

Truth in Perception

Perception is defined as the way we view, understand or interpret information and ideas. The concept of truth is also based on perception as different people comprehend information differently and form their own opinions and ideas based on their own understanding. Following that, humans have different ways of thinking and the process of conceptualizing information is different for everyone. Thus, even if the same facts are presented to a group of people, it is possible for there to be numeral outcomes based on the way they perceive the information.

According to Slavoz Zizek's philosophical narrative, we only tell people what we want them to believe in the public space, for example in the social media which is currently the trend for many globally. Our brains function in a way, whereby we believe the things we see or read at a surface level, without even checking if the information is accurate. This concept is very obvious in today's information age where information in various forms, from video, audio to text, are easily disseminated through sharing in various platforms to capture attention. Information shared through our mobile devices is normally very short due to our short attention span. As a result, the information which we see or read, normally in less than three minutes, may not reflect the truth of the entire situation.

The challenges in the 21st century with high usage of technology is that we are in an environment whereby the integrity of information is questionable. Information relating to politics, economy, social, health, relationships, environment and many others, are easily accessible to us and it easily influences our beliefs and forms our perceptions. No doubt, there is true and false information out there which may deceive the audience. Based on our perceptions, we only believe what we want to

believe without questioning its authenticity and with so many versions of the truth, is our own perception of truth a false truth or is it actually true?

In this essay, the example of dissemination of information on vaccination is elaborated to present the different perceptions by Malaysians on vaccination based on the philosophical narrative. Since March 2020, Malaysia has been facing a global pandemic known as Covid-19, which also started in other countries. Currently, not only Malaysia but the whole world is still facing many difficulties and challenges to overcome this pandemic. The pandemic has caused many deaths of all ages globally and people's perception of the pandemic has created a lot of fears and caused people's mental health to deteriorate which has led to many people committing suicide. Due to many uncertainties and economic breakdown, many have experienced loss of jobs and downfall of businesses due to lockdown.

The perception of the public on the pandemic situation in Malaysia and strategies used by the government and authorities to tackle and to control the spread of the 2-year disease have created a divide in society. According to Malaysia's Health Ministry, as of January 25th 2021, Malaysia recorded about 3,000 cases. But as of August 7th 2021, the number of cases has increased about 6 times, as there were 20,889 new positive cases recorded. The numbers are still increasing even though an estimate of 500,000 people in Malaysia are vaccinated in a day and millions of vaccines are still being distributed throughout the country and sponsored by the government.

All of us have the same hope, which is to see the Covid-19 virus disappear so that we are able to at least go back to our normal lives. However, this seems difficult to achieve in the near future as one of the main reasons as to why the spread is hard to

be controlled is because there are still many Malaysians who are against vaccinations or are unsure whether the vaccine can help in preventing the spread of Covid-19. The number of Covid-19 cases can only be reduced if there is herd immunity. Nevertheless, these people perceive the vaccines to be more dangerous than the actual virus and most are afraid to face the side effects that come with being vaccinated.

These perceptions and beliefs are preventing our country from achieving herd immunity and thus it has caused our country to fall behind other countries in terms of controlling the disease. So, the question is, how did some people perceive that the vaccines are dangerous as compared to Covid-19? Why are many people still not vaccinated yet or not sure if they should be vaccinated?

Those who are vaccinated have the perception that there are more benefits than risks when it comes to the need to be vaccinated. There are many news reports, interviews, videos and articles published in the media based on academic and medical research that showcase the benefits of vaccines to the public in order to convince them that all the different vaccines out there are safe to be used. The reliable sources of information strengthen the beliefs of many to be vaccinated and to face the side effects of vaccines with the hope that they can be protected against the virus.

Having said that, the other group of people are against vaccinations as they do not believe that vaccines can help to prevent them from the infection of the virus although the vaccines are available for free. Instead, from their perspectives, they understand that the vaccine would cause more harm than do any good. This belief is stemmed from different forms of information such as articles and videos that

publish fake news regarding vaccines with the goal of creating fear in the minds of the people. These articles are usually published by unnamed sources and the credibility of these articles are often unreliable. Nonetheless, these types of false news is often widely spread through social media and many people still wholeheartedly believe what is written in them.

Besides that, people also tend to believe information from word-of-mouth, especially from relatives and friends or even respectable political or religious leaders. They think that because the political or religious leaders are well respected, the information dissemination from them is accurate and must be followed. People who are against vaccination believe that it is against their religion to be vaccinated or it is their own right to make a decision to be vaccinated and not be forced by the government. Although there are stories in the media about deaths caused by Covid-19 directly or indirectly, this group of Covid-19 anti-vaxxers are still persistent to avoid vaccination.

So, the role of media, particularly television and newspapers, must play a role to engage discussions involving both sides of the argument, of a subject matter, to be presented to the public so that the public can make better choices and decisions regarding vaccination. However, this is a different case for social media platforms. In social media, information is biased and normally one-sided and this is dangerous especially when people just share information without checking on its authenticity.

On this note, it is important for consumers to know the sources for information. There are a lot of websites or online media outlets, which are perceived as active in spreading fake news. Websites that focus more on gossip and trending topics tend to exaggerate their information in order to capture the reader's attention. It is also

possible for these sites to mix in false information with their articles so that rumours could escalate to create curiosity and excitement to cause commotion.

With recent technology, it is easy for people to create fake situations that seem real but have never happened with applications such as Photoshop. With that in mind, the information that is shown to the public can easily be manipulated in order to trick and mislead people from the truth. It is also advisable to find out the entire context of information from photos or videos and know the entire story before forming any opinions. This is so that our perception of the topic is not biased or incomplete and we can judge the context provided fairly.

Following this, there have been instances, whereby the media reported a story and later realised that the information reported turned out to be fabricated. One example is of a Malaysian student who claimed to have received a Nasa scholarship on Twitter on May 4th 2020. The media published the story and the whole nation, including Malaysia's Prime Minister and the King of Malaysia had congratulated the student via social media. A few days later, the media had to retract the statement when they found out that the scholarship certificate was fake.

In conclusion, information is shared to spread knowledge and ensure that everyone is aware of current events. However, we should still be diligent in ensuring that the information is reliable and we should be careful to not be tricked by any false news. Facts should be checked from well founded websites and we should not trust any information that is spread to us so easily. Not only that, in order to prevent ourselves from being misled by false news, we should always doubt the source of the information until there is a confirmation from any authorities or trustworthy sources.

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