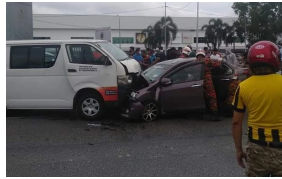


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Build public confidence via responsible reporting

March 6, 2021 @ 1:00am



Media practitioners should debunk myths and misinformation about Covid-19 vaccination. - NSTP file pic

LETTERS: I refer to a headline in last Saturday's New Straits Times article titled 'Khairy pledges to take next vaccine in bid to instil confidence'.

Kudos to the NST and its sister publication, Berita Harian, for not falling into the clickbait and sensationalism traps. These two newspapers provided their readers with straightforward and responsible headlines regarding the arrival of a new batch of Covid-19 vaccines in Malaysia.

The same could not be said about other publications and news portals, especially those on the Internet. Their headlines made it appear as if there was something wrong with the first batch of the vaccine from Pfizer-BioNTech, which compelled Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin to opt from another source. In reality, this was solely to encourage the public to inoculate.

These inaccurate headlines play right into the playbook of vaccine sceptics while providing opportunities for the group to plant seeds of doubt among Malaysians.

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active in February.

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This could be the reason why up until Tuesday, only five per cent of Malaysians registered to be vaccinated. This discouraging statistic may hamper the government's effort to inoculate 80 per cent of the population.

Sensationalism sells, but media practitioners should be responsible to their readers by providing accurate news. They should especially debunk myths and misinformation about the Covid-19 vaccines.

News headlines related to the vaccination programme should be truthful and clear to readers. They should assure people that the vaccines would provide hope rather than inciting fears and doubts among Malaysians.

News reporting should not be focusing solely on the vaccines' effectiveness, as the World Health Organisation has stipulated that a vaccine should have a minimum efficacy of 50 per cent. At present, all the vaccines chosen by the government, regardless of their manufacturers, have passed that threshold.

Such news should also focus on the vaccines' safety instead of their supposed risks. There are risks in everything we do. Hence, news reporting on the Covid-19 vaccines should emphasise their benefits, which outweigh their risks.

The media should enlighten people on what they can do after being inoculated. It should also inform them on just how close we are to crushing the pandemic. These will help us tackle vaccine hesitancy.

Those who are sceptical about the Covid-19 vaccines and modern medicine, in general, are having their moment now.

Responsible reporting is the key to ensuring that this does not last for long.

MOHAMAD SYAFIQ YA SHAK

Universiti Teknologi Mara, Perak Branch

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Straits Times

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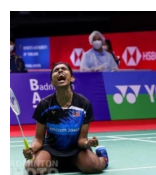
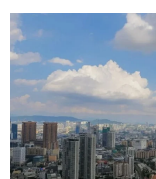
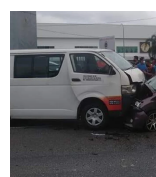
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