



# Counteracting Misinformation in Quotidian Settings

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**Abstract.** Recent studies investigating misinformation spread have been situated within political contexts and have used psychological and technological approaches. In response, this study illuminates everyday life situations where people discover misinformation. Based on interviews conducted in Vietnam, it found that people's decision to counteract misinformation in part links to their existent relationship with its sharer. People tend to counteract misinformation shared by significant others rather than by strangers. The need to adhere to norms in order to keep the relationships harmonious and to avoid embarrassing the sharer shapes what methods are used to counteract misinformation. The findings demonstrate the role of maintaining relationships in choosing appropriate ways of counteracting misinformation, offering insights for reconciling ideological polarizations in everyday life.

**Keywords:** Misinformation · Fake news · Disinformation · Information sharing · Vietnam

## 1 Introduction

People encounter misinformation through quotidian interactions with others in online and offline settings. This phenomenon has principally appeared in extant studies on how confirmation biases and groupthink expedite the spread of misinformation [1]. Despite being aware of the falsehood, the ideology promulgated by the source, people still seem to share misinformation because it serves their needs [2]. Consequently, having adequate media literacy skills is insufficient to deal with misinformation without the awareness to interrogate the biases that people hold when evaluating the quality of information circulating in everyday life [3]. In this vein, the decision whether to share, ignore, or counteract misinformation is cognitive in nature. The reaction to misinformation depends on the individual's assessment about how their action will directly affect their interest at a point in time [4, 5]. This approach to why people share misinformation pushes the fundamental understanding that people contextually interact with information, regardless of its truth or falsehood, to the periphery. In fact, misinformation and its subsequent interpretation are embedded in social interactions [6].

The interactions shape what action people deem appropriate when encounter any information they consider false. Studies have demonstrated that people tend to believe

and share misinformation because it is aligned with their predispositions [7], resulting in a strong belief that information shared by others from different perspective is false and irrelevant [8]. This psychological approach to understanding misinformation spread underestimates that such a belief indeed is a byproduct of interactions with others [9]. In everyday life, people may cordially counteract misinformation shared by others, allowing for exchanging correct information with one another [10]. In this sense, the potential for misinformation to be corrected or shared is situated within mundane interactions that motivate people from different backgrounds to engage in information sharing activities. These interactions allow corrections to misinformation to be presented organically, as well as the falsehood in the misinformation to be solidified [11]. People ascribe meanings to interactions as they consider maintaining relationships with others involved in the interactions is important to gather, use, and share information impacting their life [12]. Hence, counteracting misinformation that others share can affect the continuity of the relationships. In this sense, preserving the relationships is preferred, leading people to seek appropriate methods for counteracting the misinformation. Like the act of sharing information, the counteraction is a form of social performances, in which people choose to act in accordance to what is suitable for themselves and the situation they are in [13]. Counteracting can risk both the people's and the sharer's social situations, as the need to maintain the relationships out-weighs the intention to provide correct information. Essentially, the meaning that people put into the relationship with the sharer affects the evaluation of whether to counteract misinformation is appropriate [14].

Building on the above understanding, this study aims to illuminate mundane situations where people discover misinformation and how their relationships with the sharer lead to different ways of counteracting. This endeavor potentially provides an understanding that any form of information, regardless of its truthfulness, circulates within complex social interactions, in which people assess their positions, their relationships with others involved in the interactions, the norms that shape what actions are appropriate to perform, and the consequences to the relationships [15].

## 2 Literature

### 2.1 Quotidian Interactions as a Context

Understanding what lies beneath quotidian interactions allows for a closer proximity to the dynamics of the encounters in everyday situations [16]. Observing the everyday unfolds the opportunity to illuminate the insights that are less apparent in research employing experimental or survey methods [17]. The everyday represents the actions and behaviors that people perform when naturally interacting with others, providing an organic understanding of what it is that underlies the interactions [18]. Contextualizing a study in a quotidian setting potentially enables us to untangle the complexity and subtlety that bind social interactions. Like information, misinformation is shared in situations where people interact with others, demonstrating that its spread and consequences are a byproduct of the interactions rather than strictly situated within the people's individual psychologies [19].

