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INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS, AT
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“Traditional and online media in the new normal”

Mr Patrick Daniel, President, Singapore Press Club

Members of the Singapore Press Club

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for inviting me to lunch. I understand that in return I have to speak about traditional and online media in the new normal. When the topic was given to me, I wondered if the audience knew much more than I did.

Changing media landscape

As has been customary, let me start with some data.

According to *Nielsen’s Southeast Asia Digital Consumer Report 2011*, Singapore had the highest Internet penetration rate in Southeast Asia, with 67 out of every 100 people using the internet. Singapore’s digital consumers also spent the most time with online media – as much as 25 hours per week,

compared to our regional neighbours. The closest were the Philippines at 21.5 hours and Malaysia with 19.8 hours online per week.

3 The findings also showed that among the top online activities in Singapore, 96% of the digital consumers spend most of their time checking and replying to emails. It is also no surprise that surfing online sources for news is the next most popular activity at 86% – a strong indication of Singaporean’s news consumption online.

4 What sources of online news are they accessing?

According to the same *Nielsen Media Index 2011*, 12.4% of

Singapore’s adult population read the digital edition of at least

one of the eight local daily newspapers per week. Which is a

good thing as anecdotally, many young Singaporeans are

increasingly turning to online sources, and getting news fed to

them via social media, from their friends on Facebook or those

whom they follow on Twitter. They have also shifted from the

traditional model of reading news to being the news source themselves - generating, sharing and commenting on news online. More than news, the sense is that online media is rich with a full diversity of views.

Traditional media has done well

5 As our news consumption patterns change and online and social media use increases, our traditional media – newspapers, radio and TV have to strengthen their online efforts. And this has been done with a good sense and understanding of the strengths of traditional media and new media, and how the latter can complement the former.

MediaCorp puts up news clips on ChannelNewsAsia's website and has a video archive of Parliamentary speeches. Singapore

Press Holdings (SPH) has continued to strengthen their range of digital platforms and created apps for mobile phone and tablets. Both SPH and MediaCorp have also been actively *tweeting* the latest breaking news, and linking them to their

news reports. They have also gone into discussion platforms for some years now.

6 Even as the media industry adapts to the online playing field, it is important that our newspapers, radio, and TV do not lose sight of their key strengths. At the outset, let me commend our journalists on their dedication towards accurate and fair reporting. This has led to a generally positive perception of our local media. For example, the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer found that 65% of the “informed public”¹ in Singapore trusted the media, an increase from 59% in 2011. Singapore media have also performed well globally, against countries such as the US, where 45% of the “informed public” say they trust the media; UK at 37% and Australia at 43%.

Good journalism to prevail

7 As more Singaporeans turn to the Internet and social media for news and views, they continue to refer to our

¹ Informed publics are between the ages 25-64, in top 25% of household income per age group in each country and report significant engagement in business news and public policy.

established traditional media as their main source of news. Take the two elections in Singapore last year as an example – both elections were thought to be Internet elections. Instead, the 2011 Institute of Policy Studies Survey² found that our local newspapers and broadcasters were the most influential forms of media in shaping voter decisions in the 2011 General Elections. This was despite the fact that there was a big increase in the use of Internet or social media in the last elections as compared to the General Elections in 2006.³

8 The relevance and growth of the mainstream media will be determined by their credibility. Competition from the various alternatives brings forth expectations of higher standards – that the traditional media will help audience separate the wheat from the chaff. And this is tough understandably, not just with the competition from alternative media but the demand for good journalists in this exacting field. Despite all the competition and

² IPS Post-Election Survey 2011, conducted between May and June 2011.

³ In 2011, Internet was the third most influential type of communication channel in shaping voting decisions, behind newspaper and local TV coverage. In contrast, the Internet was sixth in 2006.

challenges, credibility that has been established with Singaporeans over all these years has to be maintained. Good journalism – characterised by factual accuracy, contextual clarity and fair reporting – must be sustained.

9 While our newspapers, radio and TV exercise their own independent editorial judgement in their reporting, we must remain mindful of the role and responsibilities. Our media model is one based on forging consensus and facilitating nation-building. We preserve social cohesion and empower audiences to make informed decisions as a society.

10 The question that would ensue is whether this approach should continue online? In this aspect, our major companies which have established presence can set the right tone online as well with good practices of information sharing and moderation on the various online platforms. We can encourage information and viewpoints that inform and evaluate, and not

disturb and divide. This will enhance their credibility that they already enjoy in the real world.

Challenges as we move ahead

11 The online social media has many strengths. Like-minded individuals can easily form interest groups online, throw up ideas and views and work towards common objectives. Instead of just receiving news, users can create their own news online or trend topics – by uploading a clip on STOMP or YouTube, sharing news on Twitter or Facebook, writing an opinion piece on their blogs ... and many other ways.

12 The public sector also has to adapt to what the social media has to offer. As of December 2011, our Ministries and agencies have set up more than 140 Facebook initiatives, 60 YouTube channels, 60 Twitter accounts and 30 mobile apps. This is in addition to some 240 websites and microsites. Agencies have used the Internet to provide government services, respond to queries, provide public education and

crisis information, community outreach and event publicity. New media has allowed the government to serve the public better.

13 So that is the upside. On the downside, the ease and speed at which information is shared online also means that rumours, distortions and hoaxes can easily spread within a very short time. Take for example the recent rumour on child kidnapping which spread like wildfire on the Internet. Just last week, there was another case of a boy being targeted online by netizens for disturbing his neighbours with noisy drumming. But the netizens got the wrong person, a fact that was confirmed by the mother of the actual drummer. Out of habit or even genuine concern, some may pass on the rumour without verifying, leading to unnecessary distress or panic. The bite-sized nature of such media also means that lines get taken out of context.

14 What we can do with the possible downside as site owners, moderators, teachers, parents and government is something all of us have to work together with some notion of what we want as a good society. In Singapore, we have adopted a two pronged approach of having legislative measures and public education to enable a safe and enriching online experience for our people, especially for our young. There are laws in place which can deal with those who cause harm.

15 However, legislation alone is not enough. Users need to be empowered on how to use new media, and also to be discerning recipients and creators of information. When Internet came on to the scene, one of our earliest concerns was pornography. As a symbolic measure, the government decided to ask service providers to block out 100 sites. But what was more interesting was the formation of PAGi or the Parents Advisory Group for the Internet, a community-led group which helped to equip parents with tips and tools to protect their

children as they ventured into cyberspace. This exemplified that the role that concerned stakeholders can play. PAGi later evolved into the Internet and Media Advisory Committee (INMAC). Recognising that partnership with stakeholders is important, we are currently reviewing the role of INMAC to see how it can play an even more pro-active role in equipping Singaporeans.

16 The Media Development Authority supports projects by people, private and public sector organisations through the Inter-Ministry Cyber Wellness Steering Committee to encourage and promote safe, responsible use of the Internet.

The National Library Board is also rolling out programmes that will help equip students as well as the broader adult population with skills, to, evaluate the accuracy and reliability of the information they receive, and in turn be able to use information responsibly and ethically.

17 There has also been a lot of discussion in the media and online platforms on whether the Government should develop and implement a code of conduct. I have shared my views on this in Parliament. I still believe that the larger Internet community and not the government, has a key role to come to some understanding on what online behaviour is acceptable and what is not. I encourage you to offer your suggestions for a code of conduct. Because all of us have to decide how new media will help good society, what values our young should grow up with and so on.

18 On that note, I hope I have given you some food for thought and look forward to hearing your views during the discussion. Thank you.

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