STEWARDSHIP OF THE SINGAPORE MEDIA: STAYING THE COURSE

# THE SINGAPORE MEDIA'S LONG AND WINDING ROAD: 1824 TO 2022

IPS-NATHAN LECTURES BY MR PATRICK DANIEL 11th S R NATHAN FELLOW

### **Lecture Outline**

#### **Part I: Press Freedom vs Regulation**

- 5 Issues at heart of today's Press Freedom debates
  - Singapore's Media Laws
  - What do Singaporeans think?

#### Part II: Looking Back at the History

- The English Press and Straits Times History
  - Singapore's Vernacular Press
- The Government's Crackdowns on the Media
- Government Interventions to Reshape Media Landscape

#### Part III: The Last Two Decades

- Disruption in the Media
- The formation of SPH Media Trust

### **Next 2 Lectures**

**Lecture 2:** Grappling with the Darker Side of the Internet: A Global Challenge

**Lecture 3:** Accelerating Trends: Challenges for Singapore and the Media

As I walked to the door of his office, the prime minister called me back. I remember his words:

"Nathan – I am giving you the *Straits Times*. It has 150 years of history. It has been a good paper. It is like a bowl of china. If you break it, I can piece it back together. But it will never be the same. Try not to destroy it. "

I said nothing. He said, "You are keeping silent."

I said, "Sir, you have told me what to do. Also what I should not do. What is there for me to say? I'll try." Excerpt from Mr S R Nathan's memoir, An Unexpected Journey: Path to the Presidency

And so I left

# PART I: PRESS FREEDOM VS REGULATION



### 5 Issues in today's Press Freedom debates

- 1. Freedom of Expression
- 2. Freedom of the Press
- 3. Media Laws
- 4. The "Marketplace of Ideas"
- 5. The Press as the "Fourth Estate"

### First Amendment Constitution of the United States

The Bill of Rights, introduced to Congress in **1789** and adopted in 1791, includes the first 10 amendments to the Constitution of the United States

### **First Amendment**

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

## United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

# Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

## Article 30

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

### **European Convention of Human Rights**

#### ARTICLE 10

#### Freedom of expression

2

- Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.
  - The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

### **Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789)** (French Constitution)

**11.** The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.

### **The Singapore Constitution**

#### Freedom of speech, assembly and association

- 14.--(1) Subject to clauses (2) and (3) ---
  - (a) every citizen of Singapore has the right to freedom of speech and expression;
  - (b) all citizens of Singapore have the right to assemble peaceably and without arms; and
  - (c) all citizens of Singapore have the right to form associations.
- (2) Parliament may by law impose
  - (a) on the rights conferred by clause (1)(a), such restrictions as it considers necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of Singapore or any part thereof, friendly relations with other countries, public order or morality and restrictions designed to protect the privileges of Parliament or to provide against contempt of court, defamation or incitement to any offence;

### **Freedom of the Press**

- Most countries do not have press freedom rights in their constitution.
- Press Freedom is an extension of Freedom of Expression
- Individual free speech is not exactly the same as press freedom

### **Media Laws**

- Most countries have laws that restrict media freedom e.g. libel laws, privacy laws, ownership laws
- Rationale for media laws: control power of the press (to do harm)
- Journalists and media owners also need ethical guidelines

### The "Marketplace of Ideas"

- Economic marketplace: Best product wins?
- "Marketplace of Ideas":
  - Best idea wins?
  - Separates fact from falsehoods?

### Media as the Fourth Estate

- Power to check on abuse by those in authority
- "Hold truth to power"

### **Press Issues in the Singapore Context** Where the Government Stands

- Does not believe in US definition of free speech with no caveats
- Does not buy idea of "Marketplace of Ideas"
- Does not agree with notion of media as the Fourth Estate
- Wants media to help promote values and "nation building"
- Must guard against subversion against the media

### Main Provisions of the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (1974)

- No foreign ownership of media
- No local newspaper barons either
- No foreign funding of the local media
- Control of appointment of directors
- Licensing of media titles
- Foreign papers must give government right of reply

