

To tweet or not to tweet?

There is no wrong in having a social media account, but you are responsible for what you post or forward, to avoid spreading confusion or panic among your "Friends" and "Followers".

Here are some stories that went viral on the Web, through both malicious and good intents.

Elevator ghost¹

In 2008, security camera footage from a building in Raffles Place displayed a ghost-like figure. This turned out to be a promotional stunt to highlight the dangers of working late.

Tsunami-linked seafood virus²

A week after the Indian Ocean Tsunami, consumers were warned to avoid seafood as it may have contained the "ZULICAN" virus. Singapore's Agri-Food & Veterinary Authorities clarified that no such virus exists.

Using mobile phones at petrol stations³

Reports of people suffering severe burns after using their phones at petrol stations often circulate. However, there is no concrete evidence to support this claim.

Eclipse causes earthquake and tsunami⁵

This 22 July 2009 warning proved false because experts have stated that earthquakes are not predictable. While a solar eclipse can happen, earthquakes are not caused by them.

The magic pill⁴

A drug called Progesterex has been claimed to be used by date rapists to sterilise victims and prevent identification through paternity tests. However, no such drug exists.

Free \$100 Starbucks voucher⁶

In 2012, Starbucks vouchers were given out on Facebook. However, users who clicked the link were taken to an irrelevant webpage. Starbucks confirmed it was a hoax.

Not all tweets that you see on your social media timeline are credible; always think twice before pressing "Retweet" or "Share" so that you do not spread false information. Here are some pointers to take note of:

How credible is your source?

Some Twitterati are not who they are, and some would not say who they are. Twitter abounds with self-promoters, spammers and "friends" who tweet the latest urban legend or rumour.

Twitter accounts can be hacked.

On 4 July 2011, the Fox News Twitter account was hacked and false tweets that US President Obama had been assassinated were sent out. Even accounts held by famous organisations can also be hacked!

Breaking news tweets may be inaccurate.

Though the news of Osama bin Laden's death broke on Twitter from solid sources more than an hour before US President Obama announced it, seemingly solid news is sometimes no more than rumours or malicious falsehoods.

Tweets cannot be recalled.

Careers have been derailed after ill-considered tweets. Even if you delete a tweet, chances are that someone else may have taken a screen shot it or even "retweeted" it. Deleted tweets sometimes hang out in Twitter search and will eventually clear with time.

Do you want your account to be suspended?

Check out the Twitter rules and regulations before making false rumours or spreading false information that could suspend your account. Spreading rumours may be fun for some but they can also be dangerous for others.

References:

1. Elevator ghost: <http://www.snopes.com/photos/supernatural/elevatorghost.asp>
2. AVA food warning: <http://www.snopes.com/food/warnings/zulican.asp>
3. Don't use mobile phones at petrol stations: <http://www.snopes.com/autos/hazards/gasvapor.asp>
4. The magic pill: <http://www.snopes.com/medical/drugs/progesterex.asp>
5. Tsunami: <http://www.snopes.com/science/tsunami.asp>
6. Free \$100 Starbucks vouchers: <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120828-367968.html>