Full Report on the IPS Roundtable on

Singapore's Television Industry: The View Ahead

Tan Tarn How, Adjunct Senior Research Fellow

Nandhini Bala Krishnan, Research Assistant

IPS Institute of
Policy Studies

Cover photo:

One in two residents in Singapore watched the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games via the Mediacorp Olympics Network. Photo courtesy of Mediacorp Pte Ltd.

Contents

Executive Summary

Singapore's television industry has made great strides in content creation and international distribution. It has also ventured into social media and over-the-top (OTT) streaming platforms in recent years to grow its audience numbers and engagement. Many of these initiatives have been led by the government. Which policies have worked, and which have not? Specifically, do they adequately address global developments in content creation and technology? What are the opportunities and challenges ahead for the industry? What else needs to be done to address them?

This is a report of a roundtable discussion held on 11 August 2021 organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) together with Ms Jasmine Ng, filmmaker and President of the Singapore Association of Motion Picture Professionals (SAMPP). Titled "Singapore's Television Industry: The View Ahead", the roundtable looked at the development of and prospects for Singapore's television industry.

Over 80 content creators, producers and policymakers attended the roundtable.

The presenters were:

1. Mr Joachim Ng, Director, Media Industry Development, Media and Innovation Group, Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA)

2. Ms Angeline Poh, Chief Customer and Corporate Development Officer, Mediacorp Pte Ltd

3. Mr Lee Thean-jeen, Managing Director, Weiyu Films

4. Mr M. Raihan Halim, Creative Director, Papahan Films

5. Mr Freddie Yeo, Chief Operating Officer, Infinite Studios

6. Ms Tan Hui Er, Co-founder, Not Safe For TV (NSFTV), The Hummingbird Co.

7. Mr Molby Low, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Creative Director, Wawa Pictures

8. Mr Chow Wai Thong, Founder and Executive Producer, August Pictures Pte Ltd

The presentations were followed by an hour-long discussion moderated by Ms Jasmine Ng.

Key growth strategies to drive Singapore's television broadcasting sector

Mr Joachim Ng, Director for Media Industry Development from the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), provided an overview of the existing television broadcasting landscape in Singapore. He also spoke about the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic on the industry such as the Safe Management Measures (SMMs) that content creators had to follow as well as the border controls which prevented some production crews from accessing important resources from neighbouring countries. However, the pandemic had also created a greater demand for content because more people were staying in their homes and looking for ways to entertain themselves, he said. On raising the industry's capabilities further, he said IMDA had four key strategies: (1) enhancing international relevance; (2) focusing on enterprise and growth opportunities; (3) expanding talent progression; and (4) using creativity and technology in storytelling. The government had been focusing on the first three growth strategies since 2003 and it would continue to work with more partners to achieve greater progress in these areas. As for the strategy of using creativity and technology in storytelling, creative talents in the industry must think harder on how they can adopt technology and digitalisation so that they can create compelling storylines and form deeper emotional connections with their audiences, he said.

Key priority areas for Mediacorp to drive content

Ms Angeline Poh, Chief Customer and Content Development Officer at Mediacorp Pte Ltd, spoke about Mediacorp's evolution from being a single national broadcaster to a customer-centric national media network that operates both on its own and third-party platforms. She cited Mediacorp's extensive coverage of the Tokyo Olympics to reflect its identity as not just a national broadcaster, but also a transmedia network. Mediacorp would focus on three key priorities to drive content across more markets, she said. The first was to maximise its reach further by leveraging third-party sites such as YouTube. Some local drama series made available on YouTube were well received not just locally but also in countries like China, she said. The second priority was to create higher levels of youth engagement as well as to nurture future talents in the industry. Ms Poh gave the examples of current platforms like Bloomr.SG — Singapore's first and only official YouTube Multi-Channel Network, as well as the MCN Accelerator programme that offer a variety of training and education opportunities for upcoming content creators. The final priority was to strengthen existing regional and global partnerships with key players like HBO and Netflix to spotlight more Singapore-made content to the world.

Local television industry's identity struggle

Mr Lee Thean-jeen, Managing Director of Weiyu Films, highlighted two key problems that he felt had to be tackled by the local television industry to move forward. The first was that the language policies put in place by the government often made it challenging for showrunners like him who wanted to authentically present Singapore's diverse vernacular landscape on screen. He gave an example of the 2019 English drama titled *128 Circle* that featured characters who spoke in English as well as in their mother tongues such as Malay and Tamil. He faced many challenges when trying

to negotiate and seek a "right balance" between the English dialogue in the show and the other mother tongue languages. The second problem was the difficulties in getting members of the Singapore industry themselves to embrace locally produced content. He said many local content producers did not watch or support other locally produced content. Calling this a "disturbing trend", he urged members of the industry to reflect on this and change their attitudes moving forward.

An era of exploration and experimentation with storytelling

Mr M. Raihan Halim, Creative Director of Papahan Films, spoke about his interest in wanting to explore new genres such as crime, thriller and science fiction in his works, which were usually presented in the Malay language. Using two examples from his works — *SR115* and *Rasasak*, he highlighted the importance of risk-taking and experimenting with technology to create more interesting and intriguing content for audiences. On the topic of challenges brought about by OTT platforms like Netflix, Mr Raihan also spoke about the changing consumption patterns of audiences. In the past, episodes of drama series and other programmes were usually aired or released over a few months. Therefore, directors had time to make the changes to their content based on audiences' reception over the first few episodes, he said. However, with the rise of binge watching among audiences, creators can no longer do this. Nevertheless, he felt that this could help to motivate content creators to work harder and more closely with their commissioners.

Attracting international productions to Singapore

Mr Freddie Yeo, Chief Operating Officer at Infinite Studios, spoke about attracting international productions to Singapore. Based on his experience working with international partners in Singapore, he gave five recommendations on how some of the existing policies could be improved further to make more gains. First, it was important for existing policies to be sustainable not just in the current moment but for the future as well. He suggested creating ways to facilitate skills transference and mentorship training. Second, during large-scale productions, crew members often need to seek approval from different government agencies to use various locations for filming, which was usually a tedious process. Therefore, he suggested establishing a single film office to coordinate between different agencies such as the Land Transport Authority (LTA), NParks and the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS). Third, Singapore's reputation as a challenging location to film because of some of its existing regulations must be better managed. Fourth, more support should be given to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to monetise their Intellectual Property (IP) rather than seeking commissions. Fifth, policymakers needed to provide more COVID-19-related support in the form of production insurances and provision of virus testing kits for crew members.

Pushing boundaries in storytelling

Ms Tan Hui Er, Co-founder of Not Safe For TV (NSFTV), spoke about her experience creating content for younger audiences on social media platforms like Instagram. As an independent content creator, her company was not strictly bound by existing Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) guidelines and therefore, had more freedom to discuss "tricky" topics such as feminism, sexuality and inter-racial relationships, she said.

However, at the same time, she also said the government had been very supportive of independent content creators like NSFTV who were trying to promote positive social messages in their content. Moving forward, policymakers could help create more avenues for content creators working on different formats such as the television and social media to come together and create new works. Existing support such as the Creator Lab partnerships have helped content creators gain more exposure by working with larger players like Facebook, she said. But policymakers should also consider developing platforms that would allow them to know how to directly work with such big players in the future, without the government acting as an intermediary, she said.

Overcoming internal challenges within the local media industry

Mr Molby Low, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Creative Director at Wawa Pictures, spoke about three key issues that policymakers needed to consider to help improve the industry. First, many producers were often confined by the guidelines under the existing Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) funding. Censorship was a major problem in the industry, which stifled the creativity of many producers, he said. Hence, policymakers needed to relax on some of these regulations to help raise the standard of content in Singapore. Second, artists play a very important role in marketing content to not just the local but regional markets as well. Many artists do not have enough resources to improve their skillsets and this should be remedied. Third, there needed to be more data sharing in the industry. Although production houses could access information on the ratings for their shows, they were unable to access the ratings of other shows. He said such data was equally important as they could help production houses learn better from one another. Hence IMDA and Mediacorp should work towards developing a more robust and comprehensive data-sharing platform that will allow producers to make more informed decisions.

Helping television producers capitalise on international productions

Mr Chow Wai Thong, Founder and Executive Producer of August Pictures Pte Ltd, said production houses in Singapore were mostly reliant on funding and commissioned work either from the IMDA or Mediacorp. Without these two funding sources, it would be difficult for production houses to sustain themselves and form partnerships with regional co-producers. He said it was time to think about other investment models and funding such as the Public Service Media Digital Partnership Fund[1] and the Southeast Asia Co-Production Grant[2] — to help producers gain more exposure in the regional and international markets. Mr Chow also spoke about how Singapore had managed to attract some major OTT platforms such as Netflix to establish their headquarters locally. While this was a positive move, it had not led to many commissioned work opportunities for local television producers. Local television producers needed to be given sufficient exposure and opportunities to work with

---

[1] The Public Service Media Digital Partnerships Fund was launched in 2019 to support collaborations or partnerships between local media companies and regional or international partners to produce quality content for audiences. It is no longer available at the time of this publication.

[2] The Southeast Asia Co-Production Grant was launched in 2019 to encourage more collaborations between Singaporean creative producers and Southeast Asian filmmakers. It is no longer available at the time of this publication.

regional and international partners, just like how filmmakers have been able to do so, he said.

Discussion

In the discussion after the presentations, the following points were raised:

1. Singapore has been successful in attracting key players like Netflix and HBO to set up their headquarters here. This is mainly because of its conducive environment and policies. However, Singapore's small domestic market is a great disadvantage as these key players preferred to focus on expanding their audience reach in other markets like Indonesia and South Korea.

2. Local production houses and content creators need to work harder and look for more innovative ways to design and market their content in order to make a mark regionally and internationally.

3. In recent years, more minority actors have been given the leading roles in many local English language dramas. It is important to continue with such "colour-blind casting" as it highlights Singapore's multicultural landscape and can become one of its key selling points.

4. Television content creators should not be overly worried about how existing PSB guidelines may affect their creative storytelling process. They can explore ways such as airing different versions of their content on different platforms that meet the platform guidelines.

5. To overcome the volatile nature of the media industry as well as the stiff competition from regional players, local content creators should consider working more closely with one another by establishing collectives similar to the Screenwriters Association (Singapore) and the Singapore Association of Motion Picture Professionals (SAMPP).

6. Instead of focusing on just being a production hub, Singapore should start looking for ways to become a content producing hub. This would provide it with more opportunities to not only sell and market its content in the regional market but also establish a strong name for itself globally.

Introduction

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), together with Ms Jasmine Ng, Filmmaker and President of the Singapore Association of Motion Picture Professionals (SAMPP), organised an online roundtable discussion on 11 August 2021 to discuss the growth and evolution of Singapore's television industry over the years.

