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Making Content Better, Safer, And More Inclusive

A seminar by the Content Forum and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission explores what it takes to enhance the local content ecosystem

KUALA LUMPUR, 16 MARCH 2023 — With the advent of new digital tools and changing consumer habits, Malaysia’s content landscape is evolving at a rapid pace. Given the country’s diverse and multicultural makeup, how can we balance this progress while keeping our content ecosystem harmonious and inclusive?

To address this question, the Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (Content Forum) and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) recently co-organised a seminar titled “The Ultimate Guide to Better Content”. The event saw participants from the broadcast and advertising industries as well as Content Forum members unpacking the evolution of content in Malaysia so far — as well as how best to move forward with the changing times.

Following a welcoming speech from Eneng Faridah Iskandar, Senior Director, Consumer & Industry Affairs Division (MCMC), the first speaker of the day was Lena Tee of Nielsen Audience Measurement (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, who shared her insights on Malaysia’s current media landscape in her keynote address. “In Malaysia, there is an increase for multi-channel consumption, as reliance on single media platforms is getting lower. Consumers (including Gen X and Baby Boomers) continue to embrace both traditional and digital channels, especially since the pandemic. This is likely to continue, giving media owners an opportunity to promote the reach of the cross-platform footprint.”

A Living Code

Among the most recent noteworthy developments in the local content industry has been the revisions made to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Content Code (Content

Code), a set of guidelines outlining best practices and ethical standards for content creation and consumption across all platforms.

Mediha Mahmood, Executive Director of the Content Forum, offered participants a rundown of these revisions, including clarifications on inclusivity and protection for women, children and persons with disabilities (PWDs). The new Content Code also sets ethical standards for issues such as media reporting on suicides, influence-based marketing, and preventing the exploitative use of religion in advertising.

To further spark thought on these changes, a panel session moderated by Kudsia Kahar, Managing Director and Co-Founder of Metamorfosa Sdn Bhd, explored the impact of the Content Code as well as its potential direction for the future. Speakers on the panel included Assoc. Prof. Dr Aida Mokhtar of the International Islamic University Malaysia; Claudian Navin Stanislaus, President of the Malaysian Advertisers Association; Assoc Prof Dr Nur Kareelawati Abdul Karim from Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia; and Shariman Zainal Abidin from Media Prima Berhad.

The panellists overwhelmingly agreed that content guidelines should never stay static. “The Content Code has to be a living code and change with the times,” said Claudian Navin. “If it’s carved in stone – it would not have helped society.”

Acknowledging that while self-regulation may not be perfect, Claudian Navin added the Content Code served as a guide to steer people in the right direction, especially in a fast-changing environment where content is uploaded every second.

Dr Aida pointed out that the Content Code could facilitate greater media literacy, particularly among young people. “We should encourage the youth to think about the effects of their content,” she said. Adding on to this, Prof Dr Nur Kareelawati suggested that the Content Code could also be introduced in schools to help students understand and apply it when creating and consuming content.

Putting self-regulation into practice

Speaker Dr. Ong Sheue Li, from the Department of Economics and Applied Statistics, University of Malaya, inadvertently expanded on this subject in her presentation on what Malaysians

thought of self-regulation. In her six-month research project on the matter, Dr Ong found that while industry professionals favoured the use of key opinion leaders (KOLs) to promote the message of self-regulation, average users said educational efforts would be more effective.

Meanwhile, Datuk Mohamed Bazain Idris, Chairman of the Content Forum's Complaints Bureau, shed light on the decision-making process of the Complaints Bureau members when adjudicating any complaints related to alleged breaches of the Content Code. He emphasised that being empathetic towards various cultures, traditions and backgrounds was crucial in engaging with those who think differently, while minimising one's own prejudices against others.

Expanding on the Film Censorship Board of Malaysia's (also known as Lembaga Penapis Filem or LPF) new film classifications was Abdul Hafeez Hamzah, a Board Member of LPF. He explained that new classifications aimed to preserve adults' freedom in their film choices while protecting children and teenagers from being exposed to age-inappropriate content.

Rounding up the conversations of the day was another panel session, which sought to examine if the content standards in Malaysia were progressively evolving or regressing backwards. Moderated by journalist Kamarul Bahrin Haron, the panel saw Agnes Kim Rozario, Director of Content ASTRO; Namanzee Harris, CEO of TV Al-Hijrah; Loy Ekzan, Vice President of Commercial Radio Malaysia (CRM); and Mediha Mahmood, Executive Director of Content Forum sharing their thoughts on the topic.

Having been in the industry for a long time, Agnes highlighted how far Malaysian content quality has evolved. "I'm really proud to say that we're at an age where we are producing content that can travel and that we can be proud of. The standards of production are constantly improving in terms of the storytelling and the quality of production. So, I'm very encouraged to be a part of that," she said. The session also veered into a discussion on encouraging more factual content to inform and engage the general public, with Kamarul pointing out that a society is only as good as its level of discourse.

In his closing speech, Kenny Ong, Chairman, Content Forum, said the conversations sparked during the seminar were important ones in shaping the content landscape. "We need balance to create a dynamic content industry that can go forward — that's why self-regulation is important," he added.

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ABOUT THE CONTENT FORUM

The Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (Content Forum) is an independent self-regulatory industry organization registered under the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and designated by the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA'98) to oversee and promote self-regulation of content over the electronic networked medium. The Content Forum consists of key players of the content industry i.e., advertisers, advertising agencies, broadcasters, content creators/distributors, audiotext hosting services providers, advertising agencies, internet service providers and civic groups.

Aimed at facilitating self-regulation, which provides an additional layer of consumer protection that complements the legal framework, the Content Forum is committed to govern and promote the creation, distribution and consumption of electronic-networked content.

As an industry self-regulatory body, the Content Forum comprises of key members of the communications and multimedia content industry, including broadcasters, advertisers, content creators, internet access service providers and civic groups. This dynamic and robust representation of industry practitioners ensures that content standards continue to be developed with the objective of establishing a level playing field in the industry.

The Content Forum is responsible for the implementation and enforcement of the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Content Code (“the Content Code”). The Content Code was prepared by the Content Forum and first registered with MCMC on 1st September 2004. The Content Code is the principal source for industry self-regulation as it contains governing standards and best practices for content dissemination within the communications and multimedia industry in Malaysia. The main objective of the Content Code is to outline procedures of self-regulation that provides the platform for creativity, innovation and healthy growth of a fast-evolving industry.

The Content Forum houses a Complaints Bureau that is empowered to address all complaints relating to content disseminated over electronic networks. The Complaints Bureau is empowered to investigate possible breaches of the Content Code, mediate disputes, adjudicate cases, publish orders and impose sanctions where necessary. The Complaints Bureau accepts complaints from industry players and the general public. Additionally, it plays an advisory role to any party that requires guidance on electronic content matters.

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