts is now a new reality that corporate communications have to navigate. Social media has also changed the dynamic for journalism. Social media has helped to spread of lies misinformation and dubious claim. Facts have become less influential in shaping public opinion than appealing to emotion and personal belief and that is how post-truth era works. The panel discusses how the post-truth era affects businesses and how businesses can manage the information to their advantage.

Key Points from the discussion:

1. Fake news is nothing new except that in the post-truth era, everyone can be a publisher of news. The new era of information technology has created the most powerful generation of people and it can create a frightening situation when “whoever screams the loudest gets the most attention”. A study by the Stamford History Education Group has found that people of all ages were incapable of spotting fake news.

2. Organisations and the people should be educated with critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of information. Every new technology requires new literacy and people should investigate information instead of simply consuming, verify information before sharing and be responsible social media users.
3. And social media poses a reputational risk to organisations if they do not teach their people to manage the information. It can also provide a great opportunity and drive businesses including for branding, products and the service industry as an enabler for them to connect directly with consumers.
4. Consumer-based companies have to be in the proactive, reactive and active mode in facing social media. This include, having a trained team, a 24-hour digital communication centre, right internal process to rectify the messages and respond quickly with transparency. Key to it is also for at all levels from the top to the operational level to be social media savvy. Messages should be simple and straightforward while employing empathy and compassion when dealing with consumers' complaints.
5. The media profession is also challenged by the noises in social media. Thus, it is important to focus and filter through the noises, and keep to what are important, which are the root causes of the subject discussed.

SUMMARISED SPEAKERS' DISCUSSIONS:

MODERATOR INTRODUCTION: I am actually more optimistic about Social Media and journalism then many people think because nowadays if you manage information and understand how to catch it, maybe there are lot of opportunity for brands and companies around the world.

To kick it off, Richard to give us an overview on where we stand in the world of social media today.

HORNICK (presentation): To me especially in the last decade the true strength or competitive advantage, if you will, of US companies is their resilience and ability to innovate in real time. And that in turn results from ability of companies to be open and to tap into the wisdom and experience

of all their employees, not just key staff. I will demonstrate why that particularly strength is extremely important in this post-truth era.

About a year and a half ago Fake News was a real concept but in the last 12 months or so ago Fake News has become a cliché. The difficulty we face is much, much more complicated. First of all, let's fake news is not new. **We had fake news from the beginning of time and every new communication revolution has created its own set of problems.** Someone once said that a lie gets around the world twice before the truth can have the chance to put its pants on. Why? **Why because lies are more entertaining and also often conforms to a lot of pre-existing beliefs.**

Fake news are **misinformation, disinformation and malinformation** with seven basic types of fake news - **Satire/ parody, misleading contents, imposter content, fabricated content, false connection, false context and manipulated content. It is a very complex issue.** Initially people thought that we would all get used to this new type of information and the overloads that it created. But a recent study by the Stamford History Education Group basically found that that wasn't true. They tested 12, 16 and 20 year-olds and even college professors and found that none of them were capable of spotting misinformation and disinformation on a regular basis, of being able to separate sponsored content from real journalism.

Why does it matter? **Well right now every company represented in this room is facing severe reputational risk. It is very hard to get in front of this problem. You can get your social marketing team on this and get out ahead of everything**

We had a very interesting presentation yesterday that talk about algorithm and how strong they are and how they can make the world a better place. **But good guys algorithm can be combated by bad guys algorithm. There are countless ways of gaming that system.** If you Google Martin Luther King Jr as an exercise, I will guarantee you that the fourth and fifth results will be a website that is a front for the Ku Klux Klan and Google knows this for 7 years and they can't get rid of it so algorithms are not going to solve your problem. Maybe the government can protect you. Malaysia has just **passed a law** and India tried to do this, what **the big**

problem with this the headlines said, who decide what is the truth and what isn't? Once man's truth is another man's lie.

Each new technology requires a new literacy. And so what we're trying to develop are teaching tools to empower people to spot fake news on their own. A new literacy for the 21st century (which involves):

1. Interrogating information instead of simply consuming
2. Verifying info before sharing it because unlike any other communication revolution this one empowers everyone to publish.
3. Rejecting rank and popularity as a proxy for reliability
4. Understanding that the sender of information is often not its source.

The Centre for News Literacy has educated over 10,000 students since 2007 and its curriculum is used in 21 universities in US, and adapted by universities in 10 countries including Vietnam which is one of our strongest partners. And after all these years of teaching college students we decided that's too late. **So we are now going after 12 year olds and we** are working on developing curriculum with the City University of New York.

