

Why Governments Are Losing the Social Media Disinformation War: Authentication, Debunking, and the Struggle for Information Integrity in Global Governance

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ABSTRACT

Disinformation poses a critical threat to global governance and citizens' decision-making. Supported by the General Research Fund (GRF) of the Hong Kong Research Grant Council (RGC), this seminar presents insights from a cross-national project spanning Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United States. It investigates the dual struggle for information integrity: citizens' resistance to misinformation and the difficulties faced by authorities in debunking falsehoods, especially in the context of powerful technical giants and business elites. Study 1, a comparative online survey, analyzes news authentication as a key indicator of resilience to disinformation. Study 2, a population-based online survey experiment in the three societies, explores how political cynicism and conspiracy beliefs undermine the effectiveness of government-led debunking efforts. The results show that corrective messages would backfire, increase issue extremity, and reduce engagement; their impact is constrained by individuals' political predispositions. For regulators, educators, and news organizations focusing on innovation and global collaboration, these findings highlight the urgent need for targeted misinformation interventions that leverage AI, media literacy, and communication strategies to achieve information integrity in the global governance.



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SPEAKER



Xinzhi ZHANG (PhD, City University of Hong Kong) is an Associate Professor with tenure of AI and Journalism in the Department of Media and Communication (COM) at City University of Hong Kong. His research focuses on digital journalism, political communication, AI policy and regulation, and computational social science. He studies how emerging technologies, particularly Generative AI (GenAI) and digital platforms, are transforming news production and dissemination, as well as how technology-mediated communication influences citizens' news consumption, public engagement, and government policymaking. His research has been supported by several internationally competitive funding schemes, including the General Research Fund (GRF) by the Research Grant Council (RGC) of Hong Kong SAR and the Public Policy Research Funding Scheme (PPR) from the Hong Kong Government. He has published over 50 peer-reviewed articles in top-tier journals, such as *Human Communication Research*, *Journal of Communication*, *Social Media + Society*, *Policy & Internet*, *International Journal of Press/Politics*, and *Digital Journalism*. He was a visiting scholar at UC Davis and currently serves on the editorial boards of *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Human Communication Research*, and *Digital Journalism*.