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No. 276

Fostering Pro-social Behaviour Online: 'Nudges' in the Right Direction

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25 June 2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my colleague Yeap Su Yin for her intellectual input and thorough proofreading of this paper. Her generous support and encouragement at every step of the writing has been extremely helpful. I am deeply indebted to her.

ABSTRACT

The internet penetration and the consequent creation of hyper-connected reality has exposed the Singaporean population to much more diversity of thoughts and influences. In this environment, efforts to maintain social cohesion and multicultural tolerance among the population is now even more challenging. In light of this, this paper attempts to explore the means available to maintain pro-social behaviour and build a culture of respect online. By assessing the current measures undertaken in Singapore, this paper argues that the majority of the strategies are “mind changing” such as education and awareness raising campaigns. However, by taking into account the specificity of the internet interaction, it is suggested that these strategies could be further enhanced by adopting a “context changing” approach in the online interaction by using specific behaviour influencers such as social norms, priming and messenger approach.

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Introduction

The commitment to protect Singapore's multicultural fabric is one that is deeply rooted in the country's nation-building efforts. Since the country's independence in 1965, there has been a sustained approach by the government to put in place a framework of legal, policy and social initiatives to preserve and manage racial and religious harmony amongst the country's multicultural population (Vasil 1988, p.95). Key to the government's efforts is to provide all races and religions with a "common space that all Singaporeans share" (Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally Speech 2009). As a result of such efforts, relations among the population have remained stable, free of racial or religious strife since the 1960s. This "common-space" is assiduously protected by a number of key legislation, policies and social initiatives. However, with a household internet penetration rate of 86% in 2011 (Infocomm Development Authority 2011), do such efforts translate well to that other growing "common space", the vast and borderless domain of cyberspace?

Taking the point that the conditions in cyberspace may present different challenges in efforts to maintain racial and religious harmony, this paper begins with a literature review that examines the causes for anti-normative online behaviour with a focus on defining and analysing what are referred to as structural conditions and social cues in the online world. Structural conditions refer to the conditions encountered by internet users as a result of the existing internet architecture which structures internet communications to be carried out in asynchronous, anonymous and invisible ways. Social cues, on the other hand, are those that are found in the content and interactions maintained online. This paper identifies online social norms, priming and messengers as cues that warrant added attention due to their prevalent influences on internet users, especially the young.

It is argued that both the structural conditions and social cues could potentially impact online behaviour. However, while structural conditions have a permanent form that makes it difficult to change at present, social cues can be subjected to modifications that can have an impact on behaviour. In this paper, pro-social behaviour refers to behaviour that displays: (i) intelligent and smart use of the internet; (ii) respect for others and responsible use of the Internet, which also includes maintaining tolerance among the country's multicultural communities; (iii) maintaining a balance between the virtual and the real world; and (iv) empowering and inspiring the others in one's positive use of the internet (Tan 2006, p.22).

The second part of the paper looks at some of the incidents of anti-social behaviour among the Singaporean internet users and examines the measures put in place so far to sustain Singapore's brand of multicultural harmony and tolerance. The Singapore government has put in place both hard and soft measures to curb incidences that may affect the country's racial harmony. The hard measures include a comprehensive legislative framework that aims to deter and punish acts that especially threaten the racial harmony of the major races in the country. On the other hand, soft measures are designed with an underlying educational objective in mind. These measures, referred to as "mind changing" measures, range from educational initiatives targeted at national schools to

programs by the recently formed Media Literacy Council to instil cyber-wellness values in the wider online population.

Lastly, this paper will offer some preliminary ideas as to what additional steps institutions can explore as a way to shape the online environment and in turn strengthen their measures in achieving a more pro-social behaviour online. In light of the differences between online and offline conditions for social interactions, the paper proposes that encouraging pro-social behaviour online necessitates approaches that take into account the online context. Changing the context of social interactions online through specific behavioural approaches could potentially enhance existing efforts in persuading or “nudging” internet users towards more pro-social interactions online. It is hoped that the end result would support existing efforts in building a common online space that all Singaporeans share.