Recent studies on misinformation have largely used politics as a context. These studies, mostly situated in democratic countries, have documented the mechanisms,

repercussions, and political ramifications of misinformation spread [20]. While portraying the current social dynamic affecting the political arena, such studies seem to assume that most people are able to identify the falsehood in the misinformation they encounter and to freely converse about political subjects. The falsehood in fact is often thin, hard to identify by non-experts, easily luring ordinary people to make false decisions [21]. In an environment where political content is sensitive, principally because of limited freedom of speech and expression, most people tend to concern themselves with non-political misinformation impacting their everyday lives. In this sense, misinformation is embedded in a nexus of mundane interactions, in which a delicate strategy to protect existing relationships with others characterizes appropriate ways of counteracting it.

In response, this study is situated within an environment where political discussions are scant. Vietnam, the most populous Socialist-Communist country in Southeast Asia, is chosen as a locus of data collection. The country has transitioned to an open policy-oriented economy since it became a member of World Trade Organization in 2007 [22]. Over 70% of approximately 97 million Vietnamese are connected to the Internet and 50% of these are social media users.<sup>1</sup> Other forms of information and communication technologies rapidly grow, enabling initiatives to mitigate the potential of the technologies to become tools for spreading misinformation. The government imposes formal approaches in the forms of laws and sanctions to combat it, as its spread has become a mutual concern among countries in the region [23].

The everyday interactions of the ordinary Vietnamese people are marked by the tendency to avoid conflicts in order to maintain social harmony.<sup>2</sup> Preserving relationships is key to interacting with others, perpetuating the inclination to conceal different opinions and disagreements. Correcting others sharing misinformation thus can be seen as challenging the extant norm that requires people to maintain harmonious relationships with others by avoiding sharing information that potentially disrupts regular interactions [25]. In a collectivistic society such as Vietnam, the relationships with others lie in a complex, delicate social hierarchy. Making others look good in the public eye is considered a social obligation while everyday interactions between different ages are often formal and less equal. Considering such characteristics, Vietnam offers promising insights to unravel the complexity of situations when ordinary people living in a non-democratic, collectivistic setting discover information they deem false in everyday life.

## 2.2 Discovering Misinformation

To unfold the counteracting misinformation as an everyday practice, this study builds on the concept of discovering information in context [26]. This concept emphasizes the understanding that people use and share information in social settings. Thus, people interact with information, together with others situated within a certain time and space, and this interaction is not entirely driven by individual needs. Rather, people's situations shape the appropriate actions, allowing for the continuous construction of the meanings that emerge from the interactions [27]. Hence, the actions reflect the people's ability to examine the consequences of the actions to themselves, their situations, and others

<sup>1</sup> [www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com).

<sup>2</sup> [www.hosftedeinsights.com](http://www.hosftedeinsights.com).

involved in the situations [28]. With that in mind, the concept of discovering information is a response to a strong tendency to understand information from a merely cognitive and psychological approach. Information indeed is a byproduct of human social interactions with others, which can affect the depth and breadth of the interactions over time [29].

Solomon's concept of discovering information implies that people use and share the information they discover without caution, giving inadequate attention to the fact that information may contain false or true content. In response, this study attempts to highlight situations where ordinary people discover misinformation, a form of information that can be true or false [30]. Misinformation potentially triggers uncertainty and polarization, and, if it remains unverified, can lead to casualties and other undesirable outcomes [31].

People respond to misinformation differently. They may correct its sharer immediately [32], authenticate it with their inner circle [33], simply ignore it because of viewing it as irrelevant to their circumstances [34], or refuse to accept the falsehood it contains [11]. Documenting different actions people performed when discovering misinformation, these studies have provided a limited understanding of the situation in which people decide to counteract misinformation in quotidian interactions.

The situation comprises people, norms, actions, and spaces in which social interactions occur [35]. Considering that misinformation is a critical incident that happens in social settings [36], a focus on situations has the potential to identify how people counteract misinformation they discover in mundane interactions, contributing to extant cognitive and psychological approaches to misinformation spread. Counteracting misinformation is an unexpected occurrence but calls for further reflection and examination to prevent unwanted events from happening, affecting people's relationships with others or harming their own situations. Given that, this study pays attention to everyday interactions in a collectivistic society and the norms that govern the interactions, shaping the decision whether counteracting misinformation is appropriate.