The roundtable discussion was held via Zoom webinar and examined the following questions:

- What has the government done to grow Singapore's television industry?

- Which policies have worked, and which have not?

- Do current initiatives adequately address global developments in content creation and technology?

- What are the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead for the local television industry?

Over 80 content creators, producers, filmmakers, and policymakers attended the roundtable.

Eight speakers delivered their presentations in the following order:

1. Mr Joachim Ng, Director, Media Industry Development, Media and Innovation Group, Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA)

2. Ms Angeline Poh, Chief Customer and Corporate Development Officer, Mediacorp Pte Ltd

3. Mr Lee Thean-jeen, Managing Director, Weiyu Films

4. Mr M. Raihan Halim, Creative Director, Papahan Films

5. Mr Freddie Yeo, Chief Operating Officer, Infinite Studios

6. Ms Tan Hui Er, Co-founder, Not Safe For TV (NSFTV), The Hummingbird Co.

7. Mr Molby Low, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Creative Director, Wawa Pictures

8. Mr Chow Wai Thong, Founder and Executive Producer, August Pictures Pte Ltd

The presentations were followed by an hour-long discussion session that was open to all participants and moderated by Ms Ng. The following are transcripts of their presentations slightly edited for readability.

Speaker 1: Joachim Ng, Director, Media Industry Development Media and Innovation Group, Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA)

I would like to thank IPS and Tarn How for putting this roundtable together. I think it is very important that from time to time, government agencies, industries and even citizens come together to openly talk about where we are in a certain area of television and where we are heading towards.

Let me start by saying that television is a very old word. It is actually more of a device today. So, when we talk about television or when I am referring to television, I am not just talking about the free-to-air television from Mediacorp. But I am also talking about over-the-top (OTT*)* media services that include the YouTubers and content from platforms like Netflix and iQiyi.

I will share some statistics that define our industry. These statistics are from the Singapore Department of Statistics' (DOS) 2020 figures. Based on this, you can see that our broadcasting and film and video sectors make up about S$1.3 billion. The entire media industry is about S$3 billion value-added. Just to put that in perspective, this is about 1 or slightly below 1 per cent of Singapore's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). So, our media industry in relation to other economic sectors is a very tiny contributor. It is a very small sector economically. But if you talk about the media industry from a social angle in terms of what it does for our country, it plays a very prominent role. As what Jasmine had alluded to earlier, Singapore stories, which we create and tell for ourselves play a very important role in terms of supporting cohesiveness in our society.

For the purpose of this presentation, I will be sticking to the economic side of things, and this is what I have been doing for the past 10 years. Television or content as a social construct is a whole different topic, which will probably last for many hours as well. In terms of employment figures, the media industry provides about 6,000 job opportunities. There are also many creative freelancers who contribute to the manpower in the industry. So, a lot of these freelancers are not full-time employees. They usually work on sets or productions, and they make a big part of our industry.

This is just a quick overview of the Singapore television broadcast ecosystem. Global broadcasters like Warner Media, Netflix and Disney which have been here for a long time, collectively position Singapore as a media hub in Asia, if not a global hub in the world. I would also like to point out the special role of Mediacorp. Mediacorp is our national broadcaster. It is also the largest producer of content on our free-to-air channels where content is increasingly going digital and online as well. So, Mediacorp actually plays a very large and important role because the productions and commissioning that come out of Mediacorp go on to support many companies and individuals in our ecosystem.

Next, we will look at the key driving forces that are impacting the media and television broadcasting sector today. I will not be explaining too much on this. All the

things that you see on this slide are quite self-evident. However, the last point on the impact of COVID-19 is something that we have been dealing with over the last 18 months. I will be talking more about this in the next slide. But if you look at the emerging trends on this slide, a lot of these trends are actually going to become very important in terms of what they do to the industry. We are living in a golden age of content. More than ever, content is being consumed by many people. In fact, because of the pandemic, people are seeing much more content as most of them are in their homes, and they turn to the television and their mobile devices for entertainment because they cannot go outside. Therefore, it is really a golden age for content consumption and for content production. I will talk more about this later.

There is certainly intense competition among OTT platforms. So, platforms like Netflix, iQiyi, Disney and HBO have been engaging in OTT wars for some time. It is not clear as to who will emerge as winners. Will there just be a handful of global OTTs? Or will there be enough space in this industry for localised OTT players to co-exist with the global giants? Things like the rapid decline of advertising revenue is something that is certainly apparent, and it is impacting all of free-to-air broadcasters and even the cable operators throughout the world. We are not immune to this kind of trend as well. The last thing is also that technology continues to play an important role — both from a distribution point of view such as the adoption of artificial intelligence to understand user taste and recommendation engines, as well as from a production side which includes things like virtual productions which are becoming and will continue to become more common. I also think that virtual production technology will become game changers in the years to come. I think this is something that Singapore has to pay more attention to.

Let me just quickly talk about the impact of COVID-19 on the media industry. For the last 18 months, the television industry in particular, has been quite severely impacted by COVID-19 because of the restrictions on the size of the crew members and the number of people who can appear on the screen unmasked. These are some of the things that the industry had to grapple with. A more severe issue is that the borders remain closed. Therefore, for a country like ours where a lot of productions are either shot in the region or where we bring in talents from outside to be part of our productions in Singapore, the restrictions on border controls have greatly impacted the way productions can be conducted. Again, as we move towards an endemic stage, this is going to be an important policy position to re-open our industry and re-engage and collaborate with our co-production partners in the region.

I could probably spend an hour talking about these four prevailing growth strategies for the media sector as follows: (1) international relevance; (2) enterprise and growth opportunities; (3) talent progression; and (4) creative tech. The first three growth strategies are certainly not new. The government has been putting in resources to grow the media industry since 2003. So, it has spent about 17 to 18 years doing this already. Singapore is already a media hub in Asia. It is also a global hub for content distribution as well. This is something for which IMDA cannot take full credit. I would say that agencies like the Economic Development Board (EDB) have been doing this work for decades by bringing in large multinationals to achieve this. Disney came almost three decades ago, but new companies like iQiyi have now come to

Singapore. Because of this critical mass of media or television companies in Singapore, we have become an important hub. This is certainly for distribution of content. Apart from this, we also need to think about what other roles we can play in the future. Can we also play a role in producing content?

The second growth strategy of supporting enterprise growth, jobs and livelihoods is also important. IMDA has been paying a lot of attention towards helping companies go overseas, explore larger markets, and find collaboration partners in the region. Again, the idea here is that markets out there are bigger. OTT players are global by nature, and they are also demanding content. Therefore, this is a great opportunity for our local companies, especially the ones that are creating and producing new IPs.

The third growth strategy is talent progression. In a way, because our industry is small, it is very important for us to maximise the quality and the quantity of talents. There are more talents coming to the industry, but we need to think about the ways to identify the best talents and help them progress even further. We also need to think about how we can move up the value chain and with these talents and abilities. In terms of helping media schools develop and hone talents, IMDA has supported Continual Education Programmes (CEPs). We have also given scholarships every year and there are probably about 300 IMDA scholars in various media fields — from direction, production to provision of technical assistance. Therefore, talent development has been very central as part of our strategy to grow the industry.

Moving on, the fourth growth strategy is a new strategy, which looks at how the creative talents in the industry can actually lend themselves to storytelling to boost the other economic sectors in Singapore. In a way, while we are concerned with technology and digitalisation, that picture is not complete. You really do need the left and right side of the brain to come together so that you can have compelling technology as well as compelling storytelling that let you move the entire sector. A classic example of this is Apple Inc, which is both a technology company as well as a creative company. As a result of this, it is able to harness an emotional connection with its customers to grow rapidly. We will come back to each of these strategies in the Question-and-Answer (Q&A) segment.

This is my second last point. This value chain is very familiar to many people in this room, right? You first start with ideation and then move on to pre-production, production, post-production and finally distribution and today, most of the distribution is through digital forms. The question that we constantly ask ourselves in IMDA is where does Singapore play in this value scale? Locally, we play in every part of the value chain but if we want to move the industry economically and push our economic space, where do we place our bets? It then becomes important to think about the following questions. Why do we focus on distribution? Where do we focus on the ideation process? Where is the money going to be made from? So, these are the questions that we will address in the discussion. Thank you very much.

Speaker 2: Angeline Poh, Chief Customer and Corporate Development Officer, Mediacorp Pte Ltd

I have been with Mediacorp for about three years. Usually when people introduce me as someone from the company, the response I often get is "I don't watch the television anymore." What I always say back to them is that Mediacorp today is way beyond just television. We have evolved from being just the national broadcaster to being a customer-centric national media network where we do not just operate on our own platforms, but also on third-party platforms, and leverage IPs and personalities to reach a wide audience in Singapore. This is because our mandate is to engage everyone everyday as Singapore's national media network. With this approach across our television, radio and digital network, we actually reach about 95 per cent of people in Singapore on a weekly basis. If we add our social and digital media footprints on third-party platforms, we practically reach almost everyone every day.

Let me give you a concrete example of how we have transformed. All of you must be familiar with CNA. CNA started 20 years ago as a cable and satellite television news channel. Today, it is an omni-channel news service that seeks to deliver timely and trusted news and information to news audiences throughout the day on whatever devices that are convenient to them. This means that we have to create content and convey the content across different formats such as television and radio bulletins, live streams, podcasts, telegram updates and anything that you name — we would have probably done it. So, we take a lot of care in developing and delivering the content to our news audiences. This is because delivering timely and trusted news and information is a cornerstone of what a public service media company like Mediacorp has to do. Therefore, we take a lot of pride when we have results like this.

What I am showing you now on the slide is from the latest Reuters Institute Digital News Report where you can see that Mediacorp's news brands rank very highly in terms of reach. So, what I said earlier is validated by third-party research. Also, we are ranked very highly in terms of trust as well. We are very highly trusted by the audiences in Singapore. Beyond news, we also take this omni-channel approach to content creation and content delivery into other areas as well. Most recently, we just wrapped up our two-week long Olympics season. As Singapore's Olympics network, team Mediacorp was working very hard to offer a comprehensive coverage of the Olympics. If I do a straw poll today, I think half of you here would have consumed some Olympics coverage on at least one of our content touchpoints. This was because we delivered 14 channels on the Olympics coverage on meWATCH, including a dedicated channel on Team Singapore events. On Channel 5, we had over 200 hours of content. We also had breaking news and updates across all our products as well as highlights and selected news clips on YouTube and on our different social media platforms. I hope these two examples give you a sense of what we mean when we say we are a transmedia network and not just a broadcaster.

