

Correcting Misinformation in Family Chats: Linguistic and Hierarchical Barriers in Chinese Canadian Families

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Abstract

We present a subset of findings from a semi-structured interview study with 11 Chinese Canadian young adults who had encountered misinformation shared by older family members in family group chats. Our early findings focus on culturally relevant linguistic and hierarchical barriers, showing how misinformation correction in family chats is shaped not only by access to accurate information, but also by language, authority, and expectations of respect.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in HCI**; **User studies**; *Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing*.

Keywords

Misinformation Correction, Family Communication, Immigrant Family, Group Chats

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1 Introduction

Misinformation is a persistent challenge in today's information environment, including in private family group chats. In these settings, information shared by close ties may be more likely to be trusted, making family members an important site for misinformation correction [5]. However, correcting misinformation in family chats is distinct because it is embedded in ongoing relationships rather than isolated information exchange. Responding to a false or misleading claim also means responding to a specific family member, often within a relationship shaped by care, respect, authority, and future interaction. As a result, correction becomes a relational and communicative challenge: what can be said, whether it feels appropriate to say it, and how a response will be received

are shaped by family roles and the communicative conditions of the chat itself [6, 8].

This makes family-based misinformation correction both important and difficult. Prior work shows that people tend to assume that family members share misinformation with good intentions, even when the original source is unclear. Challenging such messages can therefore feel like challenging the sender's judgment, intention, or care [7]. Family members may hesitate to correct misinformation when doing so risks emotional strain, conflict, awkwardness, embarrassment, or damage to family harmony [8]. Cultural norms and family hierarchies can further intensify these barriers, especially when correction involves younger family members challenging parents or elders. In such cases, disagreement may be interpreted not only as informational correction, but also as impoliteness or disrespect [6].

These challenges become even more layered in immigrant family contexts. Immigrant families may navigate multiple languages, media environments, and expectations about family communication at the same time. In East-to-West immigrant families, younger adults may be more familiar with English or French information sources and norms of open dialogue, while older relatives may rely more on heritage-language media spaces and family norms that emphasize restraint, deference, and harmony [2, 4]. This creates a correction problem that is not only about whether accurate information is available, but also about whether it can be translated, framed, and introduced in a way that feels acceptable within the family relationship. Prior research has examined misinformation correction in families and private messaging spaces, but has less often centered how these linguistic and hierarchical barriers intersect in multilingual, intergenerational immigrant family chats.

To explore this issue, we focus on Chinese Canadian family group chats as one setting where these tensions converge. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 11 Chinese Canadian young adults, we present a subset of findings from a broader McGill REB approved study on misinformation correction in family chats. Specifically, this short paper focuses on culturally relevant barriers participants encountered when responding to misinformation shared by older family members. We ask: What barriers do Chinese Canadian young adults face when responding to misinformation shared by older family members in family group chats?

2 Method

2.1 Interview Procedure

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 Chinese Canadian young adults who had encountered misinformation in family group chats. Interviews used the critical incident technique [3], asking participants to recall a specific incident where a family member shared misinformation and describe what was shared, who shared it, how they interpreted it, and whether or how they responded. Interviews also explored broader family communication patterns and challenges in correcting older family members.

2.2 Data Analysis

We analyzed interview transcripts using reflexive thematic analysis [1]. Two researchers coded the transcripts using both inductive coding and theory-informed deductive coding. The research team then compared coding results, discussed emerging patterns, refined the codebook, and developed three broader themes: motivations for correction, challenges in responding to misinformation, and response strategies. This short paper focuses on the challenges theme, specifically linguistic and hierarchical barriers.

3 Results

3.1 Linguistic Barriers

Participants described language as a major barrier to correcting misinformation. Many relied on English or French sources when evaluating questionable information, while older family members were often more comfortable communicating in Chinese. As one participant explained, *"I'm trying to explain what I feel about a certain thing and then, since my Chinese is not very good, my mom is not gonna understand what I'm saying."* This mismatch made it difficult for participants to share evidence in a form that their parents or older relatives could easily understand.

Participants also described difficulty translating not only information, but also reasoning and tone. Correction required careful wording so that disagreement would not sound too blunt or disrespectful. Some participants felt that their limited Chinese proficiency made it harder to explain their perspective clearly, especially in text-based group chats. Typing in Chinese was also described as slow or awkward, which further discouraged longer or more nuanced responses.

3.2 Hierarchical Barriers

Family hierarchy constrained whether participants felt able to correct older relatives. Correcting parents, grandparents, or older relatives could feel very different from correcting siblings or peers. While participants often felt more comfortable disagreeing with people closer to their own age, challenging older relatives could be interpreted as disrespectful or confrontational.

Several participants felt that younger family members had less authority to speak in family discussions, even when they believed they had better access to accurate information. This meant that recognizing misinformation did not automatically lead to correction. Instead, participants had to consider whether they had the relational standing to challenge the sharer, whether the correction would be taken seriously, and whether it might disrupt family harmony.

Similarly, some participants expressed feeling that it was *"not [their] responsibility to correct my parents"*, suggesting that participants view correction as constrained by family role and generational position.

4 Discussions and Conclusion

Our findings show that correction was difficult not because participants lacked evidence, but because they had to make that evidence understandable and acceptable within family relationships. Linguistic barriers made it hard to translate sources, reasoning, and tone across English/French and Chinese.

Family hierarchy also shaped whether correction felt possible. Even when our participants had stronger evidence or greater familiarity with online information sources, they still had to consider whether correcting parents or elders would be taken seriously, seen as overstepping, or interpreted as disrespectful. In this sense, access to information did not automatically translate into relational authority to correct.

These findings provide insights for the design of future misinformation correction tools and communication platforms. Our findings suggest that misinformation tools should support the communicative work of correction, rather than only providing fact-checks or source labels. Future tools could help users summarize reliable sources across languages, rephrase corrections in softer and more family-appropriate ways, and preserve sharers' dignity by framing correction as care, shared concern, or helpful information-sharing rather than direct challenge.

In summary, our study shows that our participants face linguistic and hierarchical barriers when responding to misinformation in family chats. Supporting misinformation correction in these contexts requires tools that address language, authority, and relational safety, not only factual accuracy.

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