

Disinformation and Influence Campaigns

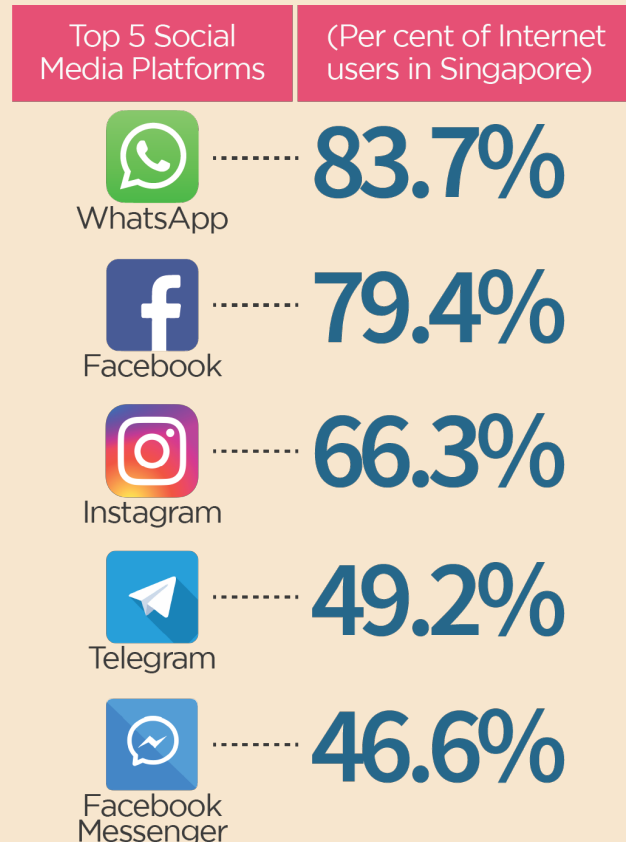
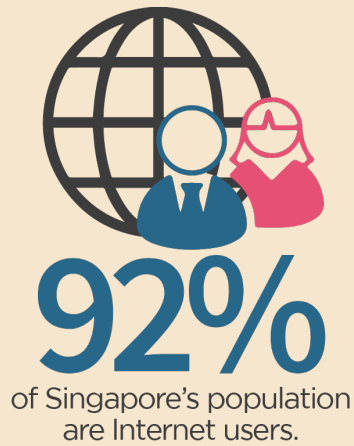
June 2022

Why should we be concerned about disinformation and influence campaigns?

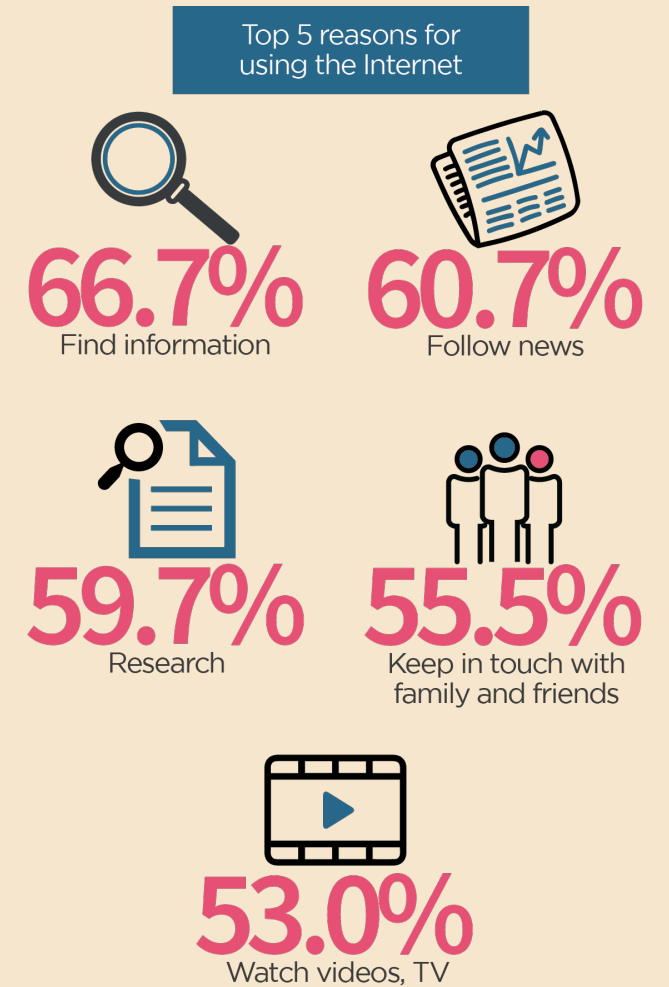
A majority of Singapore's population spend more than 7 hours online daily, mainly to look for information and news.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the spread of falsehoods and disinformation online.

