

S.U.R.E. SKILL SERIES: SAFEGUARDING YOUR MIND AGAINST FAKE NEWS

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Singapore

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1) How technology is shaping our beliefs
- 2) Psychological factors of how fake news spread
- 3) How to mentally safeguard yourself and others
- 4) Digital safeguarding measures

1) HOW TECHNOLOGY IS SHAPING OUR BELIEFS

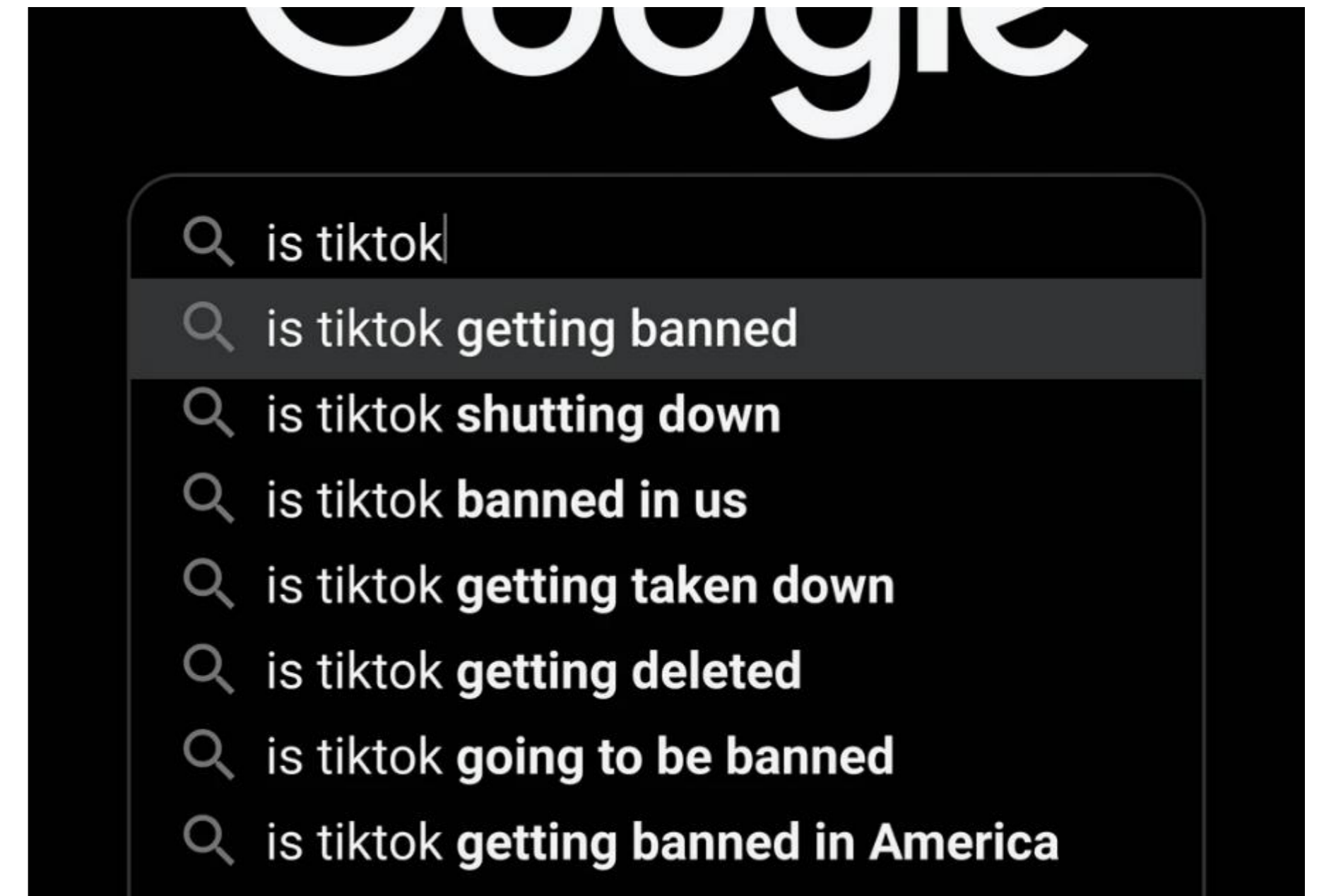
HOW TECHNOLOGY IS SHAPING OUR BELIEFS

- With smart devices and the Internet being a constant presence in our lives, we spend a significant amount of time exposing ourselves to social media, videos and other information platforms
- Global online content consumption has increased significantly since 2020, due to COVID-19 ([Forbes](#), 2020)



HOW TECHNOLOGY IS SHAPING OUR BELIEFS

- **Algorithms** in search engines and social media are pushing product advertisements and recommendations based on our search history, article-readings and video views
- For example, Google recommends a list of the most searched terms whenever you type in a question
 - Whilst convenient, it can indirectly affect how we feel about a topic/issue before we arrive at the facts
 - Everyone's search results are different, based on your search history and browsing habits



HOW TECHNOLOGY IS SHAPING OUR BELIEFS

- Unfortunately, the rise of fake news and misinformation have also led to them appearing in our information feeds and messaging groups
- If left unchecked, they may inevitably influence how people think, feel and behave as they become “locked” in their own information **echo chamber**
 - In an echo chamber, beliefs and ideas are reinforced in a repetitive closed system where alternative ideas and concepts are not accepted