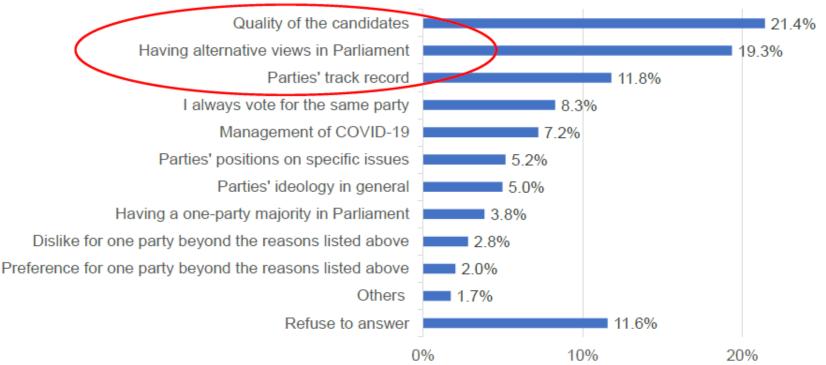
### **OTHER LAWS WHICH AFFECT THE MEDIA**

- Broadcasting Act (1994)
- Defamation Act (1957)
- Official Secrets Act (1935)
- Internal Security Act (1960)
- Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (2019)
- Foreign Interference Countermeasures Act (2021)

### What Do Singaporeans Think?

- Do the laws allow the media to do a good, professional job?
- Is there room for a responsible watchdog role?
- Should the media play a "nation-building" role?
- What about the notion of a "marketplace of ideas"?
- What changes are needed to allow for a greater diversity of views?

### Primary reasons behind people's votes "Which of the following was the primary reason behind your vote this election?"



Source: IPS Survey on Internet and Media Use during GE2020, slide by Dr Carol Soon

30%

### What Do Singaporeans Think?

- Do the laws allow the media to do a good, professional job?
- Is there room for a responsible watchdog role?
- Should the media play a "nation-building" role?
- What about the notion of a "marketplace of ideas"?
- What changes are needed to allow for a greater diversity of views?

### Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index 2021

<b>159</b> Sudan	52.93
160 Singapore	55.20
161 Somalia	55.47

Source: Reporters Without Borders

# World Press Freedom Index

Reporters Without Borders

- Index evaluates level of freedom available to media
- Not an indicator of quality of journalism in the country
- RSF's main issue: Media laws are a breach of press freedom
  - Re earlier discussion on 5 issues of debate
  - POFMA caused Singapore's ranking to drop by 7 places in 2020
  - Another drop likely with FICA
- Questions over methodology