Literature Overview of the Structural Conditions and Social Cues Online

For the purpose of the paper the internet is approached not as a monolithic media that promotes one form of communication, but where different platforms structure interaction in different ways. For example, emails, chats and also communication carried out on social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Reddit are mainly non-verbal forms of communication. In this type of communication, people can be invisible and anonymous even when names are revealed, as they can be fictitious. Communication which occurs in invisible conditions is lacking in auditory and visual social cues that are present in real time face-to-face communication. Another feature of the non-verbal communication is that it is mostly textual and can thus be asynchronous, which means that interaction occurs in turns and replies do not occur simultaneously but could come minutes or months later (Smith and Kollock 1999, p.5).

On the other hand, the internet also has platforms where communication is carried out visibly. For example, Skype and Google Talk (Gtalk) provide video communication, which is visible and synchronous. The focus of the paper, however, is particularly on non-verbal communication, which still forms the main bulk of online communication.

Non-verbal communication, without the presence of auditory and visual cues and carried out in asynchronous, invisible or anonymous conditions can create certain psychological effects over internet users. The psychological effects can be manifested through reduced social restraints and possible anti-normative speech online (McKenna and Bargh 2000, p.61; Douglas and McGarty 2001, p. 399-403; also see Diener 1979; Zimbardo, 1969; Duval and Wicklund, 1972).

To expand on what has been termed as structural conditions online, the paper will first briefly outline the deindividuation theory and the online disinhibition effect, which will explain how behaviour could be significantly affected just by the way in which interaction is carried out. In other words, the nature of internet communication is different from real-time communication, because it does not require physical presence, is not always synchronous, visible and can be anonymous which consequently

could produce different psychological outcomes. The deindividuation theory explains how anti-normative behaviour occurs due to the loss of self-awareness in conditions such as anonymity, invisibility, group identification or high emotional arousal. This is particularly important because as was mentioned, anonymity and invisibility are the two most prominent features of the online communication (see Suler 2004).

Following this, it is argued that in the absence of situational cues, which are visual and auditory, the internet users make use of other forms of cues available in the online environment. These online social cues, can nudge online speech in pro-social or anti-normative direction. More specifically, the paper will examine how the visual online environment prime behaviour of users. Secondly, it will be examined how online social norms leverage negative or positive disinhibition and lastly how the presence of influential messengers or online users could shape the online discourse.

1. Structural conditions: Deindividuation theory and narrowing down on the online “disinhibition” factors

It has generally been observed that when an individual's self-awareness is obstructed or diminished by certain environmental conditions, for instance, if the person is merged in a group with other people or is placed in darkness, masked or if the identity is concealed, this causes a process of deindividuation to occur (see Diener 1979; Zimbardo 1969; Festinger, Pepiton and Newcomb 1952; Postmes 2007; and Reicher 1984). The deindividuation theory provides an explanation why seemingly rational and normal individuals could display anti-normative behaviour, including hate speech under conditions such as anonymity, group identification, and high levels of emotional arousal. The argument goes that when an individual is influenced by one of these conditions in the process of deindividuation he not only loses his individual identity, but also his ability for rational thinking, long term planning and control of behaviour. Consequently, this reduced awareness of self can cause impulsive and disinhibited behaviour, which the individual does not exhibit in regular interaction with other people (McKenna and Bargh 2000, p.61)

In that sense, anonymity, as one of the conditions for deindividuation online, refers to the inability to determine one's online identity. In online communication, this anonymity allows protection of users' online actions, because whatever they say or do could not immediately be associated with their off-line persona. This, consequently, provides an outlet for disinhibited behaviour, which could be anti-normative or verbally hurtful (Suler 2004, p. 322).

Nonetheless, in online communication even when people are not anonymous to each other, they are invisible. Thus, the lack of visual and auditory interaction amplifies the disinhibition effect. The physical, face-to-face interactions are governed by visible body language or voice intonation, which can signal approval or disapproval of what is said and done and this makes people reluctant to voice their opinion freely (Suler 2004, p. 324; McKenna and Bargh 2000, p. 65). In online communication, these visual and auditory cues are not available, which disinhibits people and makes them more

susceptible to the immediate cues available online or their own current emotional state (McKenna and Bargh 2000, p. 61).