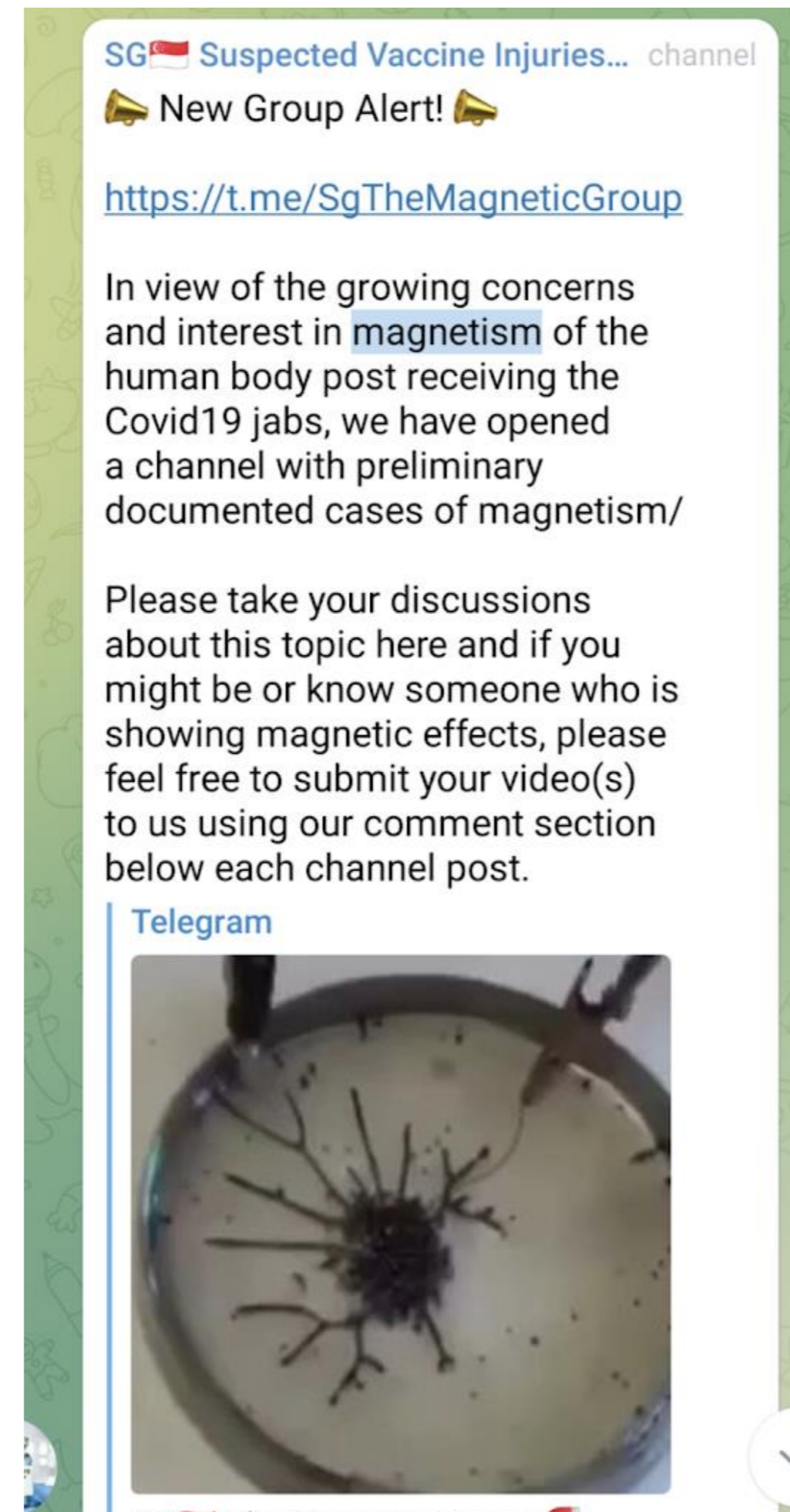
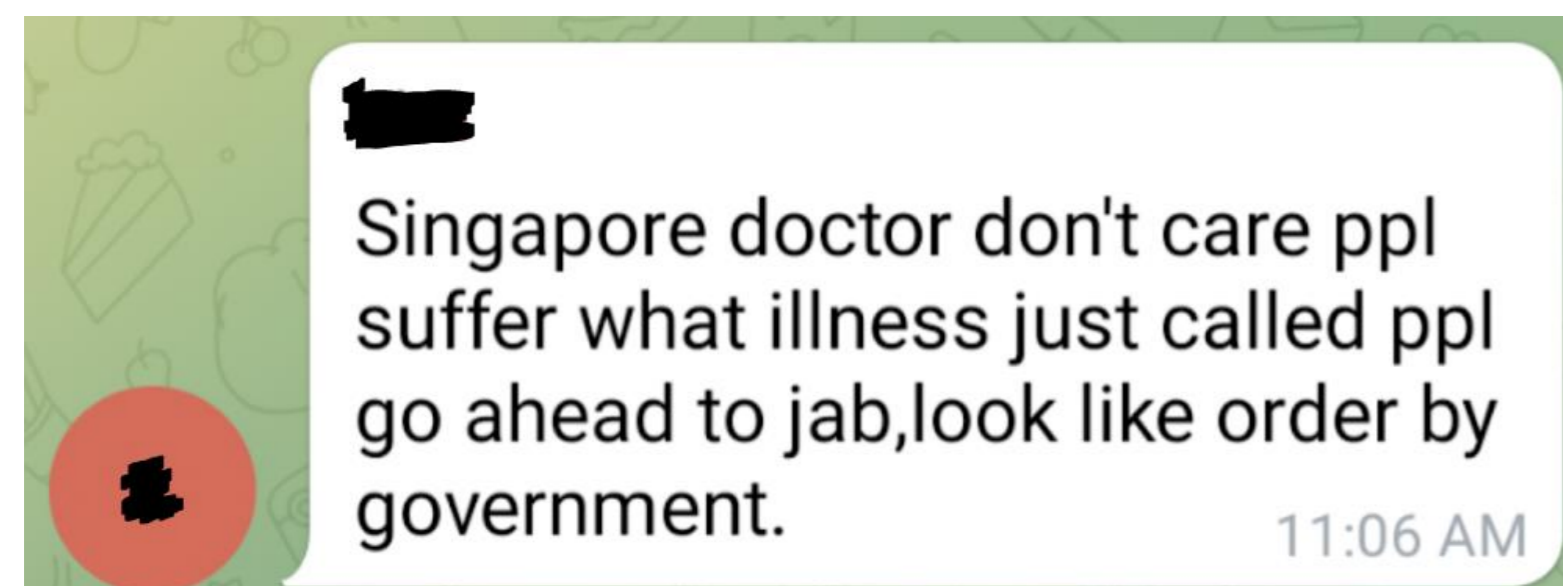


HOW TECHNOLOGY IS SHAPING OUR BELIEFS

Examples of echo chambers

- Social media (e.g. Facebook groups)
- Chat groups (e.g. Whatsapp, Telegram)
- Discussion forums
- “Like-minded” friends
- Any closed group with groupthink or a dominant view with no room for dissent
- Search algorithms (e.g. Personalised and recommended search results pushed by search engines)

Case Study: Echo Chambers



"Among the wild claims posted is one that ingredients in the mRNA vaccines cause magnets to stick to some vaccinated individuals."

"Some subscribers do attempt to correct the misinformation and other experts and researchers have spoken up as well."

The Straits Times (17 June 2021)

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/true-or-not-increasingly-tough-to-get-through-minefield-of-covid-19-misinformation>

Case Study: Echo Chambers

This video from the Southern Poverty Law Center shows how the Google's search algorithm narrowed the perspective and radicalized Dylann Roof because he searched for white supremacy information

