

Electing Integrity: Content Forum's Call for an Informed and Ethical Campaign Season

Content Forum reminds politicians to avoid duplicity or hostility amidst the election season.

CYBERJAYA, 26 JULY 2023 – As the state elections draw near for six states in Malaysia, the Communications Multimedia and Content Forum (Content Forum) stresses the importance of avoiding the spread of misinformation and hate speech leading up to the election period.

Mediha Mahmood, Executive Director of the Content Forum, reminds everyone to avoid disseminating false information, fake news, and harmful propaganda. Engaging in activities such as making false remarks, harassment, defamation, or inciting hate in campaign materials violates the law.

Such actions are against the Election Offences Act 1954 (the Act) as well as the Communications and Multimedia Content Code (the Content Code). According to Section 4A of the Act, it is an offence to say or do anything that promotes ill will, discontent, or animosity between people of different races or groups, with the intention of influencing voting in an election or supporting a specific candidate.

Similar provisions are also included in the Content Code. Part 2, Section 5.1 prohibits menacing content that causes annoyance, threatens harm, encourages crime, or leads to public disorder, while Section 5.2, prohibits hate propaganda. Regarding false information, Part 2, Section 7.1 of the Content Code emphasises the need to avoid content containing false material or incomplete information likely to mislead.

Mediha urges self-regulation of content, especially on sensitive topics involving race, religion, women, children and people with disabilities, among others. She reminds politicians and their supporters that minorities and marginalised communities should not be used as political pawns. Sensitive and controversial issues should also not be weaponised as the harmful impact on society may far outlive the election period. In this fast-paced, virality-prone digital world, it is crucial to be responsible for what is said or written as once something is shared and consumed, it becomes difficult to retract or erase.

Politicians and election candidates are urged to uphold their integrity by speaking the truth and not engaging in dishonest tactics like smear campaigns, slander or targeted attacks. Indulging in such behavior not only misleads the public but also exposes the politicians themselves to the risk of injured parties seeking legal redress.

Considering the intensity of the campaign period, mistakes such as hurtful remarks or false information emerging in the heat of the moment may occur. Therefore, it is important to cautiously approach all content, particularly in political discourse. It is also vital that if mistakes



are made, they are immediately acknowledged and promptly rectified. The spread of misinformation should quickly be stemmed by immediate correction and the spread of accurate information.

Social media has emerged as a significant force in political campaigning owing to its extensive reach and effectiveness. Users are encouraged to exercise self-regulation by carefully choosing the content they engage with, and any content that promotes hate, disinformation or harassment, should be promptly reported on their respective platforms to curtail their dissemination.

During the election period, it is crucial for members of the public to be prudent in consuming content and news about candidates in order for them to make informed decisions. The public is urged to verify sources and cross-reference information, look for context, check for bias and participate in fact-checking communities such as at <https://sebenarnya.my/> or by sending their queries to JomCheck Malaysia via WhatsApp at 0174776659.

Mediha believes that it is vital that Malaysians be equipped with the essential tools and agency to address and counter harmful content. By proactively educating themselves and being prudent in the consumption and sharing of content, politicians and the public can shield against the risks posed by misinformation and hate speech, creating a healthier and safer content space during the upcoming election season.

For more information about the Content Forum, please visit <http://www.contentforum.my>.

ABOUT THE CONTENT FORUM

The Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (Content Forum) is an independent self-regulatory industry body 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 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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