Apart from chats and Skype conversations that take place in real time, interaction in most of the other social media as well as forums is carried out in asynchronous intervals and the responses of the other participants can take days or even weeks. When people are engaged in continuous, synchronous interaction the responses from the other person influences behavioural expressions, usually in the direction of complying with social norms. Suler argues that asynchronous communication could be experienced by some people as “running away” or “hit and run”, after posting a hurtful message and not logging in again in the same forum (2004, p. 323; McKenna and Bargh 2000, p.60).

The deindividuation process has principally been analysed for the negative disinhibition it produces in individuals under the influence of anonymity. Nonetheless, as mentioned before there is no one single main effect that the Internet has over average Internet users. As elaborated earlier, people are also influenced by situational social cues governing the virtual world in face-to-face communication through online interactions. For example, variables found in the different modes of online communication or the designs of internet content have an effect on and produce different psychological outcomes (McKenna and Bargh 2000, p. 61).

Namely, in hostile and insulting conversations between internet users, commonly known as flaming, the negative disinhibition partly occurs because of the structural conditions but also due to social cues, as for example being primed by the insulting words. Therefore, the anti-normative behaviour expressed could also result from the social norms governing that particular interaction, or could be primed by the interface of the platform. In this respect, the next section of the paper will focus on the specific social cues present online which nudge behaviour in certain direction.

2. Social Cues

Changing social cues conditions in the online environment: the effect of priming, social norms and messenger

Research in experimental social and cognitive psychology has shown that individual's choices and behaviour are affected by: “changing minds”, which includes changing the way people think, or “changing the context” by influencing the environment within which people make decisions (see Dolan et al. 2012; Thaler and Sunstein 2008). Policymakers are turning their focus to the area of context changing strategies, as a means of encouraging more pro-social behaviour. Hence, such strategies are increasingly used to complement initiatives to alter minds, which are more often than not achieved only through long term policies in educational or legislative initiatives.

As a result, changing the context online is a tool that could potentially have an immediate impact on the behaviour of internet users. To further analyse this, the paper borrows from the mnemonic

MINDSPACE framework as proposed by Dolan et al. (2012). This focuses on “changing the context” by introducing nine different influencers of human behaviour.

MINDSPACE cue	Behaviour
Messenger	We are heavily influenced by who communicates information to us
Incentives	Our responses to incentives are shaped by predictable mental shortcuts such as strongly avoiding losses
Norms	We are strongly influenced by what others do
Defaults	We “go with the flow” of pre-set options
Saliency	Our attention is drawn to what is novel and seems relevant to us
Priming	Our acts are often influenced by sub-conscious cues
Affect	Our emotional associations can powerfully shape our actions
Commitments	We seek to be consistent with our public promises, and reciprocate acts
Ego	We act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves

Table 1: The MINDSPACE framework for behaviour change.

(Adopted by Doland, P., Hallsworth, P., Halpern, D., King, D., Metcalfe R., Vlaev, I. 2012, p. 266)

In the context of developing strategies that are aimed at promoting pro-social behaviour online, the paper focuses on three approaches: (i) priming; (ii) norms; and (iii) messenger; which are identified as having a strong impact on users’ online behaviour.

Priming environment

In the past couple of decades, there has been a great number of experiments carried out in the field of priming, which indicates that individual behaviour is strongly influenced by social cues, ranging from sights, words, to sensations. Furthermore, the same research shows that if priming is used for certain social identity characteristics, individual behaviour and decision-making could be unconsciously affected in very expectable and measurable ways (Dolan et al. 2010, p. 25; Seaman 2008: 117).

Common experimental studies on the effects of priming involve experiments on priming people with words that relate to age (e.g. wrinkles), which subsequently resulted in people walking slowly and displaying poorer memory. The opposite effect was achieved when people were asked to make a sentence out of words such as “athletic”, “lean” or “active”, which made them more inclined to use stairs (Dolan et al. 2012, p. 270; Seaman 2008: 117). It has also been observed that the physical features of one environment can have a great impact over behaviour through reinforcing shared social norms of what is regarded to be appropriate behaviour in that environment. Example of this can even be found in criminological theories, such as the Broken Window theory, which states that if the physical urban environment is maintained in well-ordered conditions this could prevent vandalism or more serious forms of crime. Namely, it has been observed that when a building has few broken windows and they are not repaired, there is an increased chance that a few more windows are broken or another form of crime is committed. The possible explanation for this behaviour is that the sight of disorder functions as a conditioned stimulus, to behave in an antisocial way (Dolan et al. 2010, p.34; Thaler and Sunstein 2008, p.57-79, see Kelling and Wilson 1987).

