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Mobile Communication and Online Falsehoods: Trends, Impact and Practice

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This volume will be part of the Springer series, "Mobile Communication in Asia: Local Insights, Global Implications" *(series ed., Sun Sun Lim)*.

<u>Overview</u>
Online falsehoods, in the form of fake news, misinformation, disinformation and information operations, have received much scrutiny among scholars, practitioners and policymakers in recent years. Within Asia, online falsehoods that were perpetrated during 2017 gubernatorial election in Jakarta and the 2019 election in India played a crucial role in influencing public opinion and, in the case of the former, culminated in criminal persecution of a candidate. Concerned stakeholders from the public, private and people sectors have attempted to counter the effects of online falsehoods through a range of legislative and non-legislative means. However, the ubiquity of social media and an increasingly diverse pool of perpetrators exacerbate the spread of online falsehoods on open communication platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) and closed communication platforms (e.g., WhatsApp and WeChat).

As the reliance on mobile devices for news seeking and information sharing continues to surge, the spread of online falsehoods on **mobile instant messaging services (MIMS)** continues to confound academics, practitioners and policymakers. There are several reasons why online falsehoods on MIMS merit a close scrutiny. First, MIMS are increasingly used for communication beyond the personal realm. They have become indispensable channels for people to exchange news and discuss political issues. Recent developments in Brazil and India demonstrate how MIMS can be used to spread falsehoods. Second, as MIMS are used primarily for informal interactions among people sharing close ties (i.e., friends, family and co-workers), the high trust that exists within such networks fuels the spread of online falsehoods.

Third, the end-to-end encryption technology — a key feature of MIMS — encourages user perception of privacy and safety. As a result, users tend to shed their inhibition when sharing unverified information. Furthermore, the encrypted nature of MIMS limits

the efficacy of countermeasures as platform owners, fact-checkers and public agencies are less able to fact-check content that is shared by users. Fourth, the proliferation of smartphones and their multimedia capabilities allows for easy and swift sharing of eye-catching and emotive visual and audio content. Deep fake technology renders such content more convincing and contagious.

Significance of this volume

Existing research located at the intersection of online falsehoods and MIMS, though sparse, hail from different disciplines. However, the body of research on online falsehoods on MIMS remains small, compared to what has been published on online falsehoods on open communication platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Furthermore, existing studies on the topic focuses on WhatsApp, with few looking at other platforms like WeChat and Telegram that are seeing quick growth in user adoption.

Research on the dynamics between MIMS and online falsehoods in Asia is even more scarce, despite burgeoning efforts made by educators and ground-up organisations to promote digital literacy and fact-checking. Asia currently accounts for about half of all Internet users and has a sizeable population of bottom of pyramid mobile users who tend to be mobile-only and therefore more vulnerable to MIMS. A 2020 report by GSMA Intelligence puts mobile Internet users at almost half the world's population, with about three quarters of all mobile Internet users living in low- and middle-income countries, including Asian countries. Adding to the pervasiveness of mobile use, the uneven development of the media industry, and fractious politics and social relations in some Asian countries, contribute to the virulence of online falsehoods on MIMS.

Scope of this volume

As MIMS play an increasingly bigger role in information sharing, news dissemination, collective organisation and political campaigning, **this volume offers a timely and critical analysis of research and practice that focus on the Asian context, by established and new scholars** in the field.

This volume welcomes contributions that stem from different disciplines (e.g., media studies, political communication, cultural studies and cognitive science) and methodologies (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, computational science and case studies). Advanced graduate students are also encouraged to contribute to the volume.

As mentioned earlier, non-academic and non-governmental institutions in the region are doing important work in countering the influence of online falsehoods. As such, this volume also seeks **contributions from practitioners who have some track record in developing initiatives or programmes in this field** to better inform research and practice. Submissions may describe new, ongoing or recently concluded projects.

There will be three sections in this volume.

Section A: Trends in the proliferation of online falsehoods and MIMS
Section B: Impact of online falsehoods transmitted via MIMS
Section C: Practice and intervention

Section A examines the latest developments and emerging trends pertaining to the spread of falsehoods on MIMS. Possible topics include, but are not limited to, the types and characteristics of falsehoods circulating on MIMS (e.g., genre, formats, context attributes), the strategies used by various actors (e.g., political actors and citizens) to create and disseminate falsehoods during election and non-election periods, and the reasons that drive or mitigate the spread of falsehoods (e.g., individual, social, institutional factors).

Section B focuses on methodological work that studies the spread of falsehoods via MIMS and their effects in different domains. Methodological papers may address issues relating to data collection and the monitoring of MIMS groups, and the evaluation of interventions. Contributions can also confront the ethical considerations relating to this area of research. As MIMS are part of a larger information ecosystem, work that addresses cross-platform spread of online falsehoods would be a valuable contribution to this volume.

Section C looks at the latest and emerging initiatives in Asia to counter online falsehoods on MIMS. The chapters can take the form of case studies that provide intimate and candid assessments of the efficacy of interventions and the challenges faced in their development and implementation.

The audience for this volume will comprise a wide range of stakeholders, given the significance of the topic for research, policymaking, the design of interventions and public education. As such, contributions to the volume should be pitched at the intelligent layperson.

Abstract submission
Authors are requested to submit a 1 to maximum 2-page proposal by **August 1, 2021** to carol.soon@nus.edu.sg (sans serif font, font size 12, single line spacing). Abstracts should include the following:
- Chapter title
- Authors' titles, affiliations, and contact information
- Key references

Full chapter submission
Contributors will need to submit full chapters only upon acceptance of the abstract. A full chapter is normally 15-20 pages long or around 6,500-8,000 words (including footnotes and references). Case studies or practice-focus chapters will be shorter, between 5,000-6,000 words (including footnotes and references).

Schedule
- Abstract submission deadline: August 1, 2021
- Abstract notification: October 1, 2021
- Full chapter submission deadline: Jan 1, 2022*

- Chapter reviews to authors: Apr 1, 2022
- Revised chapter submission deadline: Jun 1, 2022
- Final chapter submission deadline: Aug 1, 2022
- Submit final book manuscript for review: Oct 1, 2022
- Tentative publication date: March 2023

* The chapters will be reviewed by a fellow volume contributor and the Editor.

Notes on the series

This Springer series, *"Mobile Communication in Asia: Local Insights, Global Implications"* (series ed., Sun Sun Lim), aims to systematically and thoroughly canvas the research community who studies the impact of mobile communication in Asia, and highlights research that has not yet attained a sufficiently international profile.

Springer has a new practice of indexing edited volumes under Scopus which means that book chapters in this Springer series will match journal articles in terms of visibility and impact.

Other titles in this series include *Mobile Media and Social Intimacies in Asia: Reconfiguring Local Ties and Enacting Global Relationships* (2020), *mHealth Innovation in Asia: Grassroots Challenges and Practical Interventions* (2018), *Mobile Gaming in Asia: Politics, Culture and Emerging Technologies* (2017), *Mobile Media, Political Participation, and Civic Activism in Asia: Private Chat to Public Communication* (2016) and *Mobile Communication and the Family* (2016).

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