Looking into the future, we will continue to build on our priorities. I will share with you about some of them now. The first is leveraging third-party sites to maximise reach. A year ago, we consolidated our footprint on YouTube. Now we have got two general entertainment channels on YouTube — Mediacorp Entertainment and Mediacorp Drama. They are language agnostic, and we present the best of our current content on these channels. We include subtitles so that more people can enjoy them. The content that we present there do not just include what we have always been producing, but it also includes YouTube originals like *JustSwipeLah*. These are native YouTube content that appeal to the audience there. They are doing well and some of them even go onto the YouTube trending lists in Singapore. Our local dramas also do very well. I have included two examples here — *Naam* and *My Star Bride*. *My Star Bride* has been famously trending in China through the Douyin app. It has also gained a second and third wave of audience growth as a result of this.

Well-received Mediacorp titles on YouTube such as *JustSwipeLah*, *Naam* and *My Star Bride*. Photo courtesy of Mediacorp Pte Ltd.

We are also moving beyond radio to look at audio content. We are creating a lot of podcasts by audio personalities that are not just posted on meLISTEN but also on other platforms like Spotify to engage the audiences who use that platform. On the youth front, we are continuing to build our youth engagement and identifying young talents whom we can nurture for the industry. So, Bloomr.SG is our multi-channel network that was launched a few years ago. Today, Bloomr.SG accounts for about 14 million subscribers as well. Our partnership with YouTube was taken to the next level last year when we were appointed as the official YouTube multi-channel network in Singapore, and we are now actually amid an accelerator programme, which is run in partnership with YouTube and IMDA to create structured training. This is so that more creators can benefit from learning how to optimise their channels

and scale up their reach. Right now, we have about 50 creators in our network and our mission is to grow this to about 1,000 creators over the years. Beyond third-party creators, we are also launching our first social-first brands. *You Got Watch* and *Clarity* are two examples that exist exclusively on third-party platforms, and they are targeting the younger audiences. This is really content by the youths and for the youths. The content that they are producing are doing phenomenally well. For example, podcasts by *Clarity* were consistently featured in Spotify's top 50 chart.

Last but not least, I am also going to talk about content partnerships. This is where we look at working with like-minded partners in and outside Singapore to tell more compelling Singapore stories. *Slow Dancing* is an example of a partnership with Wattpad where we identified a Singapore author on the platform with a global following and adapted her story into a drama series. When it launched, we noticed that 60 per cent of the audience came from countries like the Philippines, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom (UK). We also have two more Wattpad stories in the pipeline and they will be launched soon. Rising Stories is a competition that was developed with our partner Studio 76 in Taiwan. We just concluded the competition not too long ago, which attracted over 500 submissions. We are still going through the submissions right now and are hopeful that we will find a few gems in there.

Online poster of *Slow Dancing* that premiered in 2020. The series was based on a story written by Singaporean author Noelle on Wattpad — a popular online storytelling platform that provides an avenue for budding writers to share their works. Photo courtesy of Mediacorp Pte Ltd.

Beyond just making content, we also want to make sure that the content we produce are able to reach a wide range of audience as much as possible. These points were also raised earlier by Joachim and Jasmine. So, the recent announcements that we made with Netflix and HBO are some examples of how they are picking up some of the best titles that we have commissioned and produced, in partnership with the independent production houses that we work with, and presenting them to a wider

audience in Asia. These kinds of deals also give us a sense of international validation of the quality of stories that we can tell from Singapore. I hope that these have been able to give you a glimpse of how we are thinking about the types of partnerships and capabilities that we are thinking of developing in the future.

I will now go into the topic of how we can work better with the government in this new landscape that we are now operating in. First, let us take a step back. In the late 1990s, Pay TV was first introduced in the Singapore market, which I suppose was the first point at which we started to segment the audience. The government had introduced legislation then to ensure that the discoverability and accessibility of public service media content was preserved in the new operating landscape. That has helped to ensure that the Singapore stories that we tell continue to be front and centre for all Singaporeans. However, now that we are operating in a digital environment, how do we ensure that these principles are preserved, especially when consumers are consuming content across different digital devices and platforms where Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being used to recommend content to them? How does this legislation continue to preserve the discoverability and accessibility of public service content on these platforms? These topics are also debated in countries like Germany and the UK.

Even though there is a lot of change, competition and other aspects like audience fragmentation in the environment, at Mediacorp what continues to centre us is our core purpose as the national media network where we need to engage everyone every day. We also acknowledge that we need to work very closely with the government to ensure that the legislative framework continues to evolve to keep pace with what is happening in the industry as well as the technological changes that are happening to the way content is being produced and consumed. We also want to continue collaborating at a deeper level with our partners in the creative ecosystem in Singapore and in the region to create great stories to engage our audience with. We are confident that this collaborative approach will help us to secure a future for a robust public service media network that can thrive in an omni-channel age. Thank you, everyone.

Speaker 3: Lee Thean-jeen, Managing Director, Weiyu Films

Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this roundtable. I revisited the brief for today's event last night and realised that we are supposed to address questions like what the government has done to grow the industry, what policies have worked and what has not. Frankly, I do not know if I am the right person to provide a scorecard or a prescription for the "view ahead", but I am going to press on, and share a little of my journey in television, and hopefully, you would not ask me to give you ten minutes of your life back. By the way, when I say television, you can assume that I am referring to streaming services as well, just like what Joachim had mentioned in his presentation earlier.

Let me provide some context about myself, before I dive into my presentation. During the time when I started out in this industry, when you told someone, you were switching to digital, it meant that you were retiring your analogue watch and getting one of the new Casios that were coming out. Film was a piece of celluloid you held in your hands, rather than a substitute for the word "movie". So, where has my journey taken me so far? In my humble opinion, Singapore television has always had a struggle with its identity. I am going to posit two observations stemming from my personal experience. My first observation is that, in most aspects of our lives here in Singapore, the notion of a multiracial nation is reinforced and encouraged everywhere, except when we turn on the television, where we are reminded of the fact that we are a nation segregated by different languages such as English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. My adventures in the vernacular world of television started very early in my career. The first show I ever did for television was an anthology series called *AlterAsians* for Arts Central, in the year 2000. It was an adaptation of short stories by Singapore authors, and one of the stories we adapted was *Or Else, The Lightning God & Other Stories* by Catherine Lim, about the escalating conflict between a tempestuous mother-in-law and a headstrong daughter-in-law. When it came to the filming, the actors playing this contentious couple asked if they might do some of their scenes in Cantonese, as it felt more natural that way. It was my first show and I naively agreed with this. The actors were right. Some of these scenes really took flight. But to cut the long story short, we were asked to re-dub all these scenes. Ideally, the scenes had to be re-dubbed into English, but because it was too difficult to maintain the lip sync with the English dialogue, we ended up dubbing them in Mandarin. Even though a good 80 per cent of the television shows I have made over the years have primarily been in English, I have always felt that if it seemed more natural for two actors in a scene to speak in their mother tongue, I should not stand in the way. I just would not let them do it in dialects anymore.

Fast-forwarding ahead, when Toggle — now known as meWATCH, was about to be launched, we were approached to produce a feature-length movie for the launch. That discussion evolved into a production called *Love And Other Bad Habits*, which

was in both English and Mandarin, almost in equal parts. Our ongoing, evolving discussion with stakeholders about creating something that more "authentically" portrayed life in Singapore also culminated in a show called *128 Circle*, two years ago. Instead of trying to describe the show to you, let me show you a short clip of the show. (See trailer of *128 Circle* here: https://vimeo.com/402488150)

Poster of *128 Circle*, which featured stories of hawkers at a food centre in Singapore. Photo courtesy of Weiyu Films.

One of the more complex aspects of writing and producing *128 Circle* was not dealing with dialogue in four different languages but negotiating the percentage of non-English dialogue within each episode. This is because, categorically, this was still an English drama, so there were several factors at play when it came to language. For example, what was the "right" balance? How would audiences receive a drama where they had to read subtitles half the time? In the final tally, I guess the show's performance was not horribly shabby, since we managed to produce a spin-off series with some of the characters, where we once again, had to negotiate percentages and decide what the right balance was. But at least it was a road we had trekked once before. The only question was, where would we go from here?

In summary, you could argue there is progress. We are trying to embrace the multiculturalism of our society and reflect it on-screen. Perhaps that is how we will come to define ourselves as a cultural entity where this multilingualism or multiculturalism becomes our Unique Selling Point (USP) in the broader landscape of Asian, and international television. But is it enough to have only a few shows that reflect this? I think that is the question we are currently confronting. Will we be able to move away from assigning percentages to the different vernaculars heard on the same programme? And will we ever be able to embrace the idea of using dialect

and Singlish — as an authentic texture of life in Singapore rather than a gratuitous novelty or a minor punchline in a mainstream show?

I want to move on to my next observation — that is, as an industry, I think we are still trying to decide who we want to be when we grow up. Are we creating shows for a local audience, or do we aspire for a piece of the international pie? What is our benchmark for validation? Is it the fact that our family and circle of friends in Singapore are finally watching our shows? Or, is to be able to blast out on our socials that we have been picked up by Netflix? Do we want our cake and eat it? Can we have our cake and eat it?

In an ideal world, at least in my ideal world, every Singapore show that we produce will land with the local audience, acquire regional distribution in every major Asian market, and win international awards. But that is an ideal. One of the biggest stumbling blocks, in my opinion, to having our work embraced by a local audience is ourselves — as in, we who are the industry. The question that I want to post today to the panellists here, many of whom are part of the industry, is: what was the last local show any of us watched, that was not the news? Something we produced ourselves does not count.

Every year, we interview interns from institutes of higher education. In every interview, we inevitably get around to asking them what they watch on television. Inevitably, four out of five tell us they do not watch anything locally made. For the ones who do so, they are usually second-hand consumers of television. For example, their parents or grandparents have the television on during dinner, so they are accidental viewers. I do not know if anyone else is as disturbed by this trend as I am. I do not require anyone who works for me to watch anything I have done. That certainly is not the point of asking the question. But I find it hard to fathom the idea of plunging into a field when I do not know what is lurking in the grass. And beyond that, I sometimes ask what we are we doing or not doing — such that we have gotten to the point where watching our own work is, well, work. Or is it because we ourselves have been trained to set our sights outside of Singapore, to the extent we have stopped orienting the appeal of our work to audiences at home?

I think it is reductionist to say that we are here because of policy. Policies are not determined in isolation. And I can appreciate the challenge of trying to formulate a consistent strategy or vision in an industry as volatile and inconsistent as this one. Especially in these difficult times. The pandemic has brought many aspects of life down to ground zero. Businesses are going back to the drawing board. People are revisiting their ambitions and priorities.