In this context, it is worth exploring how the different online social platforms and webpages prime users towards specific behaviour. More specifically, how the design and the content of the webpage, the level of administrator’s moderation of conversation could potentially influence negative or even positive disinhibition.

When discussing the design and the content of an online platform, the focus is essentially on the physical appearance of the virtual world, within which most online users spend significant amount of time. This virtual world may be very much real to most users. Consequently, in a similar way how the physical environment and the social cues governing the physical world prime social behaviour, the virtual world with its content, images, text, or even the absence of the social cues that exist in the real world, also influence users’ behaviour in either pro-social or anti-normative direction.

Considering Suler’s theory (2004) on online disinhibition, which notes that real social cues are absent from online interaction it is argued this vacuum is substituted with other types of “cues” found online, which could nudge speech and behaviour in specific direction.

With only a cursory search on any unmoderated webpage online, it can be observed that hate speech is overwhelmingly present on blogs, webpages, or media sharing files which are of a poor quality, containing numerous advertisements and allow for anonymous posting. If the webpage is unmoderated and hateful comments are not deleted, only one troll can set the discussion in a negative direction and most other users are likely to use similar form of speech. Hateful words trigger a stimulus of negative disinhibition, and also signal users that this behaviour is allowed.

Also, apart from the aesthetically poorly designed and unmoderated webpages, even social networking sites which are moderated, could nudge behaviour in a certain direction. One such example is the most widely used social networking site, Facebook. The profile page of Facebook is designed in such way that invites users to share their most private thoughts - in a form of a status

update - by posing a simple question to the user, "What is on your mind?" Furthermore, the opportunity of sharing personal photos, videos, personal notes are all allowing and influencing users to treat their Facebook profile as their second home, where their daily real-life activities and intimate thoughts are transferred to their online profile. This consequently has an impact over blurring the border between private and public life among Internet users.

In the absence of physical, synchronous communication where the user could also infer meaning from body language, in online communication the behaviour is primed by the content and the design of the webpages. This could potentially cause the user to feel more disinhibited in his interaction.

Social Norms

Social norms are also strong influencers of behaviour as they represent a standard, customary mode of behaviour to which individuals try to or unintentionally subscribe to. This standard behaviour does not necessarily mean pro-social behaviour but rather behaviour that is upheld by a majority of people and is socially accepted as normative behaviour. When submerged in a group, individuals tend to comply with the group identity and norms, which could be either positive or negative (see: Postmes and Lea 1998; Spears and Lea 1992, 1994; and Douglas and McGarty 2001). Thus, it is the social norms that explain why people tend to show conformity to group behaviour which could not be explained in terms of rationality. In a similar vein, the social norms provide an explanation as to why people are more influenced by what they see or think that other people are doing rather than following norms that relate to what people "ought" to be doing (Dolan et al. 2012, p. 269).

Dolan et al. (2012, p. 268) argue that if the norm is desirable, individuals can be informed in a way which shows that other people display conformity with that norm. For example, in an experiment on towel recycling in hotels, it was noticed that guests recycled their towels more when the sign used social norm and read that most hotel guests recycle their towels, rather than when the sign asked guests to be environmentally friendly and recycle their towels. The percentage of people who recycled their towels increased even more when the sign showed that the previous occupants of the room had reused their towel.

Same as in the real world, in the online world people tend to express themselves in accordance to the behaviour observable online. Therefore, on blogs, forums or Facebook pages that are left unmoderated and where anonymous postings are allowed, if only a few of the users start using racist slurs they set the normative behaviour and the tone of conversation, encouraging other users to follow suit.