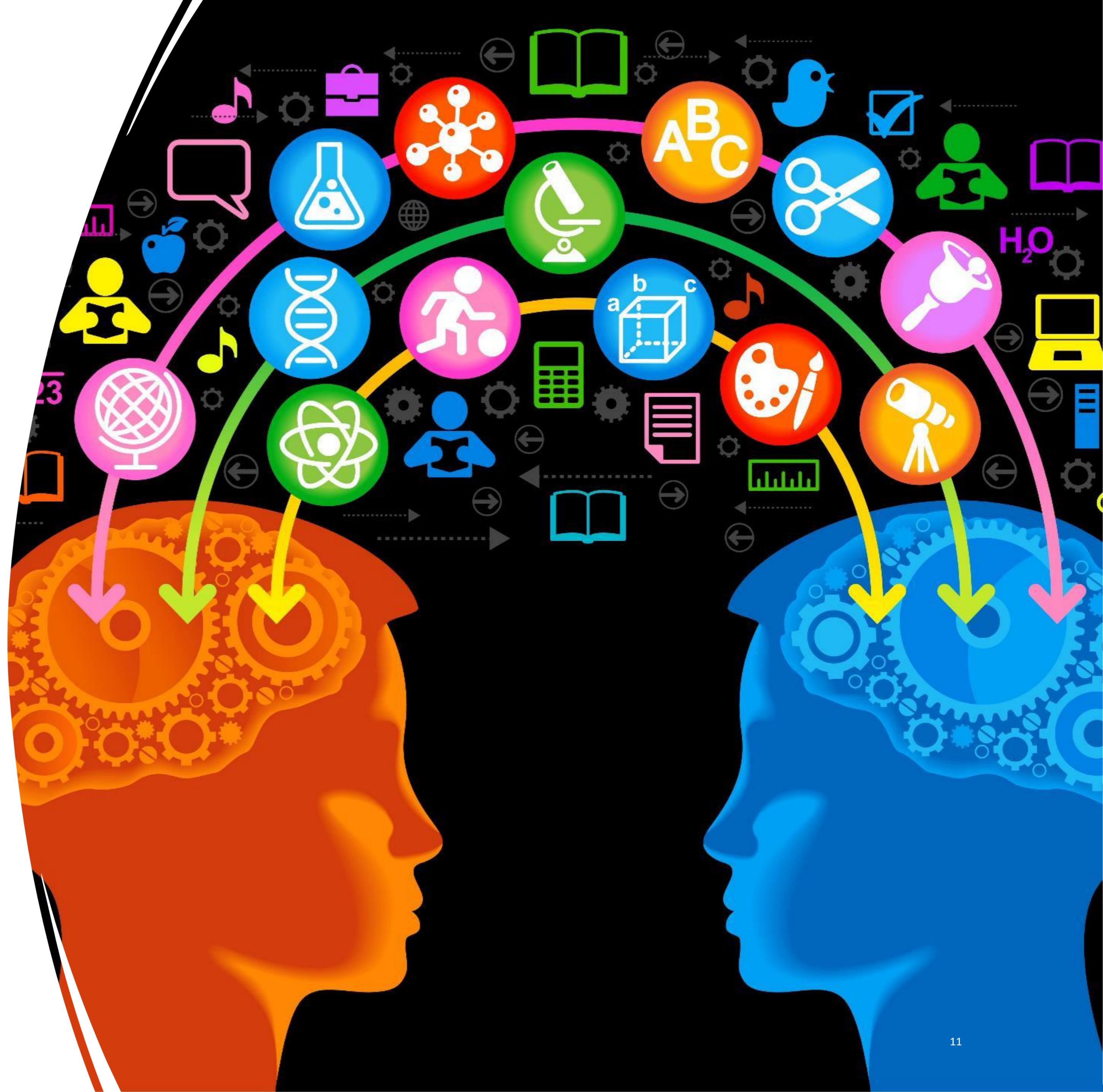
[The Miseducation of Dylann Roof - YouTube](#)

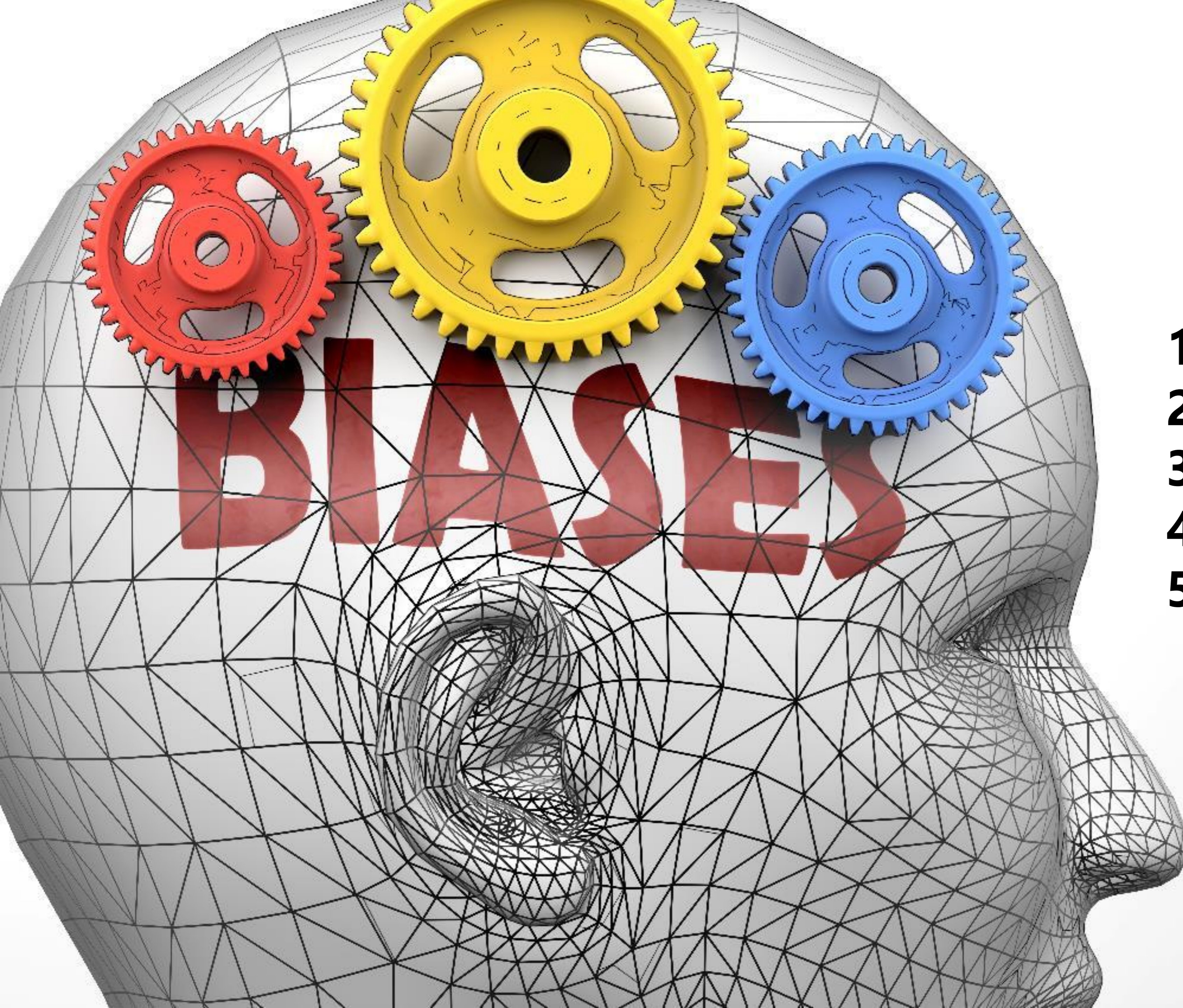


2) PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS OF HOW FAKE NEWS SPREAD