# PART II: LOOKING BACK AT THE HISTORY



### **Singapore Media in Colonial Times**



Source: The National Library Board Singapore

# STRAITS TIMES.

VOL, 181.	TUESDAY MORNING	JULY 15 TH. 1845.	NO. L.
NOTICE TO ADVERTIZERS Tak seak of charges for Advertisements in the Starts Times is made on -iterative terms. Constructs may be entered into setto terms to construct any sea entered into setto internote in the Print Times mains ite sent before 15 octocks on the day orrevious to the Philotation of the Paper	FOR BATAVIA.	TO BE LET. Seconventencial structure and stry Godowana Bucare Apply to the Printer of this assor Singupore, 15th /sily, 1945.	for say of the following Diseases- term of the induction
Singapore. July 15th 1845			
THE ETAILS THES. A CONTROL OF A CONTROL OF	Lis consequences et une Bakakainess of a Government Bounda, the un- built of the second second second second second second second binary of the second second second second second second second second second second second second second second second second MERCIAL ADVICE (cm or shorted at all hours while the Disconseque a second second second second second second second second second MERCIAL Second Second Second Second Second Second Second MERCIAL Second Second Second Second Second Second MERCIAL Second Second Second Second Second Second Second MERCIAL Second Se		The second secon
to be ready ic, deputch by the Steamer to Benopeder constraint of table larges and comprising a uncels of intelligence consect- of with the Straits Channa dec. skot a concerns Price Current and u. full report of the statu of the Markat during each month-Price of each cost fail a Spaniab Dil	FOR SALE. A FEW comes of trees: Jaiman Rick- CURRETIFE & CO Singapore, 28th May, 1845.	Tworys, Bools, Writing Desks, steps Costes, Berons, China, Lacouverd Work Boxo, Teapors, Ten Caddon, Tea Traya, Segar Boxes, Backgaminen, Baards, Ivory Chess and Backgaminen men, Bilves and Ivory Cardo Cases, Silver and Peakler Paris, Inili'i Sunday Work Boxes, Watch Stands, Card Cases, Criboge Boards, Bayer	
FOR MANILLA.	NOTICE	Outres, &c. &c	rupply blz an Elenen Shifting Box Yours trup J. DAVIDSON
THE BOARMED BYG Darrow Chap- tain Jose D'Urns will bare wrompt dispatch - Pre freezh or cassage appy to W.R. PATERSUN & Co Singapore, 11th July, 1845.	Lo senses orves that type Assolt. Ran- ter and the start of the start of the outload of Bred Assocrats Measure of Singapore, being about to quit the Bottlement for Arabia. Re- operat that all persons having claims against or who are indeed to the wold Synd away Research the Athenna Start Singapore, and start and the start of the start of the start Research the Athenna Start Singapore, and the start of the start of the start of the start Research the Athenna Start Singapore, and the start Research the Athenna Start Singapore, and the start Research and the start of the start of the start start of the start of the start of the start of the start start of the start of the start of the start of the start start of the start of the start of the start of the start of the start start of the start of the star	nute Paper, Dereita, Pireta, Missa, Or, Prekniws and Guilla, Beel Pira, Pikeri Int, Standa and Paper Holders, Hines, Bise and Ree Int, Bailing Wax Perfolds and BORS ON ANADOLS SUBJECTS PERFUNERY, constituting of different size and Reents for Units, an Lawrender Water and Reards of Distance Anternet Super- ing Research on Units, and Lawrender Water and Reards of Units and Lawrender Water Maximum Oli. Missile Anternet. Develope of Maximum Oli. Missile Anternet. Develope of Maximum Oli. Missile Anternet. Develope of Maximum Oli.	PILLS, Meil I am indicate to knowle are to provide the second second second second second Pills and Pills and Pills and Pills and Pills The And Areasen Creas are the Maker Pills and Areasen Creasen are and the Maker Pills and Areasen Creasen are and the Maker Pills and Areasen Creasen are and the Maker Pills and Pills and Pills and The Maker Areasen Creasen Creasen are and the Maker Areasen Creasen Areasen are and the Maker Areasen A
FOR LONDON.	A clemtortasse and conveniently stu- ated Bouse in High Street, unitable for a family, white out-bouses complete. Apply to the Printer of this Paper Singapore, 15th July, 1845.	and Eas de Cologne Rowsand's Rolydor. Odunic, Dematte Maranez Oli, Alianic extract, Essence of Pars, Bow-Window Rand Tolia Boso, Window Rand Tolia Boso Randow Randow Randow Randow Creession ditto. Shakrag Song. Lip Salve, Bair Poweter, Powder Bosos and Putta Baures and Brapa, Bair, Torth and Nail Bruster, Decoding and Potter Coulds and Nail Bruster, Decoding and Potter. Coulds and KIOPPAAN'S JAMS and JELIES, Tart Shald Oli, Bratrens, Sci. Mc. Olive and Shald Oli, Bratrens, Sci. Mc.	НОССОЧНИКАТ'S OINTMENT ЕКТЕМАНИМАТ СИНЕ Ф. 4 СИЛЕ ИНИМОЛЕТ И ОТ 17, ПИ ИНТОРОИТЕЛ СИЛА ОПОЛНИТИТИТИ ОВОБ БОЛИТ- ТИПО ЛИТИКАТИ ЧИЛ ВИКИК ТО КИТОКАТИ ПИПО ЛИТИКАТИ ЧИЛ ВИКИК ТО КИТОКАТИ МИТОК ОТ СИСТОТ
Bith instant. For passage only, having excellent ac-	FOR SALE	Salad Oli, Sardines, &c. &c. Prench and English BRANDY, Sherry	THIS APPERAVIT WAS SWORN TO SEFORE THE LOW MATCH OF LONGS