Conversely, if the social norms in online interactions are positive, this could encourage positive behaviour among users. For example, in a study carried out by Postmes, Spears and Lea (2000) on online group identity formation, the results indicated that online group identity could develop as long as the users share the same interests and subscribe to the same social norms. This is noticeable on many message forums frequented by users that share the same interests, who sometimes develop

their own code of acceptable behaviour and remove or ban users that do not comply with this code. An example can be seen among YouTube users, many of whom may remain anonymous or have fictitious names. Where strong social identities are present or where a majority of the users share the same interests in certain videos, any inappropriate comments would either be criticised or voted down and subsequently deleted. This is an evidence of self-regulation on the users' side, rather than the administrator's side.

Messenger

The third behavioural approach examined in this paper focuses on the messengers as influencers of human behaviour. Much of the recent research in behavioural theory has shown that before making a decision, people do not only gauge the information but also the source of that information. The perceived authority of the messenger has a strong influence over behaviour. Studies show that when the information on changing health habits comes from health educators and research assistants, this is more effective than when the same message comes from teachers (see Dolan et al. 2010, p. 19).

In a similar manner, human behaviour is strongly affected by the feelings people may have towards the messenger. For example, if people have a dislike towards the government it is not very likely that they will listen or take as credible information that the government is providing. Similarity in demographic, behavioural, social or ethnic status or age group between the messenger and the recipient of information can also influence action in either positive or negative ways. Lastly, peer pressure is very important, in particular when crafting youth-targeted strategies for behaviour change. Simple examples of how strong the peer influence could be is given in a study that found 1,000 per cent increase in smoking among adolescents if just only two or three of their schoolmates smoked, in comparison to only 26 per cent increase if one of their parents smoke (see Dolan et al. 2010, p. 19).

The messenger approach, and in particular "peer-to-peer" messenger approach is particularly relevant for online pro-social behaviour on social networking sites, forums or blogs, where the majority of users are primarily young people. Bloggers, influential twitterers, Facebook users but also popular Facebook groups, which have a great number of followers, are conveyers of information and setters of online social norms. It is therefore important to take into account the possibility of engaging these individuals or online groups in the design of any policies dealing with online pro-social behaviour.

Online Disinhibition in the Singaporean Context

"Multi-racialism in a permissive, tolerant society becomes an imperative for us and those societies like us, which, for one reason or another, have taken into one geographic whole large components of people with diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds" (Parliamentary Reports (Hansard) 1966, col 1283).

The above quote from former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, delivered in a Parliamentary speech in 1966, captures the underlying rationale for the approaches to managing the country's multicultural population. This remains an important basis for legislation dealing with hate speech at present.

There is a number of legislative measures in place to maintain racial and religious tolerance in Singapore, presenting "an intricate latticework of legislation with the object of curbing public disorder more generally, and hate speech in particular" (Zhong 2009, p.6). The Sedition Act defines a "seditious tendency" as including the promotion of "feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes of the population of Singapore" (Sedition Act 1948, Ch.290). In 2005, two Singaporeans were charged under the Sedition Act in relation to online postings which amounted to hate speech against the Malay-Muslim community.¹

While the Sedition Act remains one, if not the most, severe legislative means of proscribing racial and religious hate speech, there are other relevant legislative provisions. Section 298 of the Penal Code applies to acts that wound the religious or racial feelings of any person while Section 298A concerns acts which promote disharmony, enmity hatred or ill-will between different religious and racial groups (Penal Code 1897, act 298 and 298A). In addition, the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act specifically allows for a restraining order to be issued against persons in positions of authority from any religious groups, any member or any person from taking conduct which includes causing "feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility between different religious groups" (Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act 1990, Ch. 167 A).

Other than the above mentioned case, there has been a number of other cases of antisocial behaviour online, which have made it indispensable that specific measures be introduced to ensure that the same sensitivity to racial and religious issues persist in the online environment. For example, in 2010, a pastor of a local church was questioned by the Internal Security Department for videos uploaded on YouTube and Facebook which denigrated Buddhists and Taoist beliefs (Feng, 2010). In the same year, three youths were hauled up and given a police caution for starting a Facebook group using a derogatory term which referred to ethnic Indians. (Hou, 2010). In 2011, police reports were made over three offensive Facebook postings denigrating the customs and religion of Malay-Muslims (Wong, 2011). More recently in 2012, Amy Cheong, an employee of the National Trades Union Congress was dismissed by her employers and roundly condemned by many internet users for her Facebook comments denigrating among other things the wedding customs of a particular race in Singapore. In 2014, two other cases were at the centre of social media storm. The first incident involved the British expatriate Anton Casey who caused nation-wide outrage for his Facebook comments sneering at poor people, for which he was forced to flee the country together with his family (see Huffington Post 2014). In the second incident, the former Miss Singapore Universe finalist Jesslyn Tan posted a photo of a food stall assistant on Facebook, together with an insensitive