The answer for your protection, going forward, is **get your staff, your key people everyone has to understand what the new rules are.** How to be literate how to find reliable information in a tsunami of information that washes over us every year, everyday every hour. We actually created a course on Making Sense of the News that is free (at www.coursera.org/learn/news-literacy), that staffs can use. Everyone has the power to figure out what is accurate, what's reliable and what isn't. It just requires a little bit of help and effort.

MODERATOR: It is interesting that in this era of data (what Richard says) is it all comes down to human and actual critical thinking. Juergen, I would like to turn to you as a corporate representative all that information out there your brand could be at risk. Is that an opportunity or have you learned how to navigate it?

KEITEL: Social media provides a big opportunity and drives our businesses and what we do. Social media is an enabler for the service industry to

connect directly with consumers. There are obviously challenges and we to adapt, to rethink how to manage communication. **In the old days you are proactive in marketing and reactive in corporate communications. Today I would say we are active.** You need to have a 24-hour digital communication centre.

As you rightfully said on one hand having obviously the executive leaders being very open to new SM channel, from our point of view also entrepreneurial to see what we can achieve, but also the training for the staff. We need staff that can handle that. Having young dynamic agile staff it comes a little bit natural. Having communication inward and outward is sort of becoming easier. **It is very important to keep the messages also simple.** If people associate and hear the word AirAsia we clearly have the slogan everyone can fly. That means across the board we can actually engage all stakeholders, with that easy slogan that means affordable fares for everyone, large growing network, world class service, leading low cost airlines in world we can reach out and we have simple messaging and also address any kind of issue.

We also have to be ready and open to be reactive. Yes, today when you have something sort of as an opportunity we also have drawbacks, because you live in glass house. That means people can actually cause and deliver and communication with you in different ways so **you need to have feedback loop internally so you can get info very quickly to the right people, you need to have savviness and quick reaction time to say ok we did maybe something wrong and this was rightfully posted so we need to also react to the global media and also engage with our consumers and fans and different stakeholders so they understand we are actually in constant communication and we are transparent.**

MODERATOR: The key words I am hearing from you are proactive and engage. We are talking about managing a 24-hour news cycle, millions of followers on social media, is that actually manageable or do you have to be proactive or think about it differently about managing a brand?

KEITEL: You just to have to be ready in a way and not afraid that certain info flaws could pop up. **And have to be ready as organisation how from top level, top exec down to their operational level to be able to**

respond. With clear simple messages along the line that can help, with quick reaction and having the sort of notion of knowing what actually happened and what was broadcasted back. You can go into a sort of proactive, reactive and an active mode.

MODERATOR: You work for a newer airline, with a visionary leader. Is that something that really helps drive that type of strategy? Would it be different for a traditional company?

KEITEL: I think all companies can adapt, because they need to. It is helpful to have a leader with entrepreneur style approach and someone embarking on social media world and being present and ensuring organisation and culture aware, present and evolving with those new tech and we don't stand still. Sure other organisations can transform. That's what we all digital transformation today **.Many companies globally are seeking that path of digital transformation and media savviness in Social media is just one path to that.**

MODERATOR: Melissa you come up with credible news, the truth. How do you sort through everything you see today to come up with an ethical product?

MELISSA: Truth is subjective in post-truth world. In journalistic sense, when people say they want truth and objectivity it is not the same thing as when journalist say they want truth and objectivity. Most people think their opinion is objective and the truth. If the report doesn't reflect the reality in their head then the reporter is not objective and news report is bias that is the nature of post truth era and we have to grapple and deal with that. I am Speaking as a radio show the Morning Run of BFM covering business politics and current affairs, what we hope to do is start a conversation. Conversation tends to be shut down in Malaysia, we hope to start a process to have that conversation, to get people thinking and ask that question. That means filtering to the noise. **Everyone wants to have opinion about everything nowadays so the question is how to filter through the noise to make sure we are talking about the root causes.**

One of my main challenges as the executive producer of the show is **not to get distracted by the noise and to keep to narratives that keep asking**

right questions. We consider (the hundreds of thousands of tweets and FB posting on different things) but it is difficult to answer everything without being distracted. **I tell my team, as journalists remember what the news hook, the framing is and to keep asking the difficult questions that the noise tends to distract from.**

MODERATOR: How not to get distracted. It is normal these days that people are carrying on two conversations at once. So managing that information when writing a story or managing brands, do you have any pointers on how to do that. Is it sticking to one thing at a time or managing how you build the information.

