

Anti-Fake News law could be used on research claims

MANY events in the world can become international news. These can be political events, natural and unnatural disasters, technology breakthroughs, disruptive business opportunities and even royal marriages, just to name a few.

Many become headline or breaking news on TV networks. But during the 2016 United States Presidential election, the term "fake news" made its international debut. President Donald Trump, who many considered an outsider in US politics, surprised many by branding major US media networks as key sources in the spread of fake news. His outburst arose from his belief that most of the major networks were working in cohort to discredit him.

Soon after that, fake news became a topic of mainstream discussion. Here in Malaysia, a law was recently legislated to stop the spread of fake news which can be socially damaging.

Fake news is not entirely new. It has been around since time immemorial. Fake means different things to different people. There are fake products; for example, women are familiar with fake designer handbags. Then there are fake cosmetics and fake medicines sold in the original brand names. And what about fake claims made in advertisements?

Faking the performance of products is no longer confined only to the low-end items. Recently, the world was awoken to the deployment of fake claims even by the big international brands. Many are, of course, familiar with the fake emission claims by a major automotive brand, which was eventually slapped with a heavy fine by authorities in the US.

Even Japan has not been spared from a similar episode when a major steel maker was dealt a hefty fine for making false claims on the speci-

fications of its product. All such risk-takings have come about, many believe, because of intense competition in the marketplace.

Another damaging form of fake news is faking science. Again, as a result of strong competition in the market, some industry sectors even use credible scientific minds to fake scientific results in order to persuade consumers to favour their products. In Malaysia's case, palm oil has been the target of many such attacks by faking the science of nutrition.

Many must still remember the early days of palm oil when it received that scathing attack on the nutritional demerits of its higher saturated fatty acids content. The weapons used then were fake scientific findings. But when the real science became clear, such fake claims soon evaporated.

Recently, another claim, most likely from the enemies of palm oil, made an appearance. This was about a compound purportedly found in palm oil which can be carcinogenic. Again, the real science will disprove this.

A few years ago, South Korean science was in the news when a group of scientists claimed they had perfected the science of human cloning. The claims were proven to be false. This is the reason why some countries, for example Britain, have set up a watchdog group to monitor the reporting of scientific findings. As soon as they spot some potentially fake reporting, they will get the experts to investigate. If proven to be fake, the media is sought to publish the correct information.

Malaysia should consider setting up a similar watchdog group that could be placed under the Academy of Science. This is because the public has been bombarded by manufacturers with all kinds of fake scientific claims to bolster support

for their products. Many are conscious of the fact that totally eradicating fake news is a major challenge. We live in a nation where gossiping is embedded in our culture. The top-selling magazines in the country are mainly the gossip magazines.

Some gossips may be harmless but many can be damaging. Such gossips and fake news are now being circulated in the campaign for the 14th General Election. If left unchecked, these can be detrimental to the harmony that we are struggling to build. There is therefore merit in the law that has just been passed.

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PBS KELUAR DARIPADA BARISAN NASIONAL

VALUATOR

Company(Brand)	Mention	Tone	ROI
Cendana-Mycreative (Cendana-Mycreative)	1	0	RM 0
Malaysia General Election (Malaysia General Election)	3	0	RM 0
Malaysia Science Academy (ASM) (Malaysia Science Academy (ASM)	1	0	RM 0
Oil Palm Development (Oil Palm Development)	4	0	RM 0
Palm Oil News (Palm Oil News)	4	0	RM 0

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