Per passage only, having excellent ac- commodistions Apply to KERL RAWBON & CO. Singapore, 9th July, 1845. NOTICE.	AN Exections Ballase Tasks with Case, bridges, apparatus for Lamps, Marker Stand, de. de., complete, Apply to the Printer of the Strengt Times. Singapore, July 150k, 1845.	NOTPEAR'S JAMS and JELIES, Terr Print, Bunce, Packie, Viceae. Oftw and Breach and Socialia BRANDY. Sharry and Part Wines. Clark. Sweet, Lagoor, Gia, Jamaica Rum, Bingapore Bottled Beer, &c &c. CURSETIER & CO. Singapore, July 15th 1845.	WILLIAM BROOKE of No. 2. United Store Southwark, Landon, Messenger, maket Oathasilk has he (this depoient) we stilted with Furnas Research and Wouldo Hit Arm, and Uleralued Stores and Wouldo mitted an out-door patient at the METRO FOLITAN HONTTAL, in April, 1841, where he confinued nearly Par Weeks. Unable 1 resource there.
T being associately require to detain the FIRE QUEEN for the purpose of chenning ther Bollers and to affird time for the necessary everthal: the departure of writed of the performed Hill the day of the performer, when any will contrively start.	FOR SALE. TWO Guerrsi MILCE GOATS with three kness all in excellent condition. Apply to the Printer of this paper Singapore, July 15th 1845.		Cardinas (UNEY) (No. 10 April, 184), Weit (contrive a Care there. <b>The Dependency</b> : anually relief in a line of the contribution of the contribution of the Latest HOSPITAL, in May, for Five Week and COTS HOSPITAL, in May, for Five Week and Cotta HOSPITAL, in May, for Some and the end August, for come weeks may which the dependent left, in a few were course where Big BisMaNBW COOPER, in a hold the content "May for any data other medical Gives at the Eakloimment and table the content "May for any" and the first set of the first set.
Calcutta, 6th June, 1845.	For SALE.	HOLLOWAY'S PILLS	had told the oponent "that the only chance of serving his life was to Lose his Arm."
EASTERN STEAM COMPANY. OR CALCUTTA TOUCHING AT MALACCA AND FINANO. THE FIRE QUEEN will Lasve at day-break on the Mornings of the 5th July and 10 Begoember ceat. For define apply 10 mark	AT THE SHOP OF CURSETJEE & CO Adoming the Singaport Dispensary. Commercial System: The following Valuaties A CHOICE BRAETION of Bristab. French and Chila Cools	244, Strand near Temple Bar, London, PROFESSION ROLLOWAY Matered saling and the Kutahinhmene. (roos 8 till haid-past. 12 in the Morning, and from 7 till 9 in the Xweing, but the purpose of dispensing Advice GRATIS. THIS INESTIMABLE MEDICINE being composed exilinity of Moltinual Herius, is tree	The Deponent thereupon called u Dr. BRIGHT, chart Population of Guy's who on viewing the deponentic constitution, shall and liberally zool. "I am utilicity and a loss shall for dup for the deponentic constitution, shall enter the other the deponentic constitution of the states frequencies unit frequencies and travial shales frequencies utilisation and the shall be states the shall be and observed the Woodsery Brytes they have he being been for the shall be shall be and the space and the shall be shall be and the shall be and the shall be shall be and the shall be and the shall be shall be and the shall be and the shall be and the shall be shall be and the shall be and the shall be and the shall be shall be and the shall be and the shall be and the shall be shall be and the shall be and the
Sinpapore, July 15th 1845. Agent.	China Figures and Piam SLLKS and SATINS for Ladne' DERSSEE. Crage. Cathreet Bhowls and Bearfs. BALAAENE and MUSLIN Dressee; Ladner Bits Beck- ims. Gioves, Mitts. Bonnet and Walst-Bo- tons dee Genet Bit plain and coloured Boess and Gloves. Waat pieces. Black Neck- enhiefs. Silk and Satin Stocks. NeclReb-	THIS DESTIMATLY MEDICINE being composed entitively of Molerina libra, is rive trained any mercuital, or other desidentiation to the sevent than a la operation of the sevent between the sevent than a la operative la operative prompt and are in enditating disease from the most robust than a la operative la operative term of the sevent than a la operative la operative out and remotes Complemis of every observative thanding or despirations. One were lang- thanding or despirations. Or the Thougash of sevend by its agency	THIS UNPREPODICED advice was index of by the droppent, and a PERFECT CUR- via APPOCING IN THE WIRES on the Third Control of The Control of the Con- man shown, by the droppent, the result of the ana shown, by the droppent, the result of the manifest and drighted for a through the terrer is any you again. It would be without you farm-1 can only compare the Care b before the Manison
The Bark "Atoos" 34 Tons Register C & D & 1 Barn The Bark "Meinelby" 340 tons Register Capital Toure For Project of Measure or Disease apply to	bon. Brares and Silk Bandkorelastra, Grass Cloth and Oram. Chich Bandkorelastra, BNGLISH BLUE CLOTE CARS, Children's Puncy Do AND WATER PROOF COATS, Gold and Silver WATCHES, Gold and Binew Watch OUARD CHIANN. Gold Bines Bouches, Breat Pina, Exerrings, Backlas, Lockets and Gold and Silver Prenti cases.de JAPAN-WARE cocusating of Tables.	OF THE THOUSANDS COUNT by its agency perservices in the use have been assume an sature assumes, after every other means railed. THE MOST AFFLICTED used not resign humself up to despair, but let him make a nur Trail of the Morr Person of this autoaint, for the bissings of health. Non-her restored These housings of health.	House of the City of London, this 8th day of March, 1842