HEURISTICS & COGNITIVE BIASES

- With so much information around us to process, our brains use mental shortcuts known as **heuristics** to help us make decisions quickly and make sense of the world around us
- However, these shortcuts could lead to **cognitive biases**, which affects *everyone* in different ways, some more negatively than others

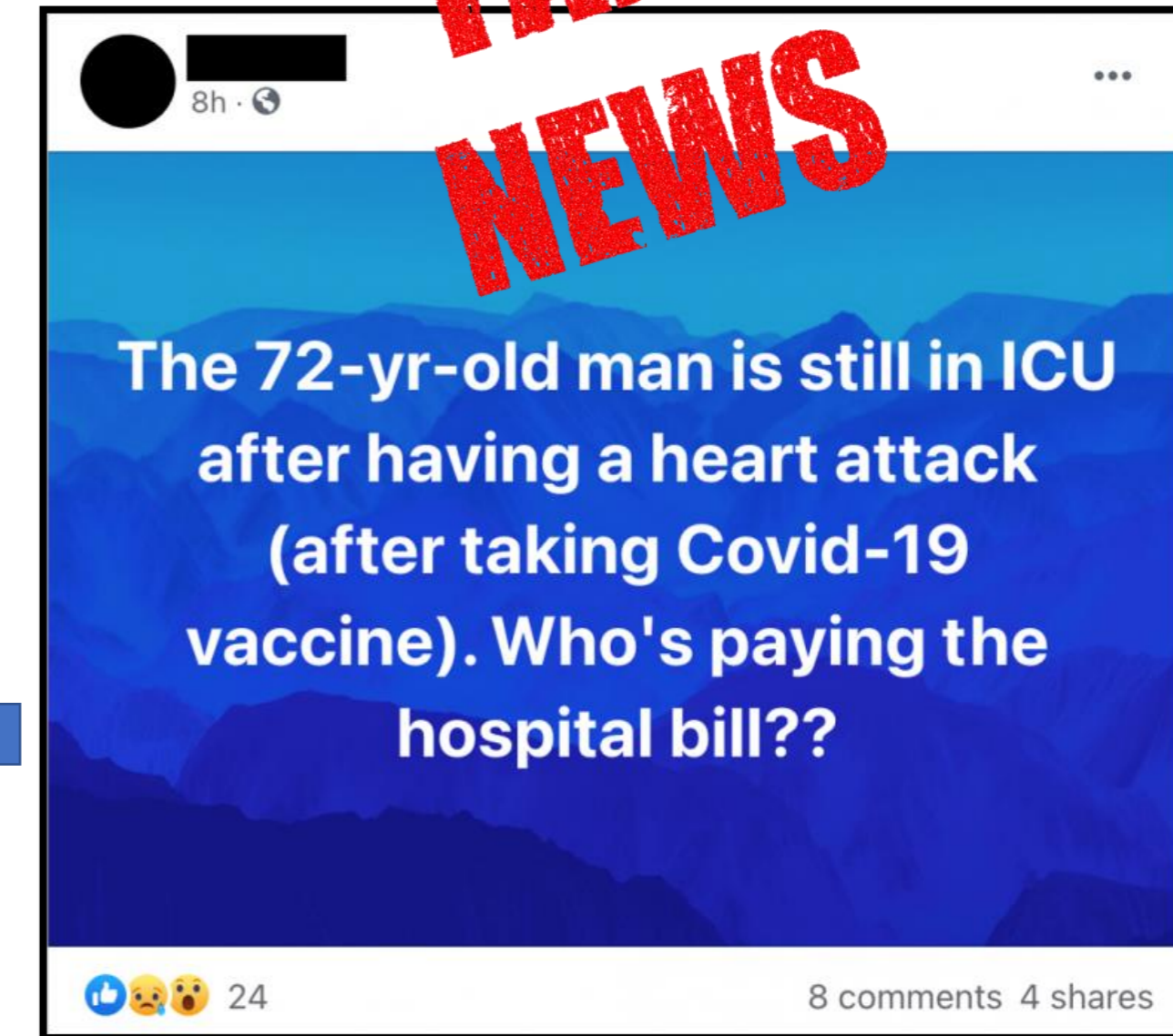




1. **Confirmation bias**
2. **Bandwagon effect**
3. **Availability heuristic**
4. **Backfire effect**
5. **Optimistic bias**

CONFIRMATION BIAS

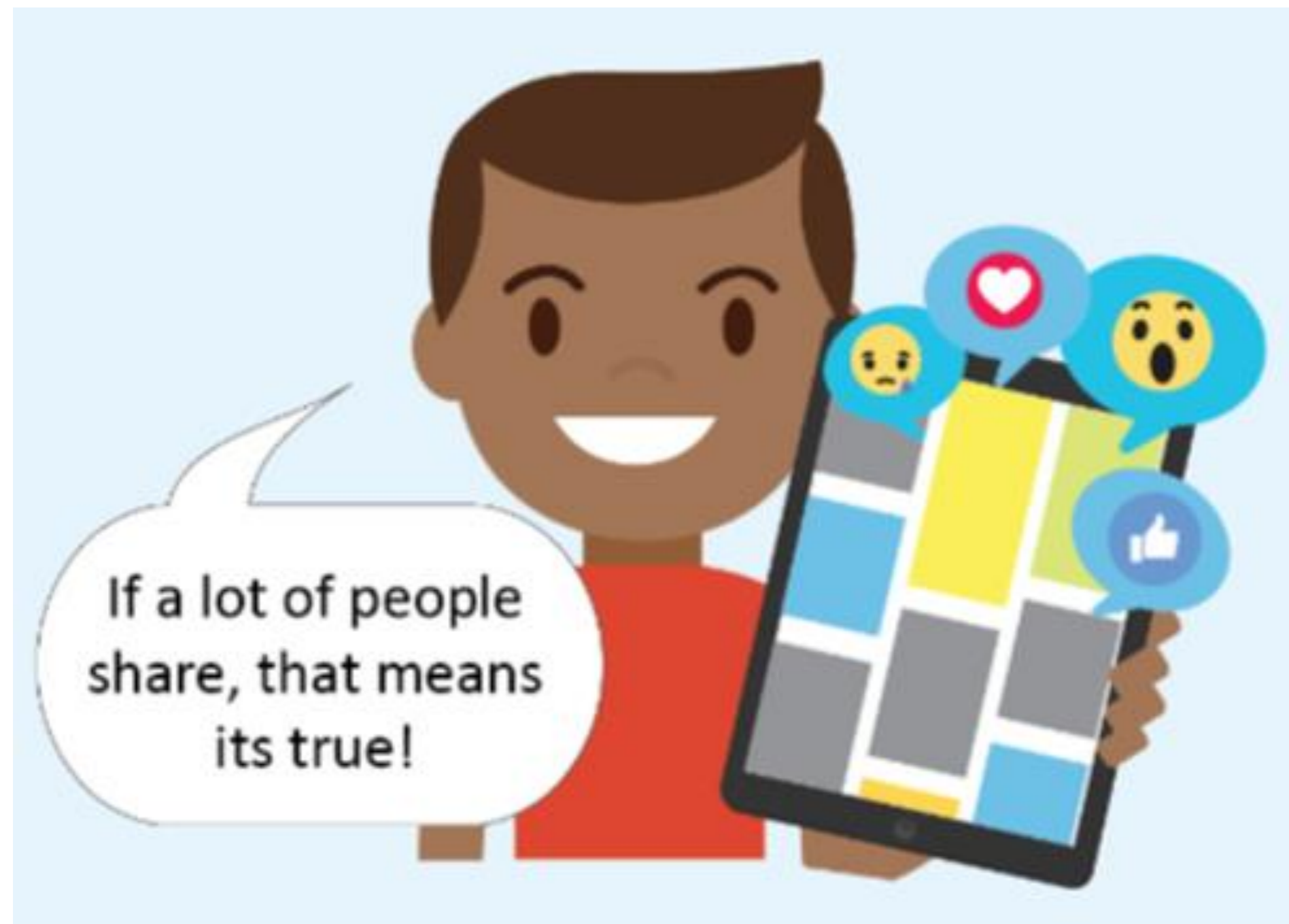
- When we favour information that confirm our current beliefs, such as social media posts and forwarded messages that may not be true or factual. (e.g. Individuals who believe that COVID-19 vaccines are harmful)