The presence of others, together with information exchanged, shape what form of counteractions are appropriate, as people reflect on what is the proper action to react to the situation faced [37]. Characteristics of other people involved in the situation when people discover misinformation, such as age and social positions, inform whether counteracting will threaten the existing relationships. The closeness between people and the misinformation sharer plays a role in whether or not counteracting the misinformation will disrupt the relationship. As such, there is a possibility that people will choose to ignore the misinformation when perceiving that correcting it will be detrimental to their relationship with the sharer. In other words, the perceived risk of counteracting outweighs the benefit, hence leaving the misinformation uncorrected is preferred [38].

The perceived risks stem from people's preconceptions about whether the spaces where the interactions take place are safe [39]. Sharing different content and information will likely occur in a certain space where people view it safe [40]. A perception of safety shapes the decision of whether to share or conceal information, where assessments of the benefits and costs for either decision take place during the span of the interactions [41]. Thus, people may refrain from sharing different information if doing otherwise will jeopardize their own safety in the space where they interact. A perceived safe space creates an inclination to share an array of information, allowing people from different backgrounds to discuss information impacting their lives [42]. Hence, counteracting false

information seems to be unlikely to happen in a space where people feel that providing the sharer with corrections is risky.

The perceived risks can also come from the norms that govern social interactions. The norms provide guidance to appropriate responses to the situation that people are part of. Hence, punishments and rewards are an integral part of the norms, requiring people to adhere to them in order to maintain relationships with others and society in general [43]. In other words, a set of normative behaviors is expected to be present in order to keep different forms of social interaction in place, leading to negotiations of what information is acceptable to share and a continuous examination of appropriate actions in a certain situation. The norms, in this sense, can therefore be constraining when the need to counteract misinformation emerges [44]. Counteracting misinformation shared by others can be seen as inappropriate, because the impact of the norm of conformity is to maintain social harmony. People may prefer not to counteract mis-information, considering that it might disrupt the relationships.

Thus, people search for appropriate ways to counteract misinformation, when believing that leaving it uncorrected will potentially bring damage to the society. In this sense, people tend to choose a communication channel that is unlikely to embarrass the misinformation sharer, taking the norm into considerations for navigating between making the decision to counteract misinformation and to protect existing relationships with the sharer. Using a private communication channel can become an appropriate way of preventing misinformation from spreading without compromising the existing relationship with the sharer. In such a channel, people can safely address the falsehood in the misinformation while assuring the sharer that the correction provided comes from a good intention. This way of counteracting indicates an incentive to sow a mutual understanding despite differences in the information people share with one another [45].

Having said that, counteracting the misinformation sharer publicly remains feasible, provided that the people trying to counteract are confident with their preemptive knowledge and the sharer's ability to accept corrections [46]. In this sense, self-efficacy and the perceived outcome lead to the decision to counteract misinformation. The stock of knowledge that people have about a subject matter generates the intention to counteract or believe misinformation, together whether its spread will directly impact them or others who matter to them [47]. Such an individual approach however undermines the complexity of misinformation spread through mundane interactions, resulting in a simplification of the social dynamics that gradually develop as people interact with others, in a particular space, and with different types of information [48].

Broadly, the presence of different types of people shapes the ways people interact with information in general [49]. Materialized in different characteristics and meanings, these social types influence whether it is appropriate to counteract misinformation and what types of communication channels are aligned with the expected norms. Counteracting misinformation, embodying an act of sharing different information, thus is embedded in social situations. It involves foreseeing the impact of taking a certain action on existing relationships with others and the situations that people faced [50]. The decision to counteract misinformation lies in a constant examination of potential damages that it may cause and the relationships between people and the sharer, in which a certain norm shapes what counteracting methods are considered appropriate.

With the foregoing discussion in mind, this study asks:

- a. What are situational factors that shape people's decisions to whether counteract misinformation?
- b. How do such situational factors affect the methods that people choose to counteract misinformation in everyday life?

### 3 Method

To answer the above questions, we conducted interviews with 36 participants (28 women). Among these, 24 had college degrees, nine had vocational diplomas, two graduated from high schools and one graduated from a primary school. The participant's average age was 34 years. These participants were recruited via social media and the researchers' connections with the local communities. To be eligible to participate in the interviews, the participants had to have at least once corrected any information they considered false online.

