

Do more to call out racism online: Panel

Leaving racist comments unchecked may normalise them: Social media expert

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The silent majority can help douse the fire sparked by comments on social media, especially when the comments touch on sensitive issues such as race.

Panelists at a talk yesterday on the impact of social media on race relations urged people to call out racist comments online.

Letting such comments go unchallenged might lead to more people thinking that racism is allowed or even allow hatred to harden into norms, said the panelists at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Adjunct Associate Professor Adrian Heng, a social media expert at NUS, said: "We aren't going to change the world overnight, but we can start looking at our own circles and take proactive steps."

He raised the recent example of how a Facebook video of a condominium resident here scolding a security guard for charging his guests a fee of \$10 for parking after 11pm on Deepavali, had sparked racist vitriol online.

Prof Heng said that while the

video was not racist, the same cannot be said of comments that identified the resident's race, and more should be done to stamp out hateful race-calling.

The call for netizens to urge equanimity online was agreed by other panelists, such as The Straits Times news editor Zakir Hussain, NUS undergraduate Shriya Rajesh and Mr Jimmy Sia, a regional head at Grab and a volunteer with interfaith organisation Roses of Peace.

The forum was organised by Roses of Peace, in partnership with the NUS Department of Communications and New Media, and The Straits Times.

It was supported by OnePeople.sg, a national body that seeks to strengthen racial and religious harmony.

One thing which the panelists and the attendees disagreed on was the extent to which measures must be taken against racist comments.

Suggestions included messaging posters of the content directly, inviting them to join activities by associations that work with minorities and hav-

ing a pop up before a comment is posted to remind users their comment is about to go public.

Mr Hussain said social media has changed the way people respond to racism, and it might be helpful to take a step back before responding.

"We get triggered so much more often now," he said.

Prof Heng said a successful outreach example is how the Young Sikh Association (YSA) had engaged Ms Sheena Phua, an influencer, after she complained on Instagram that her view at the Singapore Grand Prix was blocked by two men wearing turbans.

But one of the attendees, nurse Nur Afifah Kamel, said the burden is disproportionately on minority races to make the majority race feel more comfortable.

The 26-year-old also wondered if the talk could have a more diverse range of panelists in terms of socio-economic status so it might be more reflective of sentiments on the ground.

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