Tell family and friends not to eat durian before or after vaccination. My friend in the garden was _____

BANDWAGON EFFECT

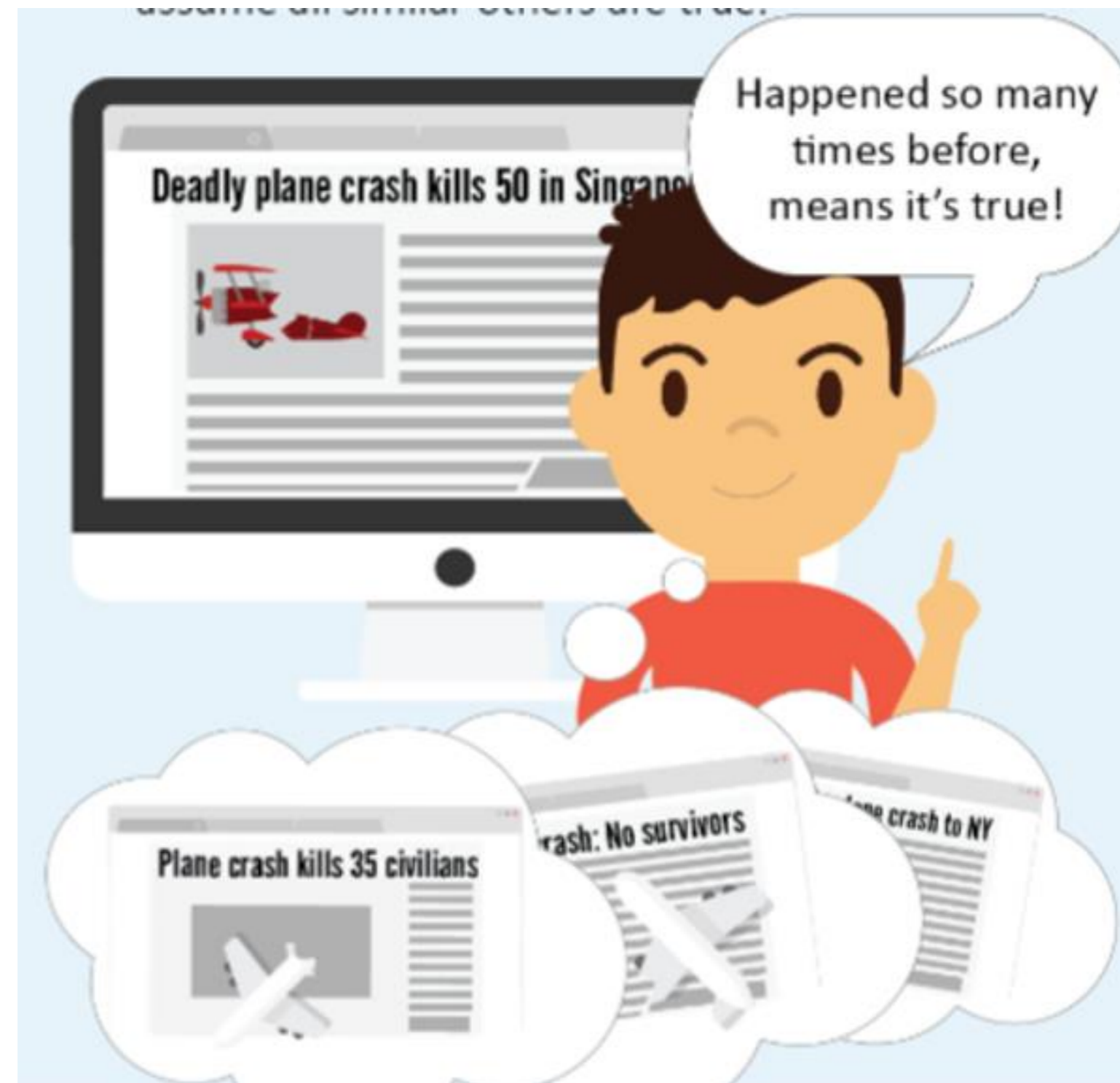
- When we agree and follow how others feel or believe in. The more people that believe in it, the more likely we are to follow them. (e.g. Panic-buying during early days of COVID-19)



<https://mustsharenews.com/supermarkets-dorscon-orange/>

AVAILABILITY HEURISTIC

- When we place greater value on information that we remember easily, and assume all other related events are similar in nature (e.g. assuming the KTV cluster as the largest cause of tighter COVID-19 rules)