MELISSA: It is difficult because you need to be on top of many things. **Focus is the right way to do it. You don't have to necessarily engage everything** .For BFM, sticking to tone and identity of station is very important. You don't have to weigh in on every topic. **It does help if you weigh in on something that reflects your branding and identity. Getting the tone right is very crucial.** Sometimes people are intuitive to some but not to others. And finding the right people in your team who seem to have their pulse on how to get that tone right will be a great management challenge.

MODERATOR: Richard, is there a much better understanding among the younger age how to really navigate through social media. Should we all hire 25 year-olds?

HORNICK: Actually that would be wonderful but actually that turns out not to be true. The Stamford study asked 12 years old how to spot sponsored and regular news and they could not tell the difference even though it was labelled. There is no roadmap. We need a new way of looking at information. One of the things for the tsunami we face there is no way we can ever slow down the pace of information that comes to us. It's impossible, but we can use focus and this is one of thing we try to get our students to do, **you can slow yourself down. We don't have to hit the reply button right away. Remember you are now a publisher of news.** So this is the most powerful generation of history of mankind. They have a TV station on their smartphone. **So it's about getting people to take responsibility for their actions as well.**

MODERATOR: TV station on smart phone, at same time walk out into tsunami of information. Beyond focus, what is the to-do list to shift through it.

KEITEL: We have to come back to what is Fake News and where is information being misinterpreted. On one hand, **being in service industry and being very much consumer-focussed we know that if something is said intentionally being said incorrectly it will bite us back. So why do it in the first place.** So this is the first message also for branding. We also have branding, we have a service and we have a product, we are transparent and we want to stick to that. Since we know that the consumer is our best feedback loop we will collect all that noises and we know if there is really something out there then they will bite us back.

But that does not mean that nothing can go wrong. But we take all that feedback and try to correct it. But in the first place not to distribute something incorrectly.

MODERATOR: Can you give us an example you face in terms of Social Media and managing your brand out there in a Fake News era and how you turn this around.

KEITEL: We had a very good example recently with an incident of mishandled baggage luggage storage with bicycle. Although we trained our staff and ramp agents but something went wrong and somebody with a camera posted that. Obviously that was a mistake and we got the feedback from our consumers. And from our top level he clearly apologised and said this was incorrect. And at same time we turned it around with the kiss your bags campaign, we will treat your luggage with love. This is one Example we really stepped up straight away to say there was a mistake, we noticed it, from the top level .. that we needed to change something and the consumer is still very much at the driving seat.

HORNICK: I think it is a terrific approach **but in this era you have to be totally transparent and you can't over-promise.** One of most important lesson to any company right now or you will be caught. Today you have no idea what's going to take off. You said the consumer is your best sort of

feedback loop but isn't it your employees? Maybe there was somebody in your baggage claim that could have told you that was happening.

KEITEL: The first feedback is consumers but internally as well. We have people so whatever has happened or could happen we try to be proactive to change processes and address it. However there are still sometimes occurrences when things just go wrong. Now today consumers have opportunity to capture that much quicker. We do have to react and acknowledge that. Yes internally there is feedback loop and employees have to be trained and be aware of these noises.

MODERATOR: Melissa, from the brand who are trying to manage its own brand and now people are brands as well. Are you able to interview people and not get information from people or is your news now dull news or nothing different or special?

MELISSA: with radio is power of voice, with live radio there is no edit, you have someone you are talking to someone you may not see them but can hear them, hear them sweat, struggle or pause or umm... there is some honesty on that. You can't bitesize, or trunket that into a 140 character tweet and then get that misquoted or taken out of context. That keeps radio journalists honest and their guests as well, because it keeps them on their toes. But you are right in terms of because everything becomes clickbaity you want the next sensational headlines. Often if you have Half hour interview you waiting for that one soundbite that will make that great tweet that you think can go viral. That is a challenge for journalist to go beyond simplifying context to simplify something that is important. I tell my team always choose the honestly complex over the deceptively simple. That is you job as a journalist not to fall into the trap of going into clickbait. As much as we love the likes, the click and shares that is not what we stand for and this motto kept us true to the journalism ethics.