¹ See Public Prosecutor v Koh Song Huat Benjamin and Another [2005] SGDC 272. Both accused pleaded guilty. One was jailed for a day and fined \$5,000 while the other received a prison sentence of one month. In the same year [2005], a 17 year old pleaded guilty under the Sedition Act for racists remarks posted on his website and received a sentence of probation of 24 months.

comment on the condition of his t-shirt (Aripin, 2014). Both incidents went viral and resulted in an outpouring of verbal abuse online.

To tighten control and manage online interactions, the Media Development Authority of Singapore has introduced an Internet Code of Practice. The Code governs internet content and service providers and categorises as prohibited material content that “glorifies, incites or endorses ethnic, racial or religious hatred, strife or intolerance.”(The Media Development Authority’s Internet Code of Practice). Further, in August 2012, the Media Literacy Council (MLC) was formed to formulate effective means of inculcating media literacy and cyber-wellness among the population.

At this juncture, three underlying objectives appear to drive measures in ensuring the maintenance of a “common space that all Singaporeans share.” There is firstly a punitive objective, to punish transgressors of the “basic ground rules” in place. Swift action has been taken to deal with incidents involving hate speech, many of them committed in cyberspace. As seen from the cases referred to above, these actions could range from receiving a police caution to being charged under the Sedition Act. This objective was made clear by the presiding judge at the sentencing of both the Singaporeans charged under the Sedition Act in 2005: “While an offence under section 4(1)(a) Sedition Act is rare, it is necessary for this Court to make it clear that such an offence will be met, upon conviction, with a sentence of general deterrence.”² In line with this, there is also the intention to prevent future occurrences of such behaviour, given the way in which the authorities have handled cases of hate speech. Amy Cheong’s Facebook rant attracted condemnation from several government ministers, including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (Ho, 2012). According to Bleich, “legislation has a strong declarative effect when it is enacted...it asserts that certain expressions are deemed unacceptable by the country as a whole and reassures vulnerable groups that their interests and identities are considered worthy of national attention.” (Bleich 2011: 917-934).

However, the Singapore government has not contained efforts in maintaining racial and religious harmony to legislative measures only. Above and beyond these are efforts made to persuade the population to embrace and adopt a multicultural outlook. Therefore, many of the social initiatives mentioned below have been put in place with the hope of generating cohesion from the ground up and in sustaining toleration and moderate behaviour among its multicultural population.

Current Non-Legal Initiatives for Promoting Online Pro-social Behaviour in Singapore

Other than the existing legal provisions, there has been many initiatives at promoting media literacy and cyber-wellness online. For instance, softer measures, which include “mind changing” approach, such as school programmes, have underlined the government’s efforts to educate and encourage the public towards more pro-social behaviour. While the aims of the existing approaches and programmes are clear, it is argued that there may be a need to consider additional approaches. This in particular refers to the soft measures that include “context changing” approaches that aim at influencing the online context of interaction through priming, social norms and messenger approach.

² Public Prosecutor v Koh Song Huat Benjamin and Another [2005] SGDC 272 as per Richard Magnus J.

Media literacy and Cyber wellness initiatives

In August 2012, the Media Literacy Council (MLC) was formed to come up with effective means of inculcating media literacy and cyber-wellness among the population. The MLC has since its inception ran campaigns for improving media literacy such as the recent Safer Internet Day held on 5 February 2013. The MLC chairman, Professor Tan Cheng Han notes that “in cyberspace and the real world where people are constantly interacting and sharing information, appropriate social norms and discernment are important. The MLC hopes to raise the media literacy level of Singaporeans so that everyone can benefit even more from the Internet, and traditional and new media” (Tan 2013, p. D6).