The data collection period was from May to September 2019. Most interviews lasted between 60 and 75 min. Two Vietnamese native speakers conducted the interviews, maintaining the cultural and contextual elements of the situations that the participants experienced when counteracting misinformation. At the end of the interviews, the participants were asked to nominate their associates to participate in this study [51]. Most participants nominated female associates for convenient reasons, disproportionately skewing the sample towards female participants. Gender was not the focus of the present study, this limitation to data collection however should be acknowledged.

Data analysis began in October 2019. We used NVivo for data analysis, after the interviews were transcribed and translated into English. On a weekly basis, we discussed some of the themes and patterns regarding the situations where the participants encountered information they deemed false as well as their considerations to whether counteract. This later process, guided by the proposed research questions, helped us develop a holistic understanding of the data. Thus, the findings reported in the following sections were able to capture the participants' experiences, while addressing the existing theoretical gap asserted in the literature [52].

### 4 Findings and Discussion

Discovering misinformation, people took into account whether the sharer was a stranger or significant other. These different social types reflected the degree of closeness between people and the sharer, resulting in a decision to whether counteract the misinformation or not. People tended not to counteract misinformation shared by strangers if the perceived risks of counteracting were high. In comparison, when discovering significant others shared misinformation, people tended to counteract it. Guided by the norm governing everyday interactions, the age of the sharer and the existing relationships affected the methods that people used to counteract misinformation. People preferred an indirect method to counteract misinformation shared by older people. Conversely, if the sharer

was younger, or at the same age, people seemed to choose a direct method to counteract misinformation. Despite employing different methods, people preferred private communication channels for counteracting misinformation. Figure 1 visualizes these findings. The sections that follow illuminate some of the situations where people discovered misinformation and demonstrate the manner of counteraction according to the norms applicable to their everyday lives.

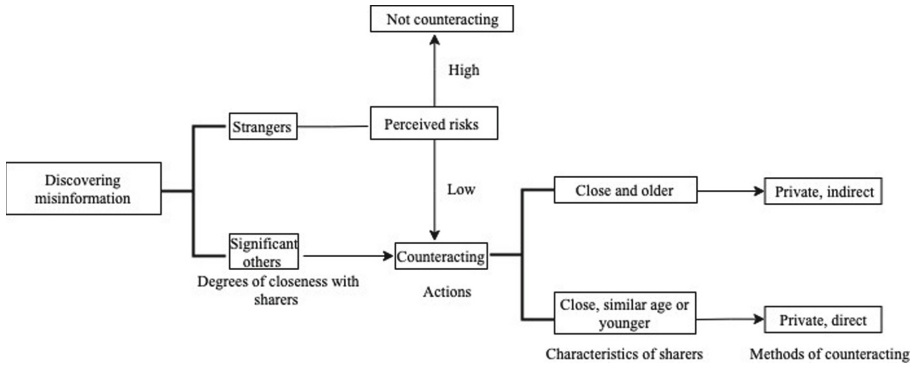


Fig. 1. Counteracting misinformation in quotidian settings.

#### 4.1 How Close Was the Sharer with Me?

The degree of closeness with the sharer affected whether people decided to counteract misinformation. The closeness ranged from significant others to strangers, facilitating the inclination to address the falsehood in the information the sharer intentionally or unintentionally spread through different occasions. Family members and friends were some of the examples that the participants reported as significant others, to whom counteracting misinformation was considered valuable in order to protect themselves and others from harm. A participant described different actions she took based on the closeness of her relationship with a significant other who happened to share misinformation:

There are some cases when I am quiet [did not counteract misinformation]. I feel uncomfortable of directly correcting [false] information from strangers. For example, when I saw someone shared an article falsely claiming that two [famous Chinese] singers were truly in love with each other, I shared that article on my Facebook and added my own opinion on it instead of directly confronting the sharer. (Anh)

The decision to counteract misinformation appeared to be related to whether people had meaningful relationships with the sharer or not. The excerpt shows that she tended to ignore strangers who shared information she considered false regarding some of her favorite singers. This decision linked to the feeling of discomfort for correcting strangers. While believing that the information shared on social media (i.e. Facebook) was false,

she chose not to directly correct the sharer. She, instead, corrected the falsehood by re-posting the article and adding some corrections and contexts to the content [53], providing clarifications to others who may have believed the false content that the article contained. She believed that such a way of counteracting was safer because a direct counteraction on Facebook could have risked her of being attacked by other Facebook users.

