AIT Commencement Speech

First of all, I would like to congratulate everyone here for your great achievement today. I was requested to share an experience that will truly inspire you all. So I thought, what would be an appropriate topic that could relate to a younger generation like yours? Looking around, I found this (showing smartphone). Everybody nowadays has a smartphone or a tablet to use; very convenient. Around this campus, you can probably see people texting or checking their Facebook while walking all the time. You can see how this (holding smartphone up) has affected our society and everyday life. It has become a part of our daily lives. You know, my ๒-years-old niece knows how to do this (hand gesture of tabbing/zooming) before he can even speak properly.

Within ten to fifteen years or so, the world has advanced significantly, both in terms of social and technological changes. We have social media; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube. Instant messaging: Line, Whatsapp, Skype, Facetime. New terms and connotations such as Like, Share, Selfie, Tweet, Hashtag have become normal. We might call it "a generation gap" but some of these words didn't even have a meaning when I was at your age; we used to call Hashtag a number sign. Anyone here know what a floppy disk is? (pause...) In case you don't know, it is a data storage device before CD era; it looks like a save icon, or rather the save icon was made to resemble the floppy disk. The memory capacity of this disk is roughly ๑.๔๔ MB, which today could not even be used to store a single high-resolution picture. I guess in ten years or so, if I show a floppy disk to a kid, they will probably all say "wow, cool. You ๓-D print the save icon." Do you realize the smartphone in your pocket has far more computing power than the computer in Apollo ๑๑ that landed men on the moon? We've come a long way and I would like you all to appreciate humanity's technological advances. So, on this commencement, other than your parents and your teachers, who else you should be thankful for? (pause...) Maybe the internet, Google, Wikipedia, and perhaps copy and paste? Imagine going to the library to find certain information in a pile of books for your research paper.

Well, one thing is clear: society has moved towards the digital age, enabled by internet and these devices. The internet has become a major source of information. People can communicate and search for any info rather easily. However, the thing is, this fast and easy way of information exchange is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, without any limitation from time and place, we can communicate or access information at the speed of

light across the globe, enabling social network, e-commerce, and various applications that we all use daily as a part of our lives. This provides new opportunities both in terms of social and economic contexts.

On the other hand, this global interconnected network can also be harmful to both intended and unintentional means; cyber attacking, hacking, jeopardizing your privacy, identity theft, propagation of false information, and etc. False information can spread wider, faster and further beyond what we can imagine. In contrast to the past, online information has usually not gone through the same checks as newspaper articles or books. There is a higher risk that some of the facts or quotations from a particular source are false. For example, there is a shared article on Line and Facebook suggesting that if you find a person with stroke, you can help him by puncturing his fingers with a needle to release blood. Have you ever heard of this story before? What's sad is, there was actually a person who died from acute stroke because he believed this hoax. He chose to treat himself with this method rather than going to the hospital. Or recently, there was a rumor from Line and Facebook that a Thai actor, Mr. Por Tridsadee, was already dead from dengue fever after being sent to Ramathibodi Hospital. On the next morning, as you all know, he was still alive although in a critical condition. Since most people shared this news without checking the truth, this rumor spread swiftly overnight throughout the country.

With your life online, every day you are bombarded with various kinds of information. I would like to urge you to take time and consider each piece of information and use your reasoning and common sense well before believing or sharing it. Some people share or forward articles or news after reading only the headlines, without considering what is actually written inside. Some hoaxes exploit our emotions such as love, fear, and hope; how to cure disease, how to survive, and it is usually ends with the statement "share it with your friends and family's members if you truly care about them." So, what do you do after reading this? Yes I know. SHARE! Because we all love our friends and our family, right?

You might not have realized it yet, but this habit of sharing without thinking will eventually harm our society as a whole. Since it is so convenient nowadays to pass on messages with just a click, people keep sharing information without checking whether it is true or not. With this habit of sharing before checking, each day there is misleading information circulating around us more and more. Once any false information gets out and people start to believe them, it is very hard to undo, usually leaving behind misconceptions

that is hard to erase. Have you ever heard of a story that Albert Einstein failed math as a student? Well, that isn't true. In fact, he had mastered differential and integral calculus before he was fifteen. This rumor keeps appearing over and over again. Another problem is that our brains seem to stick with what they first believe. It is quite difficult to change their view, especially when more people start to accept it and those misconceptions become norm. As you know, it took humanity a few centuries to change the false belief that the Earth is flat.

What's dangerous is, when people base their opinions on this shared information, they could well be basing their opinion on false facts. Some fallacy or in other words faulty reasoning seems to originate from this as well. Due to this false information that is shared widely in our society, I also have my own experience based on this fallacy problem. Dating to a few years back, there have been a lot of shared pictures with a caption that Thailand is the Saudi Arabia of the Far East with lots of misleading information. As a result, a significant number of Thai people seem to believe that we have plenty of oil and question why petroleum products in Thailand are so expensive. As a person who has worked in the energy sector for a few decades, I can assure you that we are not the Saudi Arabia of the Far East; the majority of crude oil, roughly ๘๕% of the supply, still needs to be imported. Same goes for natural gas; although we can produce a majority of natural gas in the Gulf of Thailand, it is still not enough for the nation's demand, resulting in ๒๐% of it being imported. Our country is a heavy energy importer and we have very limited petroleum resources.

In this digital age, we consume more information than what we can digest. A large portion of people today seem to believe and forward the message that is shared through social media or the internet without checking its correctness. I would like to urge you, an educated people, to take your time to consider, to question, and to check the validity of those shared information with your reason well before believing them. Intelligence is worthless without common sense. Don't let anyone manipulate you. If you're not sure, simply just listen but don't believe nor share blindly. Don't judge anyone or anything, before hearing both sides of the story. I hope that my message today can be useful to you all and wish you good luck with your future endeavors.