So perhaps this is an apt time for us to revisit the idea of who we are and who we want to be, and shift gears towards — dare I say it — a new normal. Thank you for indulging me.

Speaker 4: M. Raihan Halim, Creative Director, Papahan Films

I wanted to be a filmmaker growing up and I learnt much about filmmaking or at least I watched good films from television. So, I caught my first *Star Wars* and other films that I love, like *Jaws*, on the television. As I grew slightly older in the early 90s, I started watching local productions. On Suria's side, there were a lot of social dramas that were being produced. As much as my family enjoyed watching these social dramas, I was more interested in what Channel 8 produced. I saw *Erlang Sheng* in one of the shows and I wanted to be one by drawing an eye on myself. Growing up — going to film school, coming out and working in the television and film industry, it always felt gratifying and it always felt like a dream getting to work with people whom I had grown up watching on television. Here I am today, creating new products. There were things that I knew that I did not want to do. One of the things that I did not want to do was to make social dramas. One reason why I did not want to do social dramas was because I felt that social dramas did not interest me. I was not keen on that. I watched television for one reason, which was mainly to be entertained.

I remember this particular anecdote that I often tell everyone. When I was in the army in the early 2000s, I remember that we had to do our last parade, which basically marked the end of the day. We had to do the parade before 7pm because everyone wanted to have their dinner, shower and sit in front of Channel 8 and watch *Holland V*. Everyone — be it Indian, Malay, Chinese and even an American-Chinese who was with us would watch *Holland V*. It became like a big communal thing for us, and I wanted to bring that experience back. I also wanted to be entertained. So, when we created Papahan Films, we started with romantic comedies, and we eventually decided to do things that we wanted to watch. A lot of the times, these were things like thrillers and crime series.

There was also an evolution at that time for Suria, which was an ethnic channel that focused on social dramas, to explore new genres. One of the things we had always talked about was to try a new approach in terms of content that is being produced in Suria. If you try something new and it fails, well at least you tried. But what if you succeed? What if that success gives birth to other new ideas? I came at a point where Suria was already experimenting with crime series and when we jumped in, during *Firasat,* we value-added to that a bit with transmedia. So, what happens is that the bounds of storytelling go beyond the television screen. If you watch the television show, there will be some websites where you can actually surf and see what is it that they are looking at. Things were blurred from the real world and the television world. That actually became very exciting. There were contests that they had to search for; there were also ways in which they could participate together in the story and also influence the story a little bit. We find that this is something very gratifying. That is the evolution of television — something which films cannot do.

We then decided to up this a little and created a series called *SR115*, which was a huge undertaking. It was a story about a plane that came back after 20 years. It was

a very challenging project because we had no planes in Singapore that could be rented out. We had to go to Malaysia for them. It was a risky and expensive project for us. But it was very exciting for us because we tried to do something new where we tried to create science fiction without the crime element. It succeeded enough for us to win the Asian Academy Creative Awards for Original Screenplay. I think that ushered in a new era for myself, to try newer and even bigger things. I have been very fortunate to be in a position where I have been able to get the content development fund twice from IMDA and Mediacorp. These were for two projects, *Raksasa* and *Sephia*. *Raksasa* is a monster tele-movie and what we did was to employ relatively new technology known as animatronics. It was a new technology for Singapore because we had never used it before. However, it was considered ancient in Hollywood. We brought animatronics experts from Thailand to show us the monster. It was extremely fun. Recently, we decided to do another tele-movie called *Sephia*. This time we were experimenting not just with CGI but also miniatures. It is a bit tough now with COVID-19 because we would usually go to the particular country to bring over the miniatures to Singapore. We are still working on this and are very excited for the tele-movie to be made.

A scene from the tele-movie *Raksasa*, about a single parent raising a rebellious daughter. Photo courtesy of Papahan Films.

A scene from *Sephia*, a science-fiction tele-movie about a comet that strikes Singapore resulting in grave destruction for the country. Photo courtesy of Papahan Films.

As we go into the new future, I feel that we are fighting a huge battle with the OTTs like the Netflix-es and the Disney Pluses. Even though there is already a big battle, there is an even bigger battle on the storytelling front. This is because, once upon a time, you were doing an eight-episode drama that could be spread across two months. You could actually tweak stories as you went along. So, for example, if the first episode does not seem to work, or if the ratings are not doing well, you can decide to maybe include an action scene in episode five to make up for it. But now, because we are doing a lot of binge-watching, if your first episode fails there is a chance your whole series may fail because no one is watching it. That is actually scary but also super fun for us content creators, because it means we have to work a lot harder now. This also means that we have to work with the commissioners together. I am still learning together with a lot of other content creators, especially in this new era of content consumption, on how to tackle this challenge. However, I must say that it has been a very exciting endeavour.

Moving forward, I find that it is so interesting, for example in *128 Circle*, to hear Malay characters speak Malay and Indian characters speaking Tamil. It is something that I have always wanted to watch since I was a little boy. I remember watching Channel 8 and Suria dramas where there were no other races. Then, one day out of nowhere, one of the Vasantham series had a Chinese main character and I thought that was a game changer. I think now the lines are blurred. We are now trying to cast multicultural characters in a lot of series and shows. This is a fun thing, and it reflects not just the channel but also Singapore.

We are now at the forefront of something new, and my greatest hope is that we keep on pushing. We have to push forward and try new things. Things that used to work

two years ago might not work now and it is time to evolve. I cannot wait for that time to come when we have to push further. Thank you everybody for having me.

Speaker 5: Freddie Yeo, Chief Operating Officer, Infinite Studios

Thank you very much IPS for having me here. I will not be covering on television as much today. I have tried to be obedient here where I have taken a close look at the roundtable's objectives and will try to supply some answers in a bite-sized format to fulfil the objectives here. But I also want to focus on the topic of attracting international productions to Singapore and how government policies have helped in doing that. I also want to focus on how it has helped the industry in terms of managing its talent and how it can improve its talent by potentially working on larger projects where some of these talents can be roped into our local productions as well. I think there is definitely a correlation between these because our industry is small. For example, people who are working in the television sector are also largely working in films as well. So, they are very much interconnected in this sense. I thought I should focus purely on international productions because I think the esteemed panel here have touched a lot on the local side. So, I will be going through some of these key points here.

What has the government done to grow the industry? First, the role of IMDA and the Singapore Film Commission is something that I do not even need to expound further on. Their objectives — such as forming co-production treaties, nurturing young filmmakers, promoting Singapore filmmakers at film festivals and markets — are all very critical in terms of strengthening Singapore talents and Singapore content. Now, on the point of positioning Singapore as an infocomm and digital media hub, I will have to go all the way to 1997. I think that 1997 was a really watershed year whereby we experienced the Asian Financial Crisis. It was also when Hong Kong went back to China officially. It really opened up an opportunity for us. I think that is where the Economic Development Board (EDB) looked at attracting a lot of international companies into Singapore. At that point of time there were only the free-to-air channels. We are talking about the Singapore Broadcasting Channel (SBC) and the Television Corporation of Singapore (TCS) here. There was nothing more. I think now, being home to so many broadcasters and that obviously leading to many digital platforms also setting up their APAC quarters in Singapore, has resulted in a huge impact in terms of growing our industry. This is a point I really want to focus on because in 1997, apart from the SBC producing its own content with its own in-house crew, there were only television commercials and documentaries. That was it. That was pretty much the landscape. So, I think from that, you can see now that all of us are doing many different things in the industry. You can see how it impacts Singapore's positioning as an infocomm and a digital hub.

There are now greater production incentives without a doubt. This includes unlocking production subsidies and creating opportunities for Singaporeans to work on international productions. This is really critical, and it is nothing new for us. In fact, there are now competing incentives all over the world. For education and training, there are many diploma and degree courses now conducted by institutes of higher learning (IHLs) for developing creative, technical and production skillsets. Of course,

there is also going to be a huge argument and discussion on this because it ties in with what is the flavour of the year or what is the flavour of the month? How and what types of courses should we then come out with? Is it sustainable? There will be a whole range of discussions but in broad general terms, I think that the government as definitely kept in touch with current trends to make sure that the IHLs also deliver suitable programmes, to basically make sure we have the talent pool to support what we do as an industry.

Now, I will touch on the question of which policies have worked and which have not. I will try to summarise and answer this based on my experience working with people. I have been fortunate enough to work with people from international studios. Some of them have also given me feedback on what has worked so far, what attracted them to Singapore and what are some of the compelling reasons for coming to Singapore. Here, I think that Singapore's position as a global business hub is critical. I think that when you are working with an international studio, it is important to make sure that the legal, financial and intellectual property protection systems are all in place. Even right down to our language policy, such as everyone in Singapore being able to speak in English, is something that we cannot belittle. A lot of international studios are coming to Singapore because of this very ease of communication.

Now, position Singapore as a vibrant and inspiring destination based on the Singapore Tourism Board's (STB's) "Passion Made Possible" idea. I think our reputation as a country in terms of our landscape and how beautiful the country is has certainly become a key factor for a lot of physical production crews, location guys and directors to film in Singapore. In terms of having a prudent and sustainable grant policy, again, I think that we can go into a lot of discussions on how a lot of directors want to film in Singapore. We can go into deeper details on the prudence and sustainability of the grant policies because Singapore is small. But I just want to say this in the context that the prerequisites of unlocking the funding would require training in mentorships, skills transference and local hires. It is not just about saying, "Here is an incentive for you to come here, you should make use of it and later, you should go away." I think there are extremely critical components in terms of having such a policy to ensure that there is this transference of skills and local hires that need to accompany this opportunity.

The wider economic benefits for supporting the industries generally include aspects like hotel accommodations, catering and air travel. We are a very different industry from say an F1 event. Because, when we are making a film, we are talking about investing weeks and months. The hotel industry loves this because we are able to generate such a huge economic benefit for them. Even a simple thing like filming a Work Pass-exempted activity is critical. This is because when you are bringing in an international crew or cast from all over the world, they would be required to apply for Work Pass and things like that. But for filming, under the Ministry of Manpower's (MOM) rule, the crew and cast can have Work Pass exemptions for up to 90 days in a calendar year. Something as simple as this is also quite important.

Also, the publicity, branding and marketing where the promotion of Singapore for example, through behind-the-scenes clips of people working on a production, is also an important part which helps to market and brand ourselves.

On the topic of what further needs to be done, again, speaking from my personal experiences as well as from collective feedback gathered, there has been some toying with the idea of establishing a single point film office to coordinate between different government agencies like the Land Transport Authority (LTA), NParks, Singapore Police Force (SPF), the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS). This is especially helpful when we are involved in large-scale productions. We are all filmmakers here and we know the logistical issues that happen. For example, dealing with parking spaces and flying in 80kg drone cameras are some challenges that we have had to deal with. Therefore, having a single-point film office in Singapore could potentially help to overcome some of these issues.