However, if the sharer was a significant other, then people seemed to be willing to directly correct the misinformation. Below excerpt reflects on just that:

If the sharer is a family member, it is quite easy to say [that the information is false]. But, if I don't know whether the information is true or false, I discuss it with them [the family member]. If the information is truly false, I will let them know that it is.

... [In comparison] if it is from a person whom I am unfamiliar with, it does not directly affect my relatives or family, or when I do not know enough to explain it to strangers, then I will not say anything. (Pham)

People tended to be able to safely point out the falsehood in the information, because they had an adequate understanding of how the sharer would likely to react to their actions. In this sense, the risk coming out of counteracting was low, the inclination to address the falsehood in the information was high. People believed that the correction provided to the misinformation would not disrupt their existing relationships, because they knew that the sharer would be able to accept the correction [54]. In this vein, the sharer had the belief that the people correcting the misinformation had no negative intention to embarrass them nor to impose their beliefs and ideologies.

In relation to such good faith, people counteracted misinformation shared by significant others was in part to protect them from harm. This altruistic intention was rooted in the belief that the significant others would endanger themselves or others if the mis-information left uncorrected. A participant commented:

If I correct people that I'm not close with, I don't know what they will think about me afterwards. Besides, I think, they will try hard to defend the information they shared, which, [if I correct it], would quickly turn into an unnecessary argument. That would never end well. ... Most time I will correct [misinformation shared by] my family members.

There was one time my sister told me information I consider incorrect regarding a concept taught in Vietnam for students grade 2–3. Since I was in the education field, I sent her a link of an article to correct her. The concept was very old. And, she might not have enough information to fairly comprehend it. Since she was my sister, and I saw that she was lacking such information and would share it with many people, so I corrected her. ...

My mother-in-law has diabetes so I look for her information on a low sugar diet. Thus, every time I hear false information that eating a certain food will reduce sugar level, I will correct it. Similar to that, my dad is quite overweight. He said that eating an unripe banana before dinner is good for losing weight, whereas I read



that eating it will badly affect health. I correct such false information immediately because it might endanger my family members. (Hung)

The comment demonstrates that correcting misinformation stemmed from an altruistic intention to prevent significant others from harming themselves and others. This act of altruism embodied a sense of civic duty that revolved around protecting the ones within the persons' social circle while at the same time mitigating the risk that the misinformation potentially brought to a larger social circle [45]. People believed counteracting misinformation shared by significant others could have the potential to prevent it from wildly spreading. In this sense, the agency that people exercised to deal with misinformation showed a need to protect the significant others, while indirectly preventing the misinformation from reaching the public. Put simply, protecting members of the smaller social circle embodied the people's intention to protect the society from damages that the misinformation could bring.

In broad terms, counteracting misinformation in everyday life seemed to be selfish in intent as reflected in the people's inclination to counteract misinformation only if they knew the sharer, resulting in a tendency to ignore misinformation shared by strangers. Paired with that, counteracting misinformation was social in intent, as people believed that counteracting it would have affected the larger social circle. People thought of counteracting misinformation that circulated within their social circle as a way of protecting society and preventing a wider audience from basing their actions on the misinformation. Counteracting misinformation began from individual interests, as people tended to care about the wellbeing of others that mattered to them rather than strangers. Within that however there was also a collectivistic intention to keep others from making decisions based on misinformation. Hence, mitigating the potential damages that it could possibly bring was necessary.

## 4.2 How Old Was the Sharer?

The social norms provided guidance to interactions, shaping the decision on whether countering misinformation was appropriate in a given situation. These norms helped inform what actions were acceptable as people from different backgrounds interacted, allowing for the maintenance of social harmony [9]. The excerpt below illustrates this, principally related to the need of respecting elders, shaped the methods that Vietnamese people chose when deciding to counteract misinformation without disrupting their existing relationships with the sharer:

Whether counteracting misinformation or not depends on the relationship between an older person and the younger one. For examples, if the relationship is close, then I can correct the misinformation directly. Otherwise, I have to examine whether it is true or not. If I think it is false, I am not close to the sharer, I have to double-check it and correct the sharer via [Facebook] Messenger or chat later. In short, I am not brave enough to speak the truth in such a situation. ...