QUESTION FROM THE FLOOR: How much do you think the human nature quest to be made viral, how much does the like button been a cause of this. People and obviously the US President talk about how many followers they have. In business you want to have matrix and quantitative information on that sort of thing but your average high school try to get out there put

malinformation just to see how many like and shares he will get. How much are we driven by this matrix?

HORNICK: It's one of the big things we talk about to our students - why are you forwarding this. Many people will admit they know something fake but retweet or like it simply because they thought it's funny, they thought it will make impressions or often it matches their own predispositions. One of the reason we have been doing this is we want a new form of journalism. **We want new journalism that can swim in this horrible tsunami and we think by training people to demand better journalism we will get better journalism.**

MELISSA: The problem in Malaysia is that a lot of misinformation is spread not by younger folks but older ones. Younger people are really savvy and they know how to check and if think if it is doggy they will not retweet it. Whatsapp is platform where people just forward without really checking because it is a private group check. We don't really do due diligence anymore because it is so easy to retweet.

KEITEL: Matrix are good but we have to realise it doesn't matter one or a million likes we have to acknowledge it. But it's also the internal communication, internal training. It doesn't mean someone automatically reacts without doing due diligence, but it also means you can't wait two weeks anymore before you go through the different command chains before you get the answer. You need have internally that digital communication channel so that we can do due diligence and react quickly with the right words.

QUESTION FROM THE FLOOR: Years ago a compliment will be people are well read. Now there is massive information available to us. I wonder if that well read compliment is still an issue because the well read comment usually referred to a variety of things one would read and try to integrate in different ways, based on intellectual curiosity to know things in broad ways. From your comment it seems all we have is much, much more information, that we are reading less variety, the quantity is high but variety is more narrow. I'm curious in your research are you finding in that perspective that people are actually reading less?

HORNICK: Back to my little war on algorithms. Basically FB and Google are in the business of making you happy. They make you happy by showing you what you want to see. We urge our students to use incognito searches or use web search like dotdotgo which does not try to anticipate what you want. But your newsfeed in Facebook is not going to show you things that you don't like, they want u to stay there. So we have real problem called the filter bubble and you are stuck inside the bubble so you are not well read. A lot is written on how to create news diet so you get a new broadness, breadth of information that makes you a better citizen or a more successful business person. Yes, it's a real issue.

MODERATOR: As a wrap up, some sort of sense how to manage it again, a to-do list on how to manage all of it.

KEITEL: **You need to focus on it, need to look at information flow differently.** You need to **design a digital information centre** to understand what is out there. You need to have the **team and right training** to understand from where the messages are coming from public or consumers, have **right internal process in place** to rectify any kind of messages and keep the message simple and straight forward. Engage proactively. Don't be afraid of the new media, it won't go away and its great tool to connect directly.

MODERATOR: (To Melissa) on what Richard said about being well read and not just taking stuff that comes to you but going out and finding facts and other sides of the story.

MELISSA: That is a given thing for journalism; to Check your facts, your sources. You are right about being well-read. We are all in echo chambers, the idea is to break away from all this. Someone once told me 'report against your biases', always approach a story and then try to prove yourself wrong in terms of finding your sources and facts. I use this approach on social media, before I react immediately, I check my biases and it becomes a mental challenge. I do this not just in my work but as consumer of news on social media I have to have an emotional scepticism. **We have to teach people to be emotionally sceptical.** Something we are not used to but we have to hone that skill.

HORNICK: It's called habit of the mind, you have to develop that. It's part of the New Literacy for the 21st century. It's a skill set. Idea is to bring scepticism to everything and not just taking something because it agrees with you. The problem today is everybody has an opinion and nobody has facts. It's so easy to hit the like button. Everyone needs to slow themselves down and look to models like corporations that have figured this out and know how to manage.

MODERATOR: (Question Keitel) Some of this is about emotion and physical reaction, managing anger because there is a lot of anger that comes out of this tsunami world of information. You must get the sharp end of this sometimes especially in the airline business.

KEITEL: Compassion and empathy. You have to understand how consumer and audience feel, why and where that comes from. Often enough there is a reason and you can find out what it is. It is key is to have whole team trained but also to understand your consumers and react that way. That what our executive management can manage very well throughout the whole organisations including ourselves and the team, to actually understand there are a lot of emotions out there, errors can happen and that we listen and we have to be empathetic and also react to that.

MODERATOR: I will sum up what I learned today - critical thinking, being patient and slowing down, thinking twice, being compassionate and understanding of other people. That in an era that's 24/7 and very fast with a lot to manage but it sounds like a very good advice.

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