

NOMINATOR'S RECOMMENDATION:

Nominator's perception of the nominee's achievements/personal qualities that distinguish the nominee from other students.

Disinformation and misinformation are serious issues in the Information and Social Media age, with people believing what they see on various social media and messaging platforms, without critically evaluating the accuracy of the information or reading in between lines.

Kunaal, having been part of the campus journalism team at Vox Populi came to me saying he'd like to do something about this problem. I encouraged him to frame his own problem, and in a very self-directed manner, Kunaal diligently read literature from various fields from AI to sociology to journalism, found the current research and critically defined the gaps to formulate his questions. Specifically, he investigated three different kinds of prompts that can accompany information (e.g., Whatsapp forwards, news headlines on social media feeds) to nudge people to critically evaluate whether what they are seeing is accurate or not.

Evaluating this is not easy. It required formulating a study involving news from various sides of the political spectrum, polarizing and non-polarizing news items, recruiting a large sample of participants and then conducting the study. In a span of a semester, Kunaal did all this, and conducted the study with a whopping 117 participants, to lend statistical significance to findings.

The study's results are also astounding. The study showed that of the various kinds of information, warning or disclaimers one could post with a news article or headline, providing short information about the source of the information is what best helps people carefully consider the potential biases in the news, irrespective of the political affiliations of the news, of the person consuming the news, or the news item itself, results in significant moderation in how much a person believes the news. Even priming a person to consider moral implications of the news or their own beliefs matters less, than the objective source—paving the way for safer online spaces.

These results have implications for the society at large, for the practice of journalism, and responsible social media design. Kunaal with his passion for making an impact on the society and his journalistic inclination found a problem at the intersection of both and attempted to scientifically find solutions to it with rigor. The work is currently being turned into a paper to be published at a top Human-Computer Interaction conference.

Beyond this, I also know Kunaal from when he took my HCI course. He has a passion for learning, and stood out as someone that enjoyed challenges even when he did not do well in a homework or exam. He always came back to say "I didn't do it great, but this exam was a lot of fun, Prof!".

Considering his thirst for knowledge, passion for social impact and exceptional research skills and diligence, I wholeheartedly endorse him for the Dr Chandrakanta Kesavan Best

Research Project Award for Outstanding Socially relevant UG project. I want to highlight that the magnitude of his research work, the significance of the findings and the methodological rigor is worth a master's thesis, and Kunaal did it in the course of a UGP, making him a deserving candidate for these prestigious awards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sruti', with a small horizontal line underneath the final letter.

Name of Nominator: SRUTI SRINIVASA RAGAVAN

Date: 15 May, 2025