Singapore also has a reputation for being a very strict, inflexible and a challenging location to film. This has to be managed. Everyone who first talks to me will always talk to me about things like how we cannot bring in chewing gum. Simple things like these can affect Singapore's reputation to a large extent. However, I think that this is something that can be managed.

Another thing that I was thinking about was to have a more competitive and flexible production grant scheme in terms of quantum and customised for specific individual services. I am not talking about this just from the point of attracting international productions, but also for local productions to be able to utilise the facilities and technology that maybe some local companies are actually employing or may be considering putting into practice but do not have the necessary budget to do so. We could look at whether some of these grant schemes would be able to help them.

Another area is to perhaps identify and support leading local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to develop, own and monetise their own IP as opposed to seeking pure commissions. We can discuss more about this in the discussion session later.

Next, I will talk about whether current initiatives have been able to address global developments in content creation and technology. I think renewing existing and forcing new content partnerships, especially with digital platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, HBO, Amazon Prime and iQiyi can be beneficial for local companies. In terms of opportunities and challenges ahead, I think COVID-19 has affected us in a lot of ways. However, we can overcome these by employing new digital production technologies such as virtual productions and Unreal Engine.[3] We can also look at expanding more COVID related support in the form of production insurance for production halts, provision of testing kits for crew members and medical assistance.

I will end this presentation with a short clip that I want to show. Again, it is not so much related to television as this is a clip on the film *Crazy Rich Asian*. I think that this clip is created by the Singapore Film Commission, and I feel that this can give people an idea of how talents have actually benefitted from working in an international production. For me the whole idea is that by having to work on international shows of such a scale, it would hopefully help to pass on a lot of these

---

[3] Unreal Engine is an open and advanced real-time 3D creation platform for photoreal visuals and immersive experiences.

skill sets into local productions as well. Since the people who are working within the film and television industry are interchangeable, this clip will be useful. Thank you.

The production crew of *Crazy Rich Asians* shooting a scene in Singapore. Photo courtesy of Infinite Studios.

Speaker 6: Tan Hui Er, Co-founder, Not Safe For TV (NSFTV), The Hummingbird Co.

Thank you to the IPS team and Jasmine for having me here today. The Hummingbird Co. is a relatively young creative agency, but you might be more familiar with our sister company called Little Red Ants.

Let me give you some context about us. About three years ago, Little Red Ants saw that media consumption was pivoting online. So, it created a Research and Development (R&D) arm to explore the opportunities in this online space, beyond what a traditional video production house can offer. One of the ways The Hummingbird Co. got about to doing that was to create a social media platform in 2019 called Not Safe for TV (NSFTV). Essentially, we are a content channel that focuses on topics driving culture and change. We try to push the boundaries of what is currently available on social media. So, like what Jasmine mentioned earlier, the bulk of what we do is mainly narrative and documentary web series. These are small-scale series, with each episode only lasting about five to 10 minutes. What we do is very small-scale as compared with what you guys have been doing. These are usually funded by grants or our branded projects. We are not at a capacity now whereby we can consistently churn out relatively high-budget series. So, what we have tried to do, especially during this year, has been to develop lower-cost and lower-production value content just to keep up with our engagement with audiences.

I was slightly nervous coming to this roundtable as this is a roundtable for television and most of you here work in the television industry. But we are Not Safe for TV. However, I think that there is still a certain value in discussing why we chose to make content that is not safe for TV and why we think that young people and young audiences are responding to this type of content. So, I will run us through the creative entry points that we take to develop our content. I think that will lead us nicely into the discussion and hopefully, that will be relevant to today's roundtable.

When we talk about social media and the television, we are essentially discussing two very different formats, especially in terms of how we can interact with our audiences. So, I think in trying to remain competitive on social media, what we try to do is to answer these questions: (1) why is it necessary for the story to be told through this format, and (2) have people seen this before? We also try to harness the tools that are available on social media to alleviate the storytelling experience for audiences. Actually, the channel debuted with a series called *One Take* where every single episode was shot in a single take. Each episode also experimented with a different way to do a single take. For example, in one of the episodes, we used the 360 function on Facebook and YouTube to tell a story. Another example would be how we had two different interactive series that were posted completely on Instagram stories, where the audience could play a part in influencing how the story

would unfold. To put it bluntly, it is a much cheaper way to do like a "Bandersnatch".[4] This was not just for us to differentiate ourselves from competitors or other content channels. We were very encouraged by our audience in terms of the support that they gave to us.

A screenshot from Not Safe for TV's (NSFTV) *One Take*. Photo courtesy of NSFTV.

I think that more than just the technical abilities and the technical challenges, the focus has always been to think about what is the most important for us. In terms of choosing the type of stories that we wanted to tell, it really came down to what we as a young team felt was not represented authentically enough on mainstream media. This aligned quite nicely with this trend of young people choosing to stand for brands that also supported the same social issues that they were passionate about. I think at the heart of what we do lay in telling stories that authentically reflect social issues that young people are concerned or passionate about. We also wanted to create content to make them seen and feel heard. What this does is that it ends up creating a really powerful connection between the content creators and audiences in a very direct way. It also helps to build greater brand loyalty. I think this nicely ties in with the next few discussion points that I would like to bring up.

I wonder if the reason why young people are responding to these stories passionately is because these stories are not restricted by the PSB guidelines. The only guidelines that we need to consider are just the platform guidelines. This gives us so much of freedom in terms of choosing the topics we want to talk about as well

---

[4] "Bandersnatch" is an episode from the Netflix series titled *Black Mirror.* The episode received much attention because of its interactive element where audiences were allowed to make decisions for the main character thereby having the ability to influence the storyline.

as the ways we choose to package these topics. We also have more freedom in terms of the creative choices that we choose to make. There was a lot of conversations earlier about language polices. I got reminded of the time when we were doing our National Day video during our very first year, we made a video that incorporated Malay and English. It did not feel radical to us because it was just how our grandparents and family members spoke. Essentially what I am trying to say is that social media has created this free space where original content is being developed without many guidelines from government bodies. If you really look at it, you can see that many people are reacting positively to such content.

I am not trying to say that the PSB guidelines are bad or that we do not support these guidelines. This is because, funnily enough, 60 per cent of our branded or commissioned projects in the past two years have been funded by government bodies. I think that these projects are trying to open conversations that may be tricky to navigate online. For example, these include topics like inter-racial relationships, feminism, LGBTQ+ stories — and most recently, in 2020, we worked under the Creator Lab partnership to look at the topic of youth delinquency and mental health.

So, why are government bodies turning towards online platforms? It may very well be a cause of budgeting issue where it is more cost-effective to put up content online. But I think we cannot deny the fact that audiences are a lot more willing to engage with independent creators pertaining to these sorts of topics and conversations. After working on these projects, I also feel that we are now trying to discuss the same social issues or promote the same positive messages. However, is it that we at NSFTV are just packaging it differently because of the freedom that we have to make these creative choices? If that is the case and if our end goal is the same, then how can the different formats from the television to social media work together? Is it about co-existing separately because of the very different demographics that we have? Or is it about directing the audience traffic in our media ecosystem? So, I think the defining of our relationship is very important, but it is not something that we independent creators can do alone. It is something that needs to be guided by the big players like IMDA and Mediacorp.
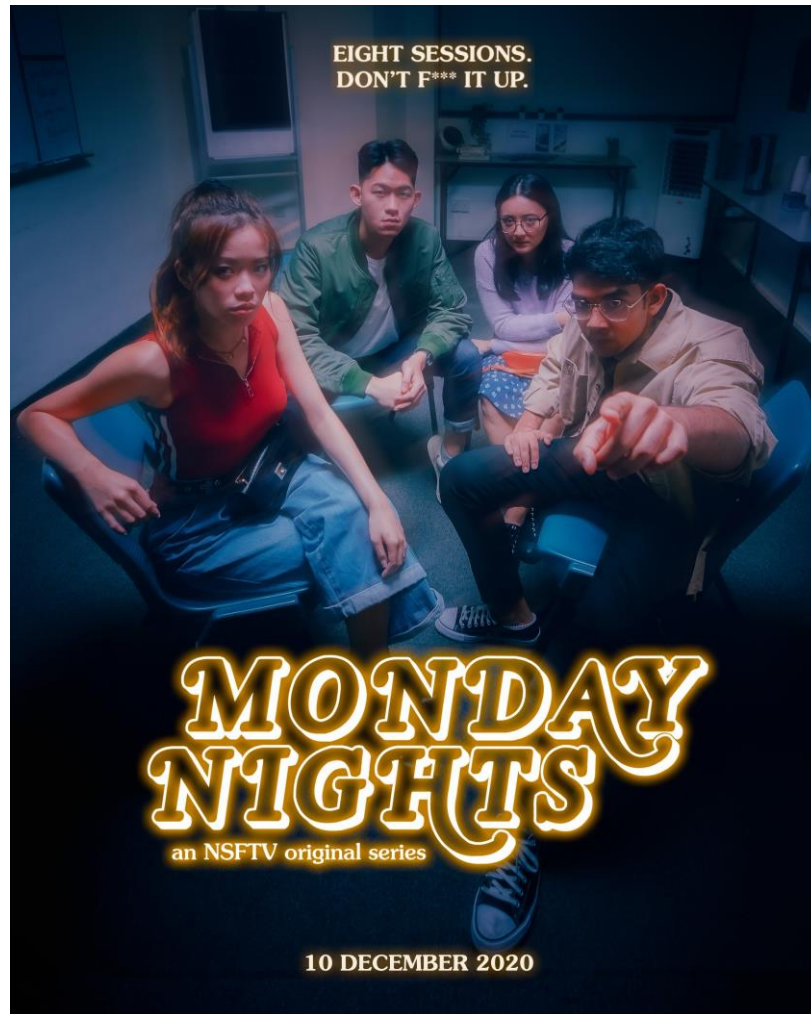
Poster of *Monday Nights*, a project by NSFTV that focused on the topic of mental health and youth delinquency. Photo courtesy of Not Safe For TV.

To end my presentation, I would like to talk about the support that we content creators need and what we see on the road ahead. I will use the example of the latest project that we completed under the IMDA-Facebook Creator Lab partnership, called *Monday Nights*. It was actually a pretty great experience because as much as it was funded by the IMDA and we also got to work with Facebook — the creative freedom that we had was boundless. This was honestly quite surprising for us as well and we had a lot of fun. We really appreciated the trust that was placed in us as content creators to develop the work. I think what was most important was also that the direction of the fund was not just focused on supporting a singular piece of work. We had to prove that this page was part of a bigger picture where it was part of a step in building our larger platform. But what we would have appreciated even more would have been to be given more guidance on how to build our platform especially because this was an opportunity to work with Facebook directly. I think there can be a system of follow-ups, conversations or dialogues, or simply a way to

expand our network. This is because it can help us to create more opportunities to break into regional and even international markets.