[With an older person] I will correct it [misinformation], but with a much softer style. "I hear about it differently ... I hear it from a legitimate source of information and so on" The elderly is keen to listen to stories from people and believe them.

It's like their hobby to listen to rumors, to sources of false information that only want to attract the attention of the receivers .... For example, when my parents give wrong information, I react immediately. "Where do you hear that from?" When something potentially goes wrong, I will usually counteract misinformation. In a family setting, I say it softly; the response is usually less severe. For people like my parents, I still have to care [about their feelings] a little bit. For my brother, no need. (Linh)

The excerpt illuminates a norm that guided ways of counteracting misinformation. The age of the sharer appeared to shape appropriate ways of counteracting, based on the norm requiring the younger to respect the elder. In this circumstance, providing corrections could be seen as embarrassing the elder or challenging their positions embedded in extant social hierarchies [24]. In the above excerpt, she carefully corrected her elder who happened to spread misinformation within her social circle. The fact that she was younger than the sharer conditioned her to look for a way of counteracting that would not be considered as disrespectful. Rather than directly addressing the falsehood in the information, she pointed her elder to other information that could motivate them to rectify the misinformation they already shared voluntarily. Indirectly talking about related content surrounding the misinformation with the elder seemed to be more appropriate than directly correcting it. She believed doing so would mitigate potential conflicts that might follow direct corrections, which could have disrupted existing relationships with the elder.

In some events, people preferred not to counteract misinformation because doing so would be seen as offensive. People chose to avoid interpersonal conflicts over correcting the falsehood in the misinformation. Staying silent was a way to keep the relationships normal [13]. Doing otherwise would trigger the impression that the younger was challenging the elder, fraying the relationships as unnecessary arguments ensued. Thus, the decision not to counteract misinformation that the elder shared was a result of a continuous examination to its ramifications to the relationships. Believing that keeping a good relationship was more important than providing the sharer with correct information, people were disinclined to counteract misinformation. If, on the other hand, they were so inclined, methods appropriate to the extant norms were employed in order for preventing the act of correcting from disrupting the relationships.

By comparison, when knowing that the sharer was younger or at the same age, people counteracted misinformation in a direct way. In the above excerpt, discovering that her younger brother shared misinformation on Facebook, she directly corrected it in person, as perceiving that their age positioned them in the same social level. Interacting with the elder, as prescribed by extant norms governing social interactions, required subtle and soft methods of counteracting. On the other hand, with others whom people considered within the same position, such an expectation seemed to be absent. The risk that correcting the misinformation would break the existing relationship was therefore low, making it feasible to directly counteract the misinformation.

The findings suggest that the norms that guided how people should behave within their social circles shaped what methods were appropriate to counteract misinformation. The norms provided a set of ideas about the consequences of choosing a counteracting method that would not disrupt the existing relationships with the sharer. In quotidian

settings, considering that correcting the elder who shared misinformation could potentially harm the existing relationship, people used a soft, indirect method to counteract misinformation. People believed that this way was viable and would not compromise the existing relationship with the sharer, especially if the sharer was normatively perceived as located in a higher social position. The indirect counteracting method stemmed from a continuous assessment of the need to counteract misinformation and to keep the relationship with the sharer in harmony. This normative consideration then informed the type of communication channels was suitable for use.

### 4.3 Private or Public?

People preferred private communication channels for counteracting misinformation shared by significant others. A one-on-one messaging app or personal conversation was considered more appropriate than public communication channels such as social media. People believed that a use of private communication channels minimized the risk of the sharer being embarrassed by being corrected, which could be detrimental to interpersonal relationships. Correcting misinformation shared by significant others seemed to be delicate; people did that in private as they considered it more acceptable in the public eye. The excerpt below points out reasons for choosing a private over public communication channel to counteract misinformation:

If someone I know posts false information, I will choose to talk to them in person rather than directly correcting them on social media. I feel like it is unnecessary to leave a comment on their post. Maybe, after correcting the information personally, they will correct it themselves. If I correct it directly on social media, what might other people think. They would say, “oh they both know each other but choose to criticize each other on Facebook rather than talking in private.” The good intention [to counteract misinformation] will become a backlash. (Kieu)