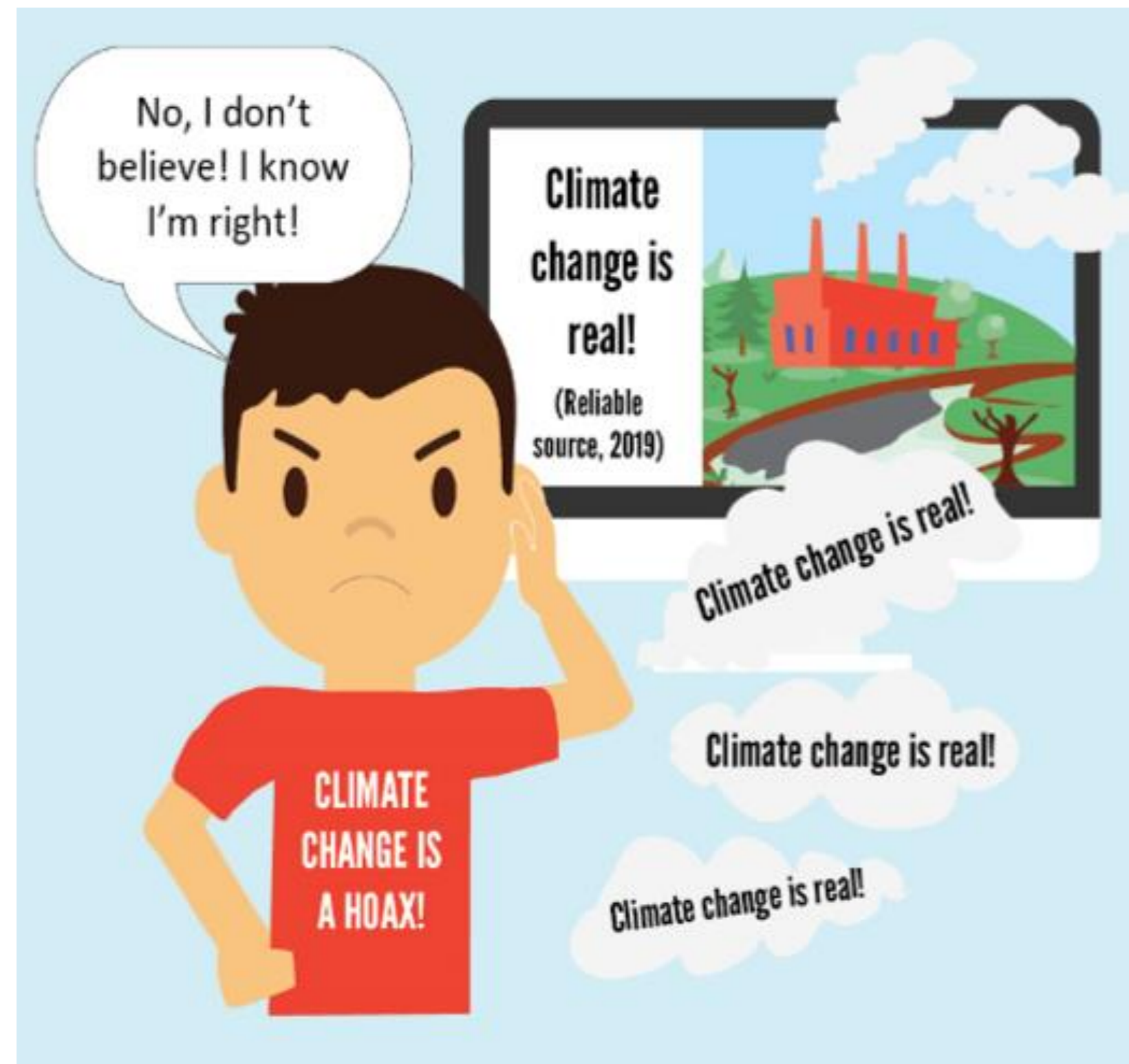
Irresponsible behaviour of KTV cluster not the reason for return to tighter Covid-19 rules: Ong Ye Kung



<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/irresponsible-behaviour-of-ktv-cluster-not-the-reason-for-return-to-tighter-covid>

BACKFIRE EFFECT

- When your core beliefs are challenged, it can cause you to believe it even more strongly. (E.g. individuals who do not believe in wearing masks)



'Sovereign' Briton who refused to wear mask on MRT deported



<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/sovereign-briton-who-refused-to-wear-mask-on-train-deported>

Woman who refused to wear a mask at MBS handed 14 new charges



<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/woman-caught-on-video-refusing-to-wear-a-mask-at-mbs-handed-14-new-charges>

OPTIMISTIC BIAS

- When we overestimate our abilities and believe we are less susceptible to risks than others



4 in 5 Singaporeans confident in spotting fake news but 90 per cent wrong when put to the test: Survey



<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/4-in-5-singaporeans-confident-in-spotting-fake-news-but-90-per-cent-wrong-when-put-to-the>

3) HOW TO MENTALLY SAFEGUARD YOURSELF AND OTHERS

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How to Overcome Confirmation Bias?

ONE



FIND OTHER SOURCES Look for ways to challenge what you see. Seek out information from a range of sources.

TWO



TALK ABOUT IT Discuss your thoughts with others. Surround yourself with a diverse group of people, and don't be afraid to listen to their views.

THREE




ANTICIPATE Embrace surprises when they happen. When you feel that something didn't go as expected, consider other options.

3) HOW TO MENTALLY SAFEGUARD YOURSELF AND OTHERS


How to Overcome Bandwagon Effect?

ONE



RECOGNISE Be wary of viral and widely-shared news. Read news directly from the news website instead of a social media feed, where the number of likes and shares are displayed.

TWO



TAKE SOME TIME ALONE Make decisions when you are not surrounded by many people, so that you can think more clearly on your own.

3) HOW TO MENTALLY SAFEGUARD YOURSELF AND OTHERS

How to Overcome Familiarity and Optimistic Biases

- ✓ **Be aware** of our **tendency to overestimate** our knowledge, and **tendency to assume** the validity of events based on past knowledge.
- ✓ Be open-minded and **seek out further information** when in doubt.