The really powerful thing about social media right now is that content is no longer just limited to the local broadcast market. It makes me wonder if instead of placing the success of a content — especially local content — on Netflix or Disney, is there an opportunity for local content to break into the regional or international market? For example, are there opportunities for a local content platform to be the next VICE Media? I cannot answer that, but I think it is possible for us to get there especially with what I have seen online. I also think that we can get there faster with a concerted effort from everyone. With that, I have come to the end of my presentation. I hope that this was relevant to the roundtable. Thank you everyone for listening.

Speaker 7: Molby Low, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Creative Director, Wawa Pictures

Thank you IPS for inviting me today. What the other speakers like Raihan and Thean-jeen talked about earlier resonates well with me. I guess this is because we are all fellow television producers.

I would like to respond to Thean-jeen's point in his presentation on language policies in Singapore. I would also like to discuss about something that we have all been talking about for many years. The issue that I am talking about here is on censorship. I would say that the censorship pertaining to the free-to-air broadcast and content on meWATCH is a little bit too stiff. We know that there are already so many YouTube channels where many local producers use the space to explore what they want to do. Yet, for the PSB funding, we all find ourselves being confined to a certain space. I remember that many years ago, probably about 15 years ago, when I joined Channel U, together with other executive producers, I was given a copy of IMDA's guidelines on censorship, and we were told to do our own censorship. At that point of time, I felt that we were really pushing our boundaries. This was because we would closely refer to the guidelines and anything that was not explicitly stated in the guidelines, we would do it. However, it has now come to a point whereby as producers, we are unsure about what can or what cannot be done. I am not even sure about the regulations for the language guidelines. For example, how many per cent of a certain language is allowed on television? This is something that I am unsure of. There are also certain things that we sometimes cannot do because some audiences have complained about them. So, the whole censorship process becomes something whereby we are going with the lowest denominator of the entire population. Someone cannot accept something and then we have to go with this lowest denominator.

This may seem like a very minor issue. However, it actually affects the creation process as it can make producers and creators shrink their mindset towards accommodating the lowest denominator. They may think that based on such past experiences; certain methods may not work in the present moment as well. This is why I am actually very envious of what Hui Er is doing, where she is not as bounded by the restrictions except when working on branded or commissioned projects. I have watched NSFTV, and some of their content are actually quite safe for TV to me. However, I guess their creation process is totally different as they would not really have someone to restrict them on what can or what cannot be done. Therefore, the issue of censorship is something that I think we can look at. If we are able to relax on censorship more, we can help to improve the standard of our content without doing a lot of other things. It is actually the lowest hanging fruit that we can focus on.

The second thing that we can look at is on looking at the television business. For me, I would say that the television business is a business of goodwill. We produce,

we engage our audiences, they like our content, it touches their hearts, and they subsequently come to us for content. The goodwill has to be built over a long period of time and someone has to see it through all the way. Sometimes, we may be moving in one direction, and then when a new head takes over, we are guided to move in another direction. This can be very disruptive. The good thing about goodwill is that artists are the ones who are fronting it. For example, when we produce a drama series, audiences may like the drama series and also the artists featured in the drama series. They will probably then look for other series that also feature the same artist. Subsequently, the artists then become marketable. However, the sad thing in the industry now is that we do not have enough resources to help upgrade our artists or make them more marketable. It is all left to the decision of the individual artists' managers and of course, they too may not have the necessary resources or funding to do anything that can upgrade the skillset of the artists. So, this is another area that I think that we might want to think about — in terms of how we want to groom our artists so that they can be marketable in Singapore and even become the face that can help to bridge Singapore to the larger international market. While we as creators and producers are trying very hard to work on our storytelling, the artist part of it is also something that we should invest in.

The third thing that I want to talk about is on the sharing of data. No doubt we do have a platform to share ratings for our shows. However, we do not have access to ratings or data of other shows. As such, it is very difficult for producers to judge how well their shows are doing as compared with others. Or if the show is doing very well, they would also want to know which segment of audiences they are being well received by. Such data is not so easily available to producers and the public. This does not help our acumen in terms of what our audiences like in the market. Therefore, this is something that IMDA or even Mediacorp need to look at; it is very important for producers to look at numbers because these will help them in their content creation process.

The fourth and last thing I would like to talk about relates to what Jasmine said earlier about how the info-ed side of Singapore media is one space that is actually very well done. It is one space that is left for us to further groom. It is doing very well in terms of distribution, winning awards, and gaining recognition from the region. Actually, if you look at today's *Lianhe Zaobao*, there is actually a write-up on this as well which you can read if you have time.

In conclusion, these are the four points that I wanted to make. I think they are simple suggestions that can have immediate effects on the industry. Thank you.

Speaker 8: Chow Wai Thong, Founder and Executive Producer, August Pictures Pte Ltd

Thank you everyone for your sharing. I really learnt a lot. What Thean-jeen and Raihan said resonated especially with me. I also agree with what Molby had just talked about. Personally, I also relate a lot with what Not Safe for TV is doing because it is very close to the work done by independent production houses like us. I realised that it is not so easy to manage a production house in Singapore. This is because, for most of us, our content or programme is funded through commissioned work or through IMDA or Mediacorp. However, if production houses are not able to get funding beyond these sources, it will be very tough for them as a business and to survive. Therefore, I feel that what Not Safe for TV does is something very refreshing, innovative and inspiring for us to embark on. This is because, I feel that in Singapore, there should also be other avenues, besides the existing national broadcaster funding, such as platforms or even investment models that we could possibly explore to equip us with a certain kind of edge — that will allow us to work with other regional co-producers. For instance, a few years ago, IMDA introduced the Public Service Media Digital Partnership Fund to support partnerships between local media companies and international partnerships. I think that such funds are important for us because they will allow us to do more programmes with our foreign partners. This will help us gain more exposure, skills, knowledge and experience of working with international collaborators. I also hope that there would be some kind of funding similar to the Southeast Asia Co-Production Grant in the future, just for television producers.

I also understand that IMDA and Mediacorp have helped to build Singapore into a very strong regional hub over the years. I feel that IMDA has provided very good funding as compared with the rest of the region. In addition, Mediacorp has also helped to sustain local production houses to a certain extent. However, when Singapore became a media hub where it attracted a lot of international OTT platforms, I realised that commissioned works in Singapore were fewer in numbers and were of a lesser budget. I do not know the real reason behind this, whereby the platforms set up their headquarters here in Singapore and yet, local television producers do not have a lot of opportunities to work with such platforms. I do not know whether there any insights that IMDA can share with us on this.

I would also like to talk about the recent announcements pertaining to collaborations such as with CJ Entertainment. Personally, I was a bit curious to know why most of the existing partnerships are with filmmakers instead of experienced television producers. Also, when it comes to content innovation, I am quite interested to know how we as a content producer from Singapore, can brand ourselves regionally and internationally. How do we also increase our visibility in the region and internationally as well? When I mentioned about the point on collaborations between overseas platforms and some of the local producers here earlier, I am not sure if the issue is about local television producers not having

sufficient exposure and recognition on our work in the region — in terms of who we are or what our production houses do. I feel that as a whole, the industry does not only comprise the regulator but also the TV stations and production houses. I think it is time we start making ourselves more visible in the region. I would like to know more about what kinds of branding or strategies that Mediacorp or IMDA has in mind to help to push Singapore's content to make it more prominent and visible in the region. This is so that people can know more about how to innovate their content and production techniques. For the past few years, I have been wanting to take a bit of risk and do productions that do not conform to the traditional norms of what local television viewers will expect. For example, *From Beijing to Moscow* was a drama where we had to travel from Beijing to Mongolia, to Russia and to Siberia within a limited budget. However, a lot of these things were done with a great risk. At times when we knew that we might have to stop our production due to various reasons, I tried to continue with the production by looking for additional funding and seeking help from the Kitakyushu Film Commission to supplement some of the funding for airfare and accommodation. This was because I wanted to do something differently in order to position us differently in terms of content in Singapore. I wanted everyone to see us differently.

In terms of Molby's earlier point, he is right about our factual programmes doing rather well in terms of distribution and marketing and winning many awards. However, somehow, our dramas have not reached the same level. I was thinking about the possible reasons for this. Could it be due to the ways our dramas are currently branded? Do we need to find more ways to make our content more visible? My concern is generally on how we can brand Singapore's content to make us more visible in terms of our capability and our visibility to create innovative content in the region and internationally. I also wonder about possible forms of additional funding that can be given to independent production houses beyond the traditional existing support and project funding. Thank you, everyone.

Discussion

Providing opportunities for local content creators to partner with big international players

Mr Joachim Ng responded to Mr Chow Wai Thong's point in the latter's presentation on the lack of opportunities given to local talents in the industry to collaborate with big international players like Netflix and HBO. Based on his conversations with these players, Mr Ng said they found Singapore to be a suitable place in Asia to establish their headquarters in. However, given Singapore's small domestic market size, they usually preferred to focus on other Asian markets to cater their content to. Therefore, he said Singapore's small domestic market size is a key challenge that content creators would need to continuously grapple with in the future. Mr Ng said despite this disadvantage, if content creators continued to work hard and look for ways to create content that could appeal to a wider market, they would definitely be able to capture the attention of these big players and partner with them. In addition, he also talked about how IMDA had already partnered with global players like Disney and CJ Entertainment to influence their commissioners so that they would consider working with local production companies and talents before considering other regional players.

Mr Ng also addressed another question by Mr Chow on why filmmakers, compared with television producers, were given more opportunities to work with global players like Netflix and HBO. To work with these players, television producers had to have very high standards of production value, he said. This meant that they needed to have extensive financial and material support, manpower and skills to break into the regional and international market. He also spoke about the stiff competition from television producers in countries like South Korea whose content had high cinematic and production value, which made it even harder for local producers in Singapore to establish themselves. To participate in a global level, local producers needed to think of ways to similarly create such high-quality content to make a mark for themselves.

Competing regionally with well-established players

Some participants discussed the difficulties faced by local production houses when competing with already established regional players. These regional players had access to important resources, expertise as well as budget to cover both production and marketing costs. As such, they felt that this caused many Singapore storytellers, who despite having the ability to create compelling storylines, to either be sidelined or dismissed from the entire regional ecosystem. They asked about the possible ways to help develop the industry further so that current and future production houses in Singapore could be better equipped to market their content regionally and even globally.