From what can be observed regarding the existing initiatives for promoting cyber-wellness and media literacy, the main areas of focus are mainly mind changing strategies, such as public education with an emphasis on educating the youth, public awareness campaigns such as the Safer Internet Day. There are also some “context changing” strategies which use behavioural approaches such as peer-to-peer effect. Specific examples include:

- 1) Road shows such as Re@lity #Virtualworld which comprises a 30-session forum theatre road show to educate Junior College students on the importance of respect and responsibility when communicating online with others (Cyber Wellness SG 2013).
- 2) Awareness raising campaigns such as the Safer Internet Day. This is a global initiative by the European-based Insafe Network to promote safer and more responsible use of online technology and mobile phones among young people across the world. Singapore joined this campaign in 2013 (Cyber Wellness SG 2013).
- 3) Roadshows and school programmes such as “Catching the Web of Lies (Say “Yes” to Cyber wellness)”. This is an interactive drama skit road show to educate secondary school students to be mindful of what they share and post online and learn to do so responsibly (Cyber Wellness SG 2013).
- 4) Exhibitions and other activities such as the Young Cyber Wellness Achiever Programme. The Young Cyber Wellness Achiever (YCA) is an activity card programme that encourages students to learn about the various cyber wellness topics through interactive and self-learning activities (Cyber Wellness SG 2013).
- 5) A video-making competition “Now you know”, ran by Google and the Media Development Authority in 2012. The campaign encourages peer education around good online practices, focuses on generating awareness around five themes: how to discern information, online etiquette, personal data protection, safety from cyber bullying, and cyber security. It specifically targets tertiary students, teachers, post-secondary and Junior College students (Cyber Wellness SG 2013).
- 6) Media Smart Club is a programme organised jointly by the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) and the Media Literacy Council (MLC), with the goal of encouraging media maturity and critical thinking among students. The process will involve training of ITE students across its three Colleges. The training aims at providing in-depth knowledge on new media and cyberspace issues. During the training the students will be taught how to interact on social

media maturely, how to deal with trolls and respond to inappropriate behaviour online, as well as the principles and workings of Singapore's media classification system. Subsequently, these students will be involved in active development of projects to foster responsible online behaviour to the wider ITE student community. –The main goal is to leverage on peer-to-peer influence (Media Literacy Council 2013).

- 7) Backpack LIVE! Cyber Wellness Student Ambassador Programme (CWSAP), a collaboration between the Ministry of Education (MOE) Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) and Microsoft Singapore aimed at training primary, secondary and junior college students to be advocates of positive social media use (Ministry of Education 2009).

While this is not an exhaustive list of initiatives that has been put in place, they cover a broad range of means to provide outreach in promoting pro-social online behaviour. With the exception of the last three initiatives, the others appear to be focused on “changing minds,” in the sense that they intend to achieve cognitive changes, leading to subsequent changes of behaviour. While such an approach may garner success in the long run, it is suggested that attention needs to be given to initiatives that aim to “change the context” of the online environment. These “context changing” initiatives could complement the “minds changing” initiatives which are currently in place. Initiatives to promote Cyber wellness and online pro-social behaviour should be designed in such way that takes into account the social cues, i.e. social norms, priming and messenger. From what can be seen of the initiatives stated above, certain context changing methods such as the peer-to-peer approach are starting to be used. Apart from the peer-to-peer messenger approach, strategies can identify other significant influencers, i.e. messengers as ways of diversifying the currently used method.

The concluding section examines whether current initiatives in Singapore address structural conditions and social cues which could potentially cause online disinhibition among internet users. It then provides policy recommendations which could serve as a basis for more integrated programs and initiatives for promoting pro-social behaviour online.

Behavioural strategies for pro-social online behaviour

In terms of structural causes of online disinhibition, there are no direct initiatives in Singapore to manage conditions such as asynchronicity, invisibility, and anonymity. As mentioned earlier, apart from anonymity the rest of the structural causes cannot be subjected to modifications. To date, Singapore has not introduced any policies which tackle anonymity online, but certain countries such as South Korea have tried and failed to put in place regulations that require users on major internet portals to log in with verified identities before they can post content (Lee 2011). In any case, introducing policies that forbid anonymity online raises other concerns. For instance, it has been argued that anonymity can serve as a form of protection that would enable people to talk about sensitive issues, such as political issues, personal medical conditions, physical abuse or sexual orientation.