Actors who wish to harm Singapore may make use of falsehoods and disinformation to undermine Singapore's political sovereignty and national security.



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Source of statistics: We are Social Singapore Country Report 2022

In this battlefield, Singapore, an open, democratic, digitally-connected and diverse country, is especially vulnerable. We are a young country with sensitive fault-lines that foreign actors can exploit to foment distrust and ill-will among our various communities. They can easily deploy the same tactics – both clandestine and overt – that we have seen elsewhere, to undermine our domestic processes and institutions, and subvert our politics.

*- then-Senior Minister of State for Health and Law,
Edwin Tong Chun Fai, in an oral Parliamentary Question
(PQ) on 12 Feb 2019*



What is disinformation and influence campaign?

Disinformation is fabricated and falsified content that purposefully aims to mislead and deceive. This can include deceptive advertisements and manipulated websites.

Influence campaigns are operations conducted by individuals or state actors, where they attempt to shape public opinions of a target country, in an organised and coordinated way to achieve specific outcomes amongst the target audiences.

In Singapore, we are most concerned with foreign interference and hostile information campaigns (HICs). Foreign interference is one of Singapore's most serious threats.

What is foreign interference and hostile information campaign?

Foreign interference

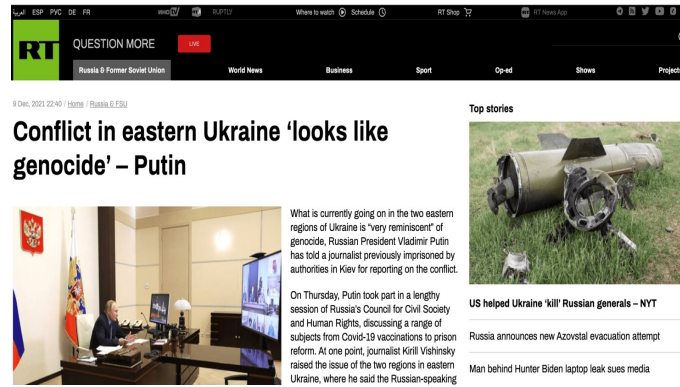
Attempts by foreign actors to manipulate domestic politics through covert and deceptive means to undermine political sovereignty and harm our social cohesion.

Hostile information campaigns (HICs)

and the use of local proxies are some common means by which foreign interference is conducted.

HICs are **deliberate attempts by foreign actors**, often secretive and coordinated, to create and spread information so as to **manipulate public opinion and harm a country's interests.**

Examples of foreign interference and HICs around the world



Russia-Ukraine Conflict (2022)

Facebook uncovers 'Russian-funded' misinformation campaign

Dave Lee
North America technology reporter
7 September 2017 | Comments

Russia and Iran tried to interfere with 2020 election, U.S. intelligence agencies say

United States (U.S.) Presidential Election (2016 and 2020)

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Brexit referendum (2016) and United Kingdom (U.K.) General Elections (2017)



Annexation of Crimea (2014)

Singapore is vulnerable to and has been a target for disinformation and influence campaigns in the past.

