

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Levelling the Playing Field: The Call for Equal Regulation Across All Platforms**

**CYBERJAYA, 19 NOVEMBER 2024** —Malaysia's media and advertising industries play a vital role in shaping the economy, supporting nation-building efforts, and fostering a safe digital ecosystem. However, an unlevel playing field between licensed, regulated entities and unlicensed, unregulated digital platforms has created challenges that threaten these objectives.

Digital platforms, such as social media and instant messaging services, operate within the same content and advertising spaces but are not subject to local governance frameworks. Furthermore, these platforms often enjoy significant financial advantages, such as reduced tax obligations and fewer compliance costs, giving them an outsized edge over local players. This lack of regulatory parity not only distorts competition but also impacts the broader societal and economic fabric.

### **Driving Economic Growth with Fair Competition**

The value of creating an equal playing field extends far beyond industry-specific concerns. From an economic perspective, ensuring all players abide by the same rules fosters healthy competition, drives innovation and encourages investments in quality content creation. Traditional media companies and advertisers that invest heavily in compliance, quality control, and ethical standards deserve a level of fairness to compete effectively.

Moreover, local businesses contribute significantly to national revenue through taxes, while unregulated global platforms often escape similar contributions, reducing their economic accountability.

### **Uniform Regulation as a Cornerstone of Nation-Building**

From a nation-building standpoint, the role of media in delivering credible information, promoting cultural values, and creating a shared sense of identity cannot be overstated. Licensed and regulated players bear the responsibility of upholding these principles, while unregulated platforms may operate with fewer restrictions, often prioritising profit over accountability.

Equally important is the battle against harmful content. Without effective oversight, unregulated platforms may promote the proliferation of inappropriate advertisements, fake news, and harmful material, including content targeting vulnerable groups such as children. Ensuring a fair and consistent governance structure can mitigate these risks, holding these platforms accountable for their financial and social impact and protect Malaysian audiences by promoting a safer and sustainable digital environment.

### **New Regulatory Framework Paves the Way for Equality and Parity in the Industry**

Malaysia's forthcoming governance framework for regulating digital platforms, set to take effect soon, marks a welcome step toward addressing these disparities. It reflects a commitment to ensuring that all players—regardless of platform—are held to fair and

transparent regulations, a crucial move for creating an industry that meaningfully contributes to the nation's economy, societal growth, and digital safety

**Appendix: Quotes from Content Forum Members**



**Euan Smith, Group CEO of Astro**, highlights the wider impact of unregulated platforms, including issues of piracy:

*"As a responsible broadcaster, Astro works diligently to comply with Malaysian laws, delivering quality news, sports & entertainment content to our audiences. However, unlicensed players—including those who facilitate piracy—operate outside these frameworks. Digital platforms that steal news and other content not only erode revenues from legitimate players but also compromise consumer trust, often exposing them to harmful, unverified content that can mislead or damage their safety and security. It's imperative that we address these gaps to ensure a safe and sustainable industry for all."*



**Claudian Navin Stanislaus, President of the Malaysian Advertisers Association (MAA) and Vice Chairman of the Content Forum**, draws attention to the need for a uniform set of standards that are practical and applicable, to safeguard Malaysian audiences:

*"A fair, transparent, and enforceable regulatory framework is essential to safeguarding Malaysian audiences, fostering trust, and maintaining a competitive marketplace that empowers businesses while protecting freedoms. For regulations to succeed, actions must match intent — be transparent, thoughtful, and resistant to misinterpretation; or misuse! Practicality must take precedence over optics; unenforceable regulations create a false sense of security. It is better to remain vigilant over known shortcomings and work toward actionable solutions than to rush into toothless declarations. Above all else, protection should never be an excuse to compromise freedoms. Instead, it must drive responsibility and equity, empowering creators and businesses to innovate while safeguarding audiences. Effective regulation should inspire progress, not stifle it, shaping a content ecosystem that benefits all while upholding fairness and freedom."*



**YBhg. Dato' Afdlin Shauki Aksan, Chairman of the Film Directors Association of Malaysia (FDAM)** highlights that ensuring consistent regulations across all media platforms is essential for protecting public trust and safety:

*"A fair and regulated media landscape is not just an industry concern, but a societal imperative. When some platforms operate without proper oversight, it undermines the standards that filmmakers work hard to uphold and exposes the public to harmful or misleading content. For the growth of the industry and a more informed society, it's essential that all media platforms adhere to the same standards. This ensures that the content we consume, from films to digital media, is trustworthy, safe, and of the highest*

*quality."*

**Lydia Wang, Chief Business Officer, Star Media Group Berhad** underscores the need for parity in ethical marketing principles:



*"The advertising industry is built on a foundation of ethical marketing principles that foster long-term relationships between brands and consumers. Licensed players invest in adhering to robust regulations, ensuring transparency and accountability. However, unregulated platforms operate without the same level of oversight, creating an uneven playing field. For a truly competitive and responsible advertising ecosystem, it's essential that all platforms, digital or traditional, are held to the same standards of ethical conduct and accountability."*

**Mediha Mahmood, CEO of the Content Forum** adds that collaboration is key to building a balanced and inclusive digital ecosystem.



*"As the Government builds essential frameworks, the Content Forum is dedicated to supporting these efforts through self-regulation, involving industry stakeholders and consumers alike. We encourage digital platforms to collaborate in these initiatives, as their involvement helps align our content policies with international best practices, ensures compliance with Malaysia's laws, and upholds the unique needs of our community."*



## **ABOUT THE CONTENT FORUM**

The Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (Content Forum) is an industry forum 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 in the content industry, i.e., advertisers, advertising agencies, broadcasters, content creators/distributors, audiotext hosting service 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 governing and promoting 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.

### **Issued by GO Communications on behalf of the Content Forum**

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