Responding to this, Mr Lee Thean-jeen said many local producers and filmmakers like him were already aware of the "volatile" and "ever changing" nature of the media industry. Therefore, he said it was important for them to constantly rethink about their short term and long-term goals and strategies in order to sustain themselves in the

industry. He also acknowledged that different production houses had different levels of resources available to them. Thus, he said it was important for them to always be aware of the emerging challenges in the industry and plan ahead on how to tackle them. Apart from this, he also said members of the media industry should also explore opportunities to work with one another by establishing collectives where they could pool their resources and expertise together. He gave the example of the Screenwriters Association (Singapore) and the Singapore Association of Motion Picture Professionals (SAMPP) to show how such collaborations could be formed.

Ms Jasmine Ng also described how the IMDA has actively come up with many new initiatives and programmes such as the WritersLab to support budding scriptwriters in Singapore.[5] She stressed that these efforts were extremely important and useful in helping to identify, nurture and groom new talents in the industry who may not have had much experience or background in the industry.

Drawing more international productions to Singapore in the Asian region

On attracting more international productions to Singapore, especially under difficult situations such as the pandemic, a participant observed that Singapore's robust management of the public health crisis allowed many local production houses to continue their work with SMMs (Safe Management Measures) in place. The participant said this could serve as a strong pull factor for international productions to work on projects with local directors and producers in Asia given that the pandemic would continue to affect many Asian markets. In line with this, the participant asked if similar incentives could be created in due course so that Singapore could become a strong production hub in the Asian market.

In response, Mr Ng said Singapore was an expensive region for many international producers and directors to film in. This was despite the favourable policies and regulations put in place to encourage more international collaborations. Reflecting on Singapore's unique position in the media landscape, he said Singapore should focus on being a content-producing hub rather than a production hub in the future. He also talked about the importance of leveraging on the incentives provided by other countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia as well as looking for ways to effectively monetise Intellectual Property (IP) beyond Singapore. Giving the rapidly evolving nature of the media industry, he said it is no longer practical to focus on just producing content solely based on Singapore talents. Instead, the industry must be willing to collaborate on more regional and international projects that require them to send their local talents and expertise to where their collaborators are based in.

Working with third-party platforms to expand viewership

A participant referred to Ms Angeline Poh's presentation to talk about how featuring meWATCH or broadcast content on digital platforms like YouTube would help to expand its viewership and bypass the usual geo-blocking restrictions. In line with this, the participant asked about Mediacorp's long-term strategy and goals as well as the

---

[5] To know more about the WritersLab initiative, visit https://www.imda.gov.sg/imtalent/programmes/writerslab.

ways in which this practice could affect the ability of production houses to sell their work to other platforms or countries.

Ms Poh said Mediacorp's platform-agnostic approach placed its audiences' needs at the centre of everything that it does. In the current intensely fragmented media landscape, she said third-party networks like YouTube had become effective platforms to host Mediacorp's programmes, and offer opportunities to significantly expand the reach and range of its content to new and diverse audiences that were native on different platforms. She also said Mediacorp's scheduled uploads on YouTube were also carefully managed to ensure scope for licensing on other content platforms.

Giving more time to develop concrete ideas into series

A participant discussed about the need for content creators to dedicate some time to develop and strengthen their creative ideas before rushing to produce content.

Ms Poh agreed with this and said efforts like the Content Development Fund was initiated to allow for piloting and experimentation. These initiatives aimed to encourage more innovation and creative use of new media technology through the commissioning of resource-friendly pilots. She gave the example of how *Raksasa* was produced as a pilot to test the viability of the concept before being expanded into a full series. Other examples of pilot commissions include *Adulting* and kids' titles such as *Little Tami's Book, Scoop* and *Mind Blown!* In addition, she also said Mediacorp worked very closely with its production partners and creatives in writers' room sessions — to flesh out the scripts and shape stories that would resonate with its audiences.

Advertisements as funding sources

A participant asked Mediacorp about the possibility of removing advertisements on meWATCH as they affected people's viewing experience online.

Ms Poh agreed with the participant that advertisements may often be disruptive to viewers. However, they were important in helping Mediacorp fund the cost of running meWATCH and to offer content for free where possible, to viewers in Singapore, she said. Nevertheless, she said user experience was also a top priority for Mediacorp; therefore, it was constantly adjusting the ad serving policy to improve viewers' experience. Meanwhile, she added that viewers could consider subscribing to meWATCH Prime, which provided ad-free viewing for on-demand videos and priority viewing of the latest Mediacorp shows, among other perks.

Exercising creativity in the age of censorship

On the topic of PSB guidelines and censorship, some participants felt that such guidelines limited creativity and innovation when it came to storytelling. They also noted that such guidelines often placed television content creators at a huge disadvantage compared with independent content creators who were producing work on digital and social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram. Therefore, they felt that television content creators were not given an "equal level playing field" with

independent content creators, and this was something that policymakers had to look into.

Responding to this topic on censorship, Ms Poh said there were different guidelines and regulations for content presented on different platforms. For example, content on free-to-air platforms often faced more stringent guidelines than OTT or digital platforms because they were easily accessible to the general public. Therefore, this posed a challenge especially when "windowing" content with PG13, NC16, M18 or R21 rating on different platforms. She said one way that Mediacorp was able to overcome this problem was by airing different versions of the content on different platforms according to their respective guidelines. For example, in 2019, there were two versions of the local drama, *Last Madame*, which were aired on meWATCH as well as on television. The M18 version of the drama series was aired on meWATCH while the PG13 version was aired on the television. Ms Poh said this was a feasible approach that Mediacorp would continue to use moving forward.

She also added that Mediacorp would continue to encourage content creators to push their boundaries and come up with more creative and innovative ideas that could appeal to different groups of audiences. Even in instances of content that may not be PG13 but have compelling storylines, she said they could explore airing different versions of the storylines on different platforms, like in the case of *Last Madame*. Therefore, content creators may not have to necessarily be bounded or restricted by existing regulations and guidelines.

Responding to this, Mr Ng felt that censorship guidelines and regulations were not the "key stumbling blocks" that were affecting the industry. He explained that given the rapidly evolving societal norms, some censorship guidelines have also changed over the years as well. He gave the example of how in recent years, IMDA had allowed for the limited use of dialects in local television dramas and even films. As such, he said factors like good writing, creativity and good execution of production play a more important role than censorship in determining the success of local television content.

Finding more ways for content creators to work with non-traditional fields

On the topic of encouraging more innovation and creativity in content creation, a participant asked the speakers to provide their suggestions on what were some of the possible ways to work with local content creators in non-traditional fields like science communication. Similarly, another participant also asked about how local content creators could collaborate more with members of the arts and creative industry.

In response, Ms Poh said that in June 2021, Mediacorp launched *The Creatives Assembly: A Call For Ideas*. This call-for-proposals exercise was extended to creatives beyond the television production sector and included companies from other fields such as film, theatre and digital content creators. The aim of this exercise was to gather ground-breaking ideas for new content while removing traditionally prescribed parameters, such as specific formats and budgets, so as to encourage maximum creativity. She said Mediacorp received a fair number of concepts from across the creative ecosystem, and was in the midst of assessing them.

In addition, it had also been actively engaging youths from institutes of higher learning through application-based and hands-on learning. In this way, she said Mediacorp hoped to include the unique points of view from budding young storytellers in its content creation process. In addition, existing partnerships with digital partners like Viddsee and Wattpad have also allowed it tap their pool of writers and filmmakers to broaden the range of stories it told on screen.

Responding to this, Mr Ng pointed out that there were many different forms of content that was being produced in the current media landscape. These ranged from factual content to scripted and scientific content. He said producers have to always carefully consider the profiles of their audiences, their tastes and preferences and whether their content would be interesting enough to sustain audience engagement and provide enough returns on their investments. Based on his experience, Mr Ng said scripted and unscripted forms of content have been the main drivers of economic incentive for a long time in the industry. For newer and more niche types of content, he said IMDA would first need to assess the level of demand for such forms of content before thinking of ways to tap on existing business models to monetise such content.

Ms Tan also agreed with the participant and speakers on the value of integrating talents from the local television and the arts industry. Reflecting on her experience of having previously worked in theatre, she said some types of content may not always be suitable for digitisation. Therefore, content creators had to pay close attention to the nature of their content, their audience profile as well as the suitability of platforms that they intended to present their works on.

On creating more avenues for content creators to work closely with the arts industry, Mr Ng recognised the possibilities for talents to crossover between these two industries. He also talked about the possibilities of effectively monetising arts performances and activities on digital and online platforms like YouTube and said this was something NAC and IMDA would continue to think about and even start experimenting with in the future. Ms Poh agreed with this and added that Mediacorp had already embarked on this through its *Lights.Camera.Singapore* initiative, where musicals like *Fried Rice Paradise* and books like *The Devil's Circle* were adapted into local drama series. These series enjoyed positive reception from audiences as well. Such collaborations between the local content creation and arts industry should be further encouraged, she said.

Types of content well-received by audiences

Besides news and national event coverage, a participant asked about other types of genres that usually received the highest level of engagement among local audiences.

In response, Ms Poh said many audiences have shown a strong liking for productions that have revolved around themes built on rich cultural colour (*Last Madame* and *The Little Nyonya*), Singapore heritage (*Titoudao, Trilogy — A Voyage, Tumultuous Time, The Journey: Our Homeland* and *Adukku Veetu Annasamy*) and stories situated in relatable and compelling contemporary local settings (*128 Circle, When Duty Calls, CLIF* and *Lesung*). In addition, they have also enjoyed works that incorporate humour while depicting certain uniquely Singaporean quirks, such as in the English adult animated sitcom *Downstairs*, the Malay parody series *Fiesta Komedi*, and the Tamil

talk show *Vadi Ready Vedi*. The positive reception to such content also reflected Mediacorp's understanding of the media landscape and the pride it took in being a homegrown Singapore storyteller, she said.

Evolution of representation in local content

On the topic of media representation, a participant mentioned how television channels in Singapore were segmented according to the different vernacular languages such as English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. The participant asked whether such segmentation restricted television producers in reflecting the multi-cultural and multi-lingual landscape of Singapore on screen.