The decision to counteract misinformation through private channels reflected the norm that bound the relationship between people and the sharer. In this case, protecting the sharer’s public reputation was deemed necessary while correcting the falsehood in the misinformation they shared. The decision to use one-on-one communication channels linked to the concern to what other people might think about one’s relationship with the sharer. The excerpt demonstrates that using public communication channels such as social media platforms to counteract misinformation was inappropriate. To do so potentially created a misperception that both parties had a bad relationship, which seemed to be unaligned with the social expectation to keep existing relationships harmonious. Correcting the sharer on Facebook potentially made other Facebook friends develop a view that both parties were in a dispute. As a result, the good intention to counteract misinformation would become a source of misunderstandings, which could lead to interpersonal conflicts if left unresolved.

The norm discouraged people from embarrassing others in public, making the use of private communication channels appropriate. The comment below shows how the norm affected people’s decision as to which communication channel was appropriate to use when deciding to counteract misinformation:

I won't correct any false information most time, if my friends shared it. I don't really want to get involved in any arguments with them .... There was information that I knew was incorrect about a fire near my friend's workplace. She had told me everything about the accident. But when some other friends shared information about it that I thought false [on Facebook], I told them about what I heard from her without saying that these friends were wrong I knew there would be others who invested time to find information and be ready to use it to argue anytime. Generally, if misinformation is from my close friends and I feel like I know the correct information, I will tell them in private. I don't comment online because I don't want to embarrass them in public. (Phuong)

The comment illuminates why people considered using a private communication channel more appropriate for correcting misinformation shared by significant others. The private channel prevented the sharer from feeling embarrassed when people provided the correction. Such a consideration implied that people aimed at balancing their intention to share correct information and to protect the sharer from being seen as untrustworthy or incapable of identifying the falsehood. This altruistic intention demonstrated that correcting misinformation remained important and that the method used to correct the sharer however should be appropriate. People had a reason to believe that using private communication channels would mitigate the risk of unnecessary arguments, as the sharer would not feel embarrassed. Besides, private communication channels opened the chance to interpersonally share the intention to prevent the sharer from harming themselves and others.

Broadly, the present finding suggests that people deemed using private communication channels to be more appropriate to counteract misinformation that significant others shared. The appropriateness stemmed from the norm that expected people to maintain the reputation of the other and keep relationships with them harmonious. The private communication channels seemed to be able to minimize the risk that the sharer would feel embarrassed, compared to when the sharer received the corrections publicly. Paired with that, counteracting misinformation in private was linked to the act of protecting the sharer from harm and bringing damages to other people. In the context of this study, a private communication channel such as a one-on-one messaging app seemed to be able to offer civility in counteracting misinformation. Although potential disruptions to the existing relationship with the sharer could still occur, people perceived that using such a communication channel was more appropriate than confronting the sharer publicly.

## 5 Conclusion

This study has illuminated the situations where people discover misinformation in everyday life. The decision to counteract misinformation in part links to existent relationships with its sharer. People tend to counteract misinformation shared by significant others rather than by strangers. This tendency stems from the intention to prevent the significant others from being seen as untrustworthy or bringing damages to others if the misinformation is left unaddressed. The need to keep the relationships harmonious and to avoid embarrassing the sharer shape what methods are appropriate to counteract misinformation in the situations that people face. If the sharer is older, people prefer an indirect

counteracting method. Believing that a public, direct counteracting method is inappropriate and can potentially disrupt their relationships with the sharer, people are inclined to choose private communication channels when deciding to counteract misinformation, regardless of the age of sharer.

As such, the finding expands the current understanding of the concept of discovering information. It sheds light on nuances in which people discover misinformation as well as the appropriate counteracting methods. Discovering misinformation invites the need to address the falsehood in the misinformation, in which assessments to the situation where it circulates affects the evaluation of whether counteracting it will harm existing relationships with the sharer. In this sense, the spread of misinformation, together with the appropriate counteracting methods, lies within a delicate matter that influences the continuity of the relationship with the sharer and the intention to prevent misinformation from spreading widely. Choosing an inappropriate method will likely harm the relationship, as counteracting can disrupt normal interactions with the sharer. On the other hand, leaving misinformation uncorrected can potentially bring damage to the sharer and others. In short, the spread of misinformation and the methods that people choose to counteract it with are embedded in complex social interactions, rather than purely situated within cognitive and technologically deterministic situations.

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