HOW TO TALK TO FRIENDS & FAMILY ABOUT SHARING FAKE NEWS

1. Be civil & polite

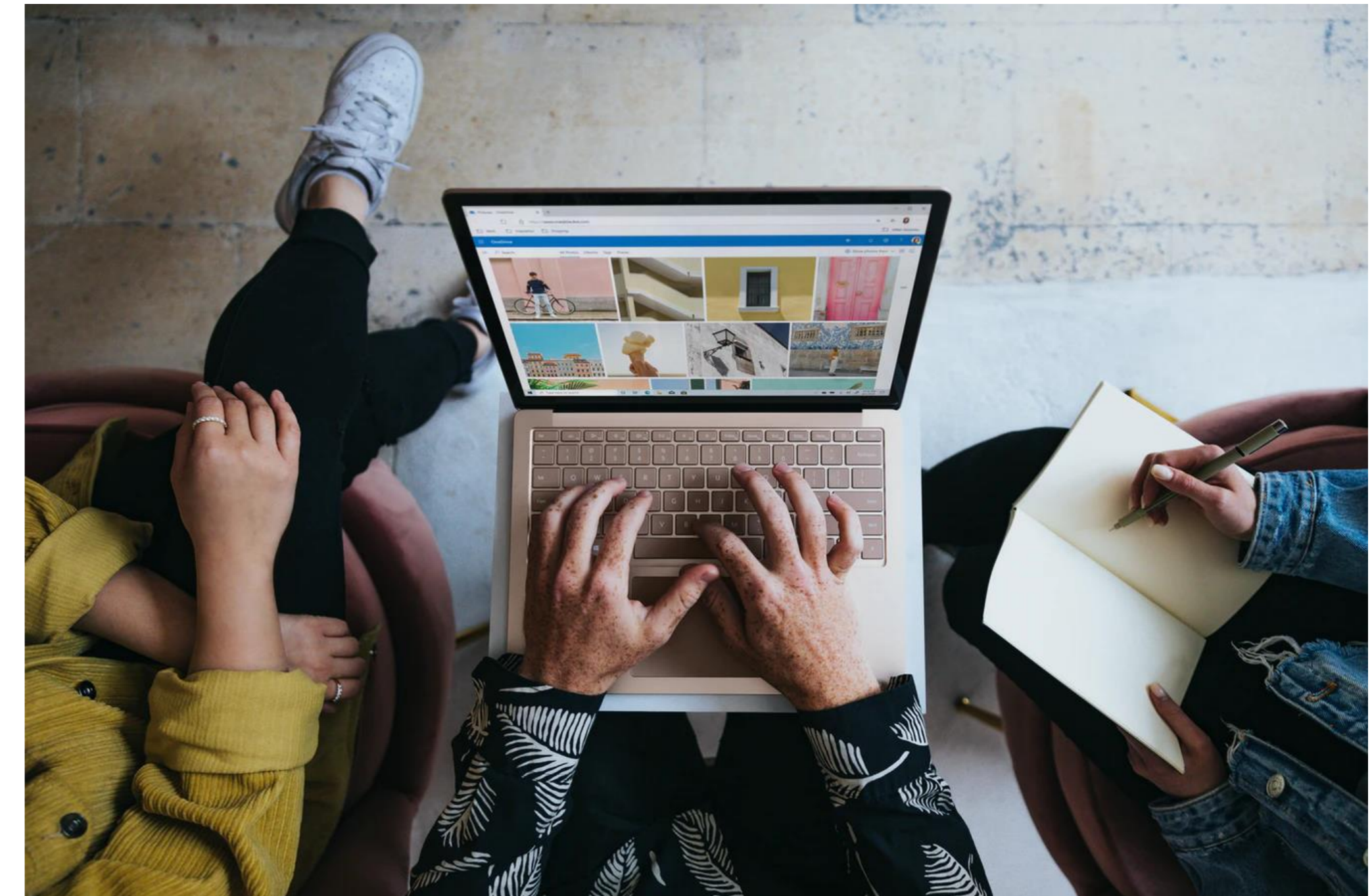
Use an empathetic and respectful tone. Avoid being judgmental or simply telling someone they are wrong.

2. Take your time

Research claims that you are unsure of, and find credible sources to share, which is key to effectively correcting misinformation online.

3. Find common ground

Try putting yourself in your friend or loved one's shoes. Why might they have posted this? Did they have good intentions? Consider pointing out shared concerns or feelings in your response.



* Adapted from [*“How to speak up without starting a showdown”*](#) by The News Literacy Project

HOW TO TALK TO FRIENDS & FAMILY ABOUT SHARING FAKE NEWS

4. Lay out the facts

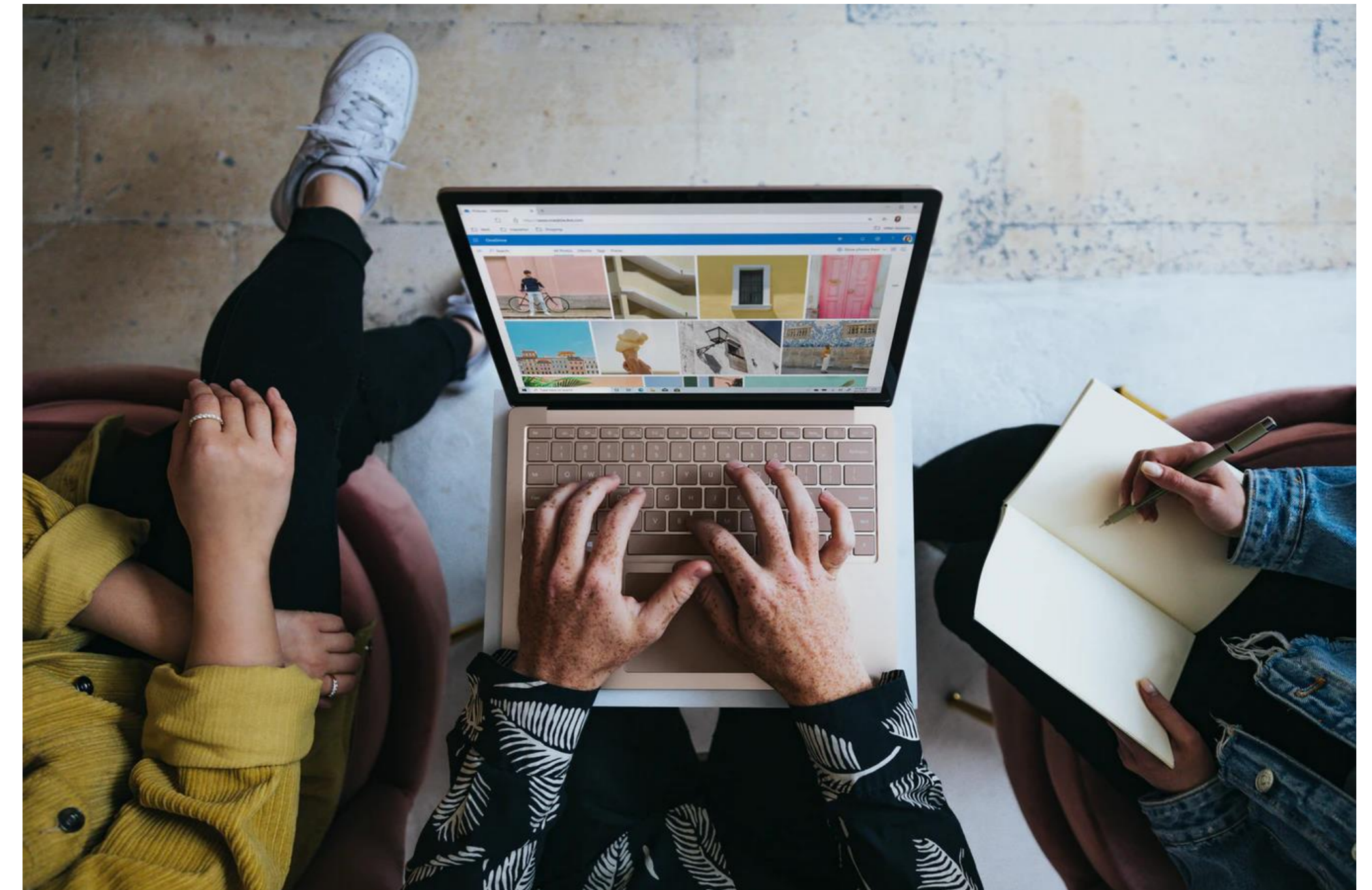
Rather than simply posting a link to a fact-check, clearly summarize the main findings of the debunk first, then add the link.

5. Public or private?

Decide how you want to post your response. Public comments can reach a bigger audience, but a private message may be more appropriate in some situations.

6. Be patient (and persistent)

Research shows we are more likely to believe fact-checks from people we know. View fact-checking as an ongoing debate rather than a fight to “win” at all costs. Consistently speaking up can help them think twice before sharing.