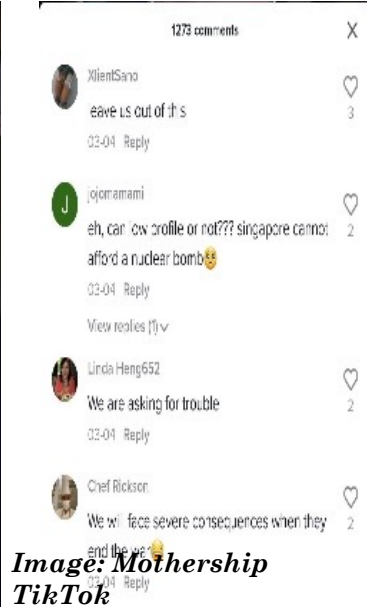
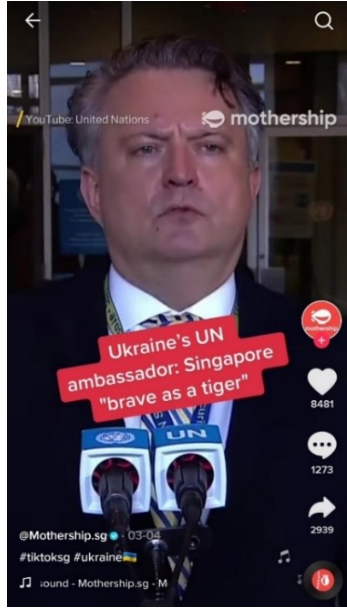


Image: Mothership
TikTok

2022
Comments from anonymous TikTok accounts to sway Singaporeans' views on the Russia-Ukraine Conflict



2018
Spike in online comments critical of Singapore when Singapore was having maritime and airspace disputes with Malaysia

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1970
Local newspapers, the Eastern Sun and the Singapore Herald received foreign funding to write articles that undermined nation-building efforts

Potential impact of disinformation and influence campaigns on Singapore

Erode trust and cohesion in society

Undermine confidence and trust in public institutions

Possible subversion or subjugation by a state actor

How can we protect ourselves against disinformation and influence campaigns?

No countries, whether big or small, are immune to disinformation and influence campaigns. Many of the countries have learnt hard lessons and are taking actions against foreign interference and HICs. Singapore has likewise taken steps to protect ourselves against disinformation and influence campaigns.

Enhanced legal framework to counter HICs

POFMA

Protection from **Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA)** seeks to safeguard against the spread of falsehoods via electronic means and online platforms.

FICA

Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act aims to strengthen Singapore's ability to prevent, detect and disrupt foreign interference in its domestic politics conducted through HICs and the use of local proxies.

How can we protect ourselves against disinformation and influence campaigns?

Educate ourselves on the threat of disinformation and influence campaigns

S.U.R.E. Campaign – NLB rolled out this program in 2013 to help Singaporeans better discern fake news and falsehoods. S.U.R.E. stands for Source, Understand, Research and Evaluate – the four concepts that we should keep in mind when assessing the reliability of news

(<https://www.sure.nlb.gov.sg/about-us/sure-campaign/>)

When in doubt, conduct fact checks on the news and information received

Government agencies provide real-time updates on their websites and social media outlets. The government's official website, Factually, www.gov.sg/factually clarifies common misperceptions of government policies, or inaccurate assertions on matters of public concern that can harm Singapore's social fabric.

You may also check on the credibility of images by using tools such as Google Reverse Image Search.

How can we protect ourselves against disinformation and influence campaigns?

We are our own first line of defence. Hence, we need to be aware of the threat of disinformation and influence campaigns. We must be sceptical and be able to discern falsehoods. When foreign actors seek to sow discord within our society, we must stand together as one people.

1

Stay informed of current affairs about Singapore via reliable sources, and be aware of fake news and disinformation about Singapore, and the tactics used.

2

Use social media responsibly by verifying the information read online and conducting fact checks before reacting to or sharing them.

3

Take personal pride in being Singaporeans, by understanding our history, culture and the principles that have helped Singapore succeed, and stand up for our national interest when the time calls for it

Conclusion

Singapore's small size, hyper-connectivity, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society make us a vulnerable target for disinformation and influence campaigns.

1

In particular, foreign interference and hostile information campaigns are threats that may disrupt our country's stability, social harmony, and our way of life.

2

We should be more discerning to comments or actions

- that artificially amplify certain views to manipulate public opinion; or
- to stir up discord amongst the different racial or religious communities in Singapore.

3