In response, Ms Poh said that as a public service media network, a key component of Mediacorp's role was in providing content that brought the different communities in Singapore together. She said in recent years, Mediacorp has commissioned and delivered more engaging and creative multilingual and multiracial titles and programmes to reflect Singapore's diverse society in an authentic way. These include the 2019 hawker drama series, *128 Circle* and its spin-off series *Shaking Legs* in 2020, both of which featured multilingual dialogues, as one would expect in a typical casual conversation in Singapore. Another initiative was last year's *Raksasa*, a monster thriller that was a joint commission between the English and Malay Audience teams. Dual versions of the show were created — one featuring heavier English language dialogues, and the other featuring heavier Malay language dialogues. In addition, Mediacorp's latest post-WWII English period drama offering, *This Land Is Mine*, is a book-to-screen adaptation that also had a similar multi-lingual treatment. She said these titles underscored Mediacorp's commitment to telling stories that were true to the Singapore way of life, and that it would continue to reach out and connect to its multilingual audiences in an authentic and uniquely Singaporean way.

On the topic of representation in the local media, a participant asked about the possibilities of seeing more minority actors in leading roles in Channel 5. The participant felt that minority actors were often given trivial roles or treated as side stops in many English-language dramas.

In response, Ms Poh said this was a situation that could be improved. She said efforts to introduce more multilingual programmes featuring multiracial casts was an ongoing work in progress. In recent years, Mediacorp had commissioned shows for meWATCH and Channel 5 that featured prominent minority lead protagonists. Some examples of these included the lead characters in *Lion Mums* (Nurul Aini as Durrani Mazlan), *Code of Law* (Fauzie Laily as Razali) and *Mixed Signals* (Udaya Soundari as Vanda and Vamila, and Thanuja Anathan as Ruby Richards). Similarly, long-form series such as *Kin* and *Tanglin* also featured a racially diverse cast (Ebi Shankara as Kenneth Bala and Matsura Ahma as Adina in *Kin*, and James Kumar as Arjun Bhaskars and Syirah Jusni as Norleena Rahman in *Tanglin*).

Mr M. Raihan Halim agreed with Ms Poh that there has been an increasing number of English drama series that featured a more inclusive and "colour blind casting". Having such inclusive casting and storylines help to reinforce Singapore's diverse identities to people, he said. This could help to create stronger bonding and communal ties among the different racial and ethnic groups in Singapore. Apart from

this, he also said the casting of minority characters in lead roles can go a long way in helping audiences from minority communities feel more represented on screen. Reflecting on his experience growing up with local television, he talked about how the casting of Singaporean-Malay actor Suhaimi Yusof as a main character in the popular *Police and Thief* drama series that premiered in 2004 on Chanel 5 left a positive mark on him. Moving forward, he said content creators in Singapore should consider it as their responsibility to adopt such practices in their respective works. Moreover, he also said in order to effectively overcome challenges from key OTT platforms like Netflix, the different vernacular channels as well as the English Channel will have to work together collectively.

Wishlist for the future

In their final remarks, some speakers also shared their respective wishlists that they had for the local television and content creation industry.

1. Greater transparency from digital and social media platforms
   Ms Tan Hui Er said that although digital and social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Facebook provided clear guidelines that gave content creators the necessary information on how to create and share content, more information must be provided especially for instances where content gets flagged or shadow banned for supposedly violating any guidelines.

2. Relooking at the existing grant system to help content creators to monetise their IPs
   Mr Freddie Yeo said there should be greater focus on not just commissioning new works on digital platforms but also in looking for ways for content creators to monetise their works and own their IPs. To do this, he said policymakers needed to relook at the existing grant system to introduce new "tweaks" to help carve out the ownership of IPs for content creators.

3. Expanding on promotion and marketing of local content regionally and internationally
   Mr Molby Low and Mr Chow Wai Thong felt that more consideration and attention needed to be given towards how local content was being marketed and promoted beyond Singapore. They felt that this was an important step to take because it would give local producers and content creators more visibility and recognition beyond just Singapore.

4. Expanding the ideation process in the local television industry
   Mr Lee Thean-jeen mentioned about the importance of the ideation and writing process among local content creators. Based on his observations, he felt that the ideation and development process of content creation were not given much attention in recent years. Therefore, he wished to see more content creators spending more time and effort in not just thinking of new and creative ideas and

concepts but also in seeking ways to sustain these ideas through lengthy productions and development processes.

5. <u>Making content available to a wide range of audience</u>
Ms Angeline Poh said content creators often put in a lot of hard work as well as heart work in their creative works. Therefore, these content had to be made available to a wide range of audience in Singapore. She said that as content creators venture into more third-party platforms, they need to also work with the algorithms to maximise the reach of their work to their target audience. Moving forward, she hoped to see policymakers and regulators working more closely with the industry to help content creators tackle with this challenge.

6. <u>Raising the "bar" collectively as an industry</u>
Mr Joachim Ng said it was important for the industry to collectively work together to "raise its game" to face the intense competition from big streaming platforms like Netflix and iQiyi. He said local producers and content creators had to think of more ways to "up" their "game" as this competition will only get stronger in the future. He also said Mediacorp, as the national broadcaster, should be more stringent and careful when selecting projects and works to be aired on television and online platforms. Doing this would help to protect Singapore's name and brand reputation in the market.

About the Speakers

CHOW Wai Thong, founder of August Pictures Pte Ltd, is a renowned Singapore-based director and producer. He has a broad array of works under his belt — from drama, infotainment to documentary. As executive producer, his works have either been nominated for or have won over 90 international accolades, including the esteemed New York Festivals TV & Film Awards and Asian TV Awards. Some of his widely acclaimed dramas include *Beijing to Moscow*, *Driver*, *Mind's Eye*, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Ghost*, and *Teenage Textbook: The Series*.

LEE Thean-jeen is one of the most prolific writer-directors and showrunners working in the Singapore film and television industry today, having created, executive-produced, written and directed over 200 hours of film and television content in the span of his almost three-decades long career. His shows have been recognised at many regional and international award festivals, including the Asian Creative Academy Awards, the New York Festivals, the Asian Television Awards, and the Prix Jeunesse. A recognisable name on the local television scene, his most popular titles include *Reunion, 128 Circle*, *Code of Law*, *Zero Calling*, and *The Pupil*. His latest work is the period drama *This Land is Mine*.

Molby LOW is a television veteran of more than 25 years. He started his career with Singapore's local television stations and established his own independent production company WaWa Pictures Pte Ltd in 2007. Under Mr Low's steady leadership and unwavering passion for the local entertainment industry, WaWa Pictures has since grown to become a prolific leading content provider in Singapore. Currently many of WaWa's content are widely distributed in Southeast Asia, Pan Asia, Australasia and even Latin America. Mr Low is in a constant process of grooming and mentoring new creative talents. He continually pushes to produce content that will not only intrigue the local and regional audiences but also resonate with the global viewers.

Jasmine NG is a director and executive producer who tells stories across platforms — from film to television, to theatre and site-specific installations (*Eating Air, Moveable Feast, Shirkers, Afterlife, Lonely Planet Six Degrees, Future Feed, IPS PRISM, In the Silence of Your Heart, and Both Sides, Now*), and with diverse collaborators (Discovery Channel, National Geographic, Mediacorp, HOOQ, Institute of Policy Studies, and Lien Foundation). She has been invited to serve on many juries and pitch panels in Singapore and in the region (Singapore International Film Festival, Discovery Channel, National Arts Council, and Infocomm Media Development Authority's Singapore Film Commission). Ms Ng is also a creative consultant and commissioner on film and television projects.

Joachim NG currently serves as Director, Media Industry Development, a division within the Infocomm Media Development Authority of Singapore (IMDA). He is also concurrently Director of the Singapore Film Commission. His responsibilities include overseeing the implementation of industry development strategy for media sector, including administration of grants and programmes that support talent development and content production. IMDA is the lead government agency that regulates and promotes the infocomm and media sector in Singapore.

Prior to joining IMDA, Mr Ng served in various industry development roles at the Media Development Authority, Infocomm Development Authority, and the Singapore Economic Development Board. He graduated from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University with a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Industrial Engineering.

Angeline POH is Mediacorp's Chief Customer and Corporate Development Officer. In this concurrent appointment, she oversees Mediacorp's customer engagement and programming across its multiple platforms; as well as manages the development and execution of corporate-wide strategy, projects, and initiatives. Ms Poh also oversees the Singapore Media Academy, which offers training and education services for the media industry.

Prior to joining Mediacorp, Ms Poh was responsible for developing the technology and media sectors through her various roles in the Infocomm Media Development Authority, Media Development Authority, and Economic Development Board.

She also previously led a regional publishing business as Managing Director of McGraw-Hill Education.

M. RAIHAN Halim, who often describes himself as a "part-time scriptwriter, full-time storyteller", began his career in television after winning two Golden Pen Awards at Infocomm Media Development Authority's National Scriptwriting Competition in 2005 and 2007.

In 2014, Mr Raihan embarked on his feature film project, *Banting,* which he wrote, produced and directed. The film's commercial releases in Singapore and Malaysian theatres were met with overwhelming response. The film was also screened at the 34th Hawaii International Film Festival.

Mr Raihan has since created award-winning shows *Firasat* and *SR115* for Mediacorp's Suria. In 2018, he won the award for Best Original Script at the first Asian Academy Creative Awards for SR115. Now working on his next film, *La Luna*, he looks forward to creating content for the worldwide audience. Till today, he still counts his *nenek*, or grandmother, as his biggest fan in the world.

TAN Hui Er is the co-founder of Not Safe For TV (NSFTV), a platform that drives culture and change with authentic storytelling. Alongside NSFTV, Ms Tan explores alternative perspectives and progresses the boundaries of content in the media landscape. She has

worked on projects with Facebook, Singapore Tourism Board, and the Esplanade. Ms Tan believes that experiencing stories have the power to effect social change and finds purpose in unravelling the human condition with her audience.

TAN Tarn How is Adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of Policy Studies. He researches arts and cultural policy.

Freddie YEO is the Chief Operating Officer of Infinite Studios and has more than 25 years of media industry experience. He manages the entire media operations of Infinite Studios in Singapore and Indonesia.

Mr Yeo is also a film and television producer. His producing credits include *My Magic*, which was in competition for the Palme d'Or in 2008, *Be With Me*, and *Tatsumi*, all of which were directed by Singapore film auteur Eric Khoo and premiered in Cannes. Other producing credits include HBO Asia's and ABC's epic period drama series *Serangoon Road*, HBO Asia's *Halfworlds*, Fox International Pictures' *Agent 47*, Scott Free Films' *Equals*, Warner Bros' Golden Globe-nominated and worldwide box office sensation *Crazy Rich Asians*, and HBO's Emmy-winning series *Westworld 3*.

He has been a member of the Advisory Committee of the Singapore Film Commission (SFC) since 2005, served on the Board of Governors at Nanyang Polytechnic for nine years (2010–2019), and was Chairman of Nanyang Polytechnic's School of Interactive Digital Media Advisory Committee for 12 years (2007–2019) as well as of Institute of Technical Education's School of Design and Media for nine years (2010–2019).