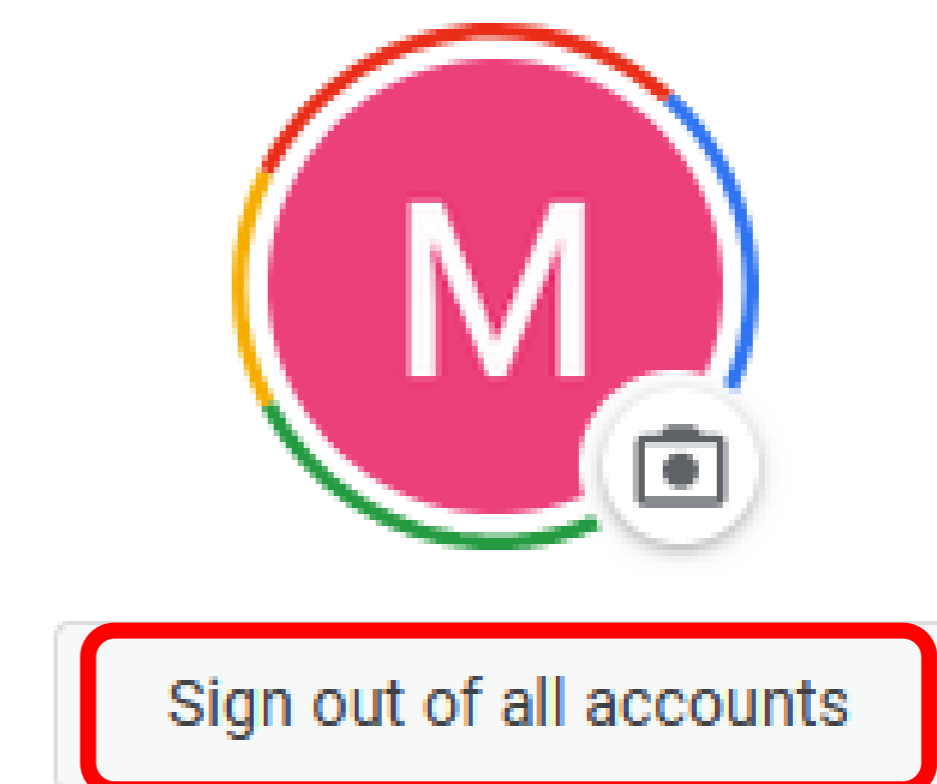
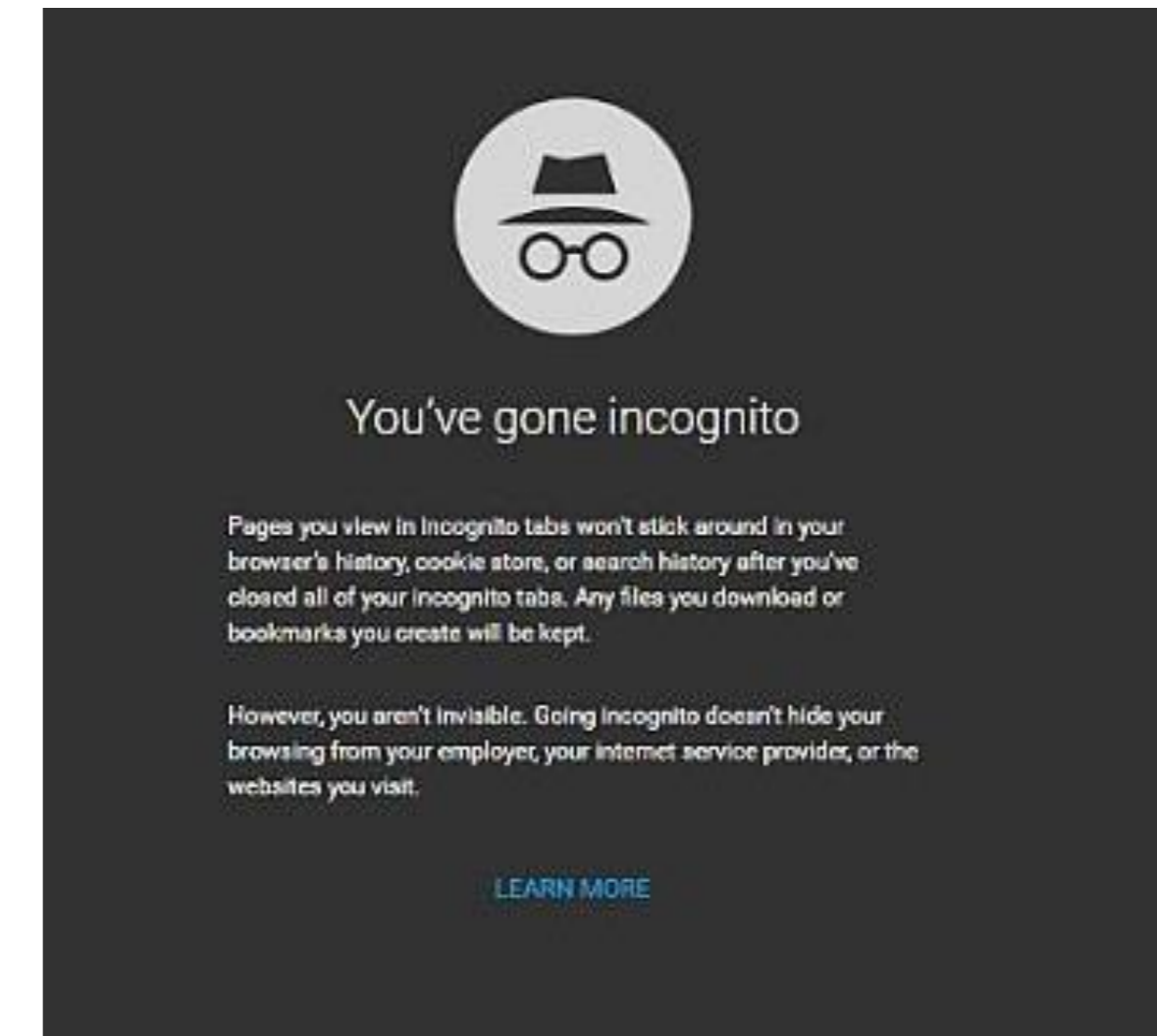
* Adapted from [*“How to speak up without starting a showdown”*](#) by The News Literacy Project

4) DIGITAL SAFEGUARDING MEASURES

DIGITAL SAFEGUARDING MEASURES

To avoid algorithms from controlling what you read and are exposed to, you can apply the following settings:

1. Avoid 'liking' similar type articles to prevent algorithms from determining your preferences
2. Limit the number of pages you follow to credible and reliable ones
3. Sign out of your Google account before searching
4. Search in private or incognito mode
5. Keep yourself updated on the latest fact-checked articles



Lesson Recap

- We can avoid cognitive biases by keeping an open mind
- We should evaluate information with a neutral perspective
- We should always check if there are other perspectives or information about an issue or topic we are unsure of
- We can safeguard ourselves and others with a combination of empathy skills and digital safeguarding measures

Thank you