Unlike structural conditions, social cues identified in this paper are a less entrenched form of the internet communication, and therefore can be modified. In fact, Singapore appears to already be considering and implementing approaches that affect “context changes.” However, other than the peer-to-peer messenger approach, there does not appear to be other initiatives in Singapore that take into account specific social online cues such as priming and social norms. While there are many initiatives of late to bolster digital maturity, these deal specifically with cognitive effects such as those undertaken by the Media Literacy Council. This includes initiatives such as digital literacy or awareness raising campaigns which are implemented in schools to educate the young users on digital issues and the maturity they need to display when using the internet. However, these initiatives have only limited outreach and the results are not immediately discernible.

Consequently, while cognitive “mind changing” strategies could potentially have long-term positive effects, they could be further complemented by strategies that deal with context change. This would provide authorities with: (i) a wider range of means to tackle the online environment without resorting to more controlling means such as legislation; (ii) possibility to institute changes that could see more immediate impact, for example peer-to-peer approaches to deal with online anti-normative behaviour; (iii) possibility to use bottom-up approach by utilising the strength of online users as a force of change rather than reliance on a top-down, government approach of deterrence; and (iv) lastly, such changes, implemented directly online with the potential to change the context in which the online communication is carried out, can potentially reach wider audience and therefore have broader impact.

Drawing from the above discussion, the following are some recommendations for impacting online behaviour by using social cues to influence the context of interaction. The first approach is to identify the online “broken windows”, i.e. the webpages or Facebook pages which are generating a great number of followers but are not moderated and thus, could prime anti-normative behaviour. This could include webpages that focus on specific issues, such as racism, xenophobia or bigoted speech. An example is the Facebook page “Stop Racism in Singapore,” which generates a great number of followers.³ While the main objective of this webpage is “creating awareness which will assist in making a difference against racism by methods of which are deemed to be peaceful, healthy and legal”,⁴ nonetheless, the activities of the webpage include reposting of xenophobic and racist comments of other online users. This has the effect of generating further comments from internet users who are subscribers to this page, thus perpetuating even more xenophobia and racism. The end result is that “Stop Racism in Singapore” is an influential platform that unintentionally establishes and magnifies negative normative behaviour.

It is suggested that such webpages which have a great number of followers and are unintentionally spreading negative normative behaviour should be mentored or provided training by the Media Literacy Council. Therefore identifying those webpages that have a large audience and influential

³ Currently the number stands at 11256, Stop Racism in Singapore Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/srisingapore>. Accessed on: 26 August, 2013.

⁴ Ibid

presence online and providing the webpage administrators with proper training on digital literacy, including moderation of sensitive discussion online, could enable them to take part in promoting more positive online behaviour. In other words, with minimal input, such pages can be turned into pro-social influencers in the online world.

The second approach is to identify the most influential individual messengers that shape opinion and set normative behaviour online. In other words, bloggers, Facebook users, twitterers who are already involved in online efforts to promote social cohesion in Singapore are a readily available resource and should also be approached for cooperation. The current trainings, which mainly target high school and university-level students, can be expanded to also include bloggers that have a different audience. For example, kiasuparents.com is a blog that is popular among Singaporean parents, and as such, it potentially influences parents and also indirectly, their children. Including even this kind of unconventional web platforms in the training programmes can multiply the impact of the initiatives.

Lastly, the Media Literacy Council has great many activities which are already using some of the behavioural approaches. What is essential is that these initiatives are also taken online. This could involve engagement of influential tertiary and university students who have attended and have been trained under the cyber-wellness programmes and educational events in creating greater cyber-wellness online presence. With proper training, these students who have showed interest in the cyber-wellness initiatives can play an active role in maintaining and moderating online discussions and thus helping in the “mending of online broken windows.”

In a nutshell, inculcating pro-social behaviour in online interaction necessitates persuasive, minds changing strategies but would also benefit from “context changing” strategies that make use of the behavioural approaches.

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