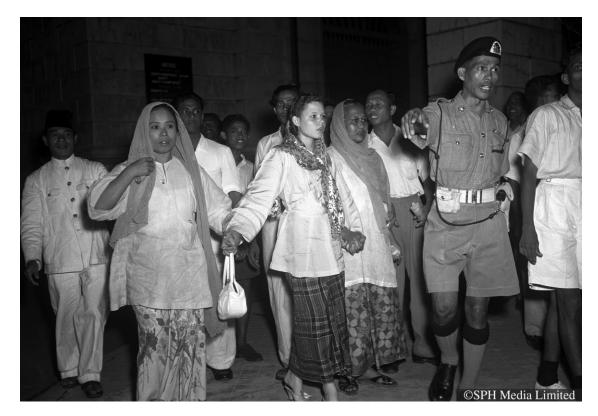
## The First Copy of The Straits Times

### 15 July 1845

### Singapore Media in Colonial Times

- 1867: Opening of the Suez Canal
- 1871: Sea cable laid to Singapore, cable news began
- 1914: Launch of *Malaya Tribune*, by Dr Lim Boon Keng, a Queen's scholar.
- 1923: Opening of Johor Causeway and start of Malayan railway.
   The Straits Times began coverage of the Malay States.
- 1930s: Intense media competition.
- WWII years: The Straits Times became the *Syonan Times*, and later the *Syonan Shimbun*.
- 1948: End of Straits Settlements: Singapore a separate crown colony.
- 1950: The Straits Times became a public company on Stock Exchange.

### The Maria Hertogh Riots (1950)



Source: Dateline Singapore: 150 Years of The Straits Times SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction

### **Singapore Media in Colonial Times**

#### 1959: First Elected Self-Government.

- The Straits Times and press freedom became an election issue.
- Furious attacks by LKY against ST for being anti-PAP.
- PAP's win forced The Straits Times to move to Kuala Lumpur

# Leslie Hoffman

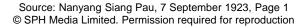
Editor-in-Chief of The Straits Times for 14 Years from 1956



### **Vernacular Press in Singapore**

#### **Chinese Language Media**

- 1923: Nanyang Siang Pau was established
- 1929: Sin Chew Jit Poh was established
- 1967: Shin Min Daily News was established
- 1983: Nanyang Siang Pau merged with Sin Chew Jit Poh to form Lianhe Zaobao and Lianhe Wanbao





### **Vernacular Press in Singapore**

### Malay media

- From 1876: 3 papers in the Jawi script
- 1957: launch of Berita Harian (by STP)

### Tamil media

- From 1887: Many Tamil papers
- 1935: launch of Tamil Murasu



Source: Berita Harian, 1 July 1957 Page 1 © SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction



Source: Tamil Murasu, 2 May 1936, Page 1 © SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction

### **Government Crackdowns against the Media**

### 1971

- Closure of The Eastern Sun
- Suspension of Singapore Herald license
- Crackdown on Nanyang Siang Pau
   Arrest of 4 staff under ISA

The editor-in-chief for the Eastern Sun newspaper, Mr Sam Krishniah, at a press conference



Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction

The editor of the Singapore Herald, Mr Ambrose Khaw at People's Park Complex



Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction

# Shamsuddin Tang Tao (Left) and Ly Singko

#### Former Nanyang Siang Pau Staff Detained under the Internal Security Act



Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction

## **Government Crackdowns against the Media**

### 1976: Crackdown on Berita Harian

- Arrest of 2 BH editors in Singapore
- Arrest of 2 BH Malaysia executives

1959-1981: LKY vs The Straits Times ("The Knuckleduster Era")

## **Government Interventions to Reshape Media Landscape**

- Merger of Chinese papers; formation of SNPL
- Formation of SPH; merger of STP and SNPL
- SPH and Mediacorp: Merger or competition?

## PART III: THE LAST TWO DECADES

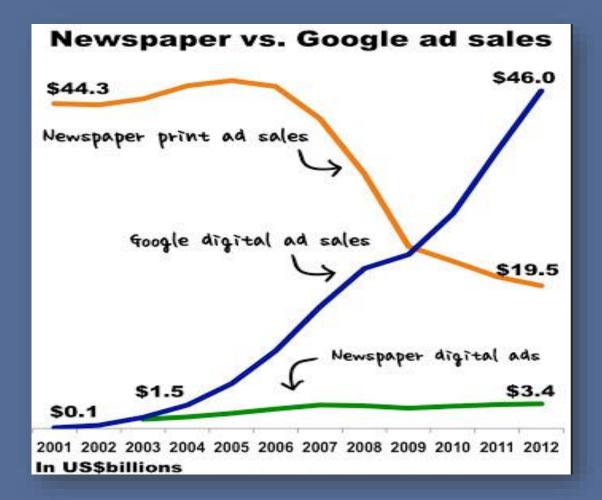
WORD BUSINESS

MIRSIPHISTREPISCIERIESINE

nune

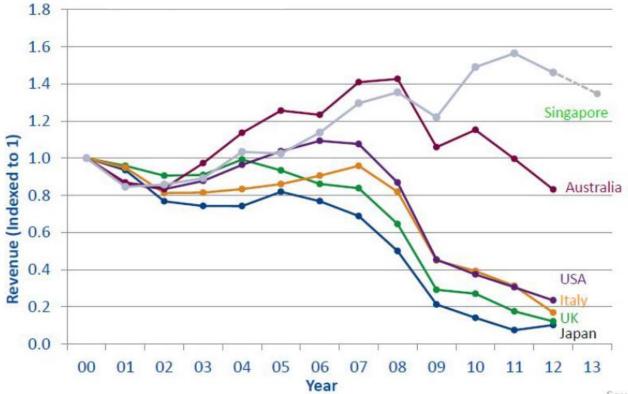
## The Last 2 Decades

- Disruption in the media: Incumbent's dilemma
- SPH Media Trust: A new model



Source : Newspaper Association of America and Google, as reported in Reflections of a Newsosaur

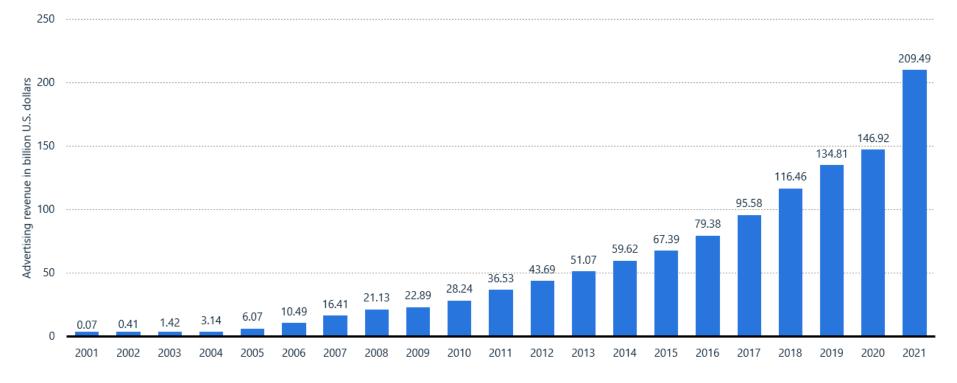




Source: BCG

### Advertising revenue of Google from 2001 to 2021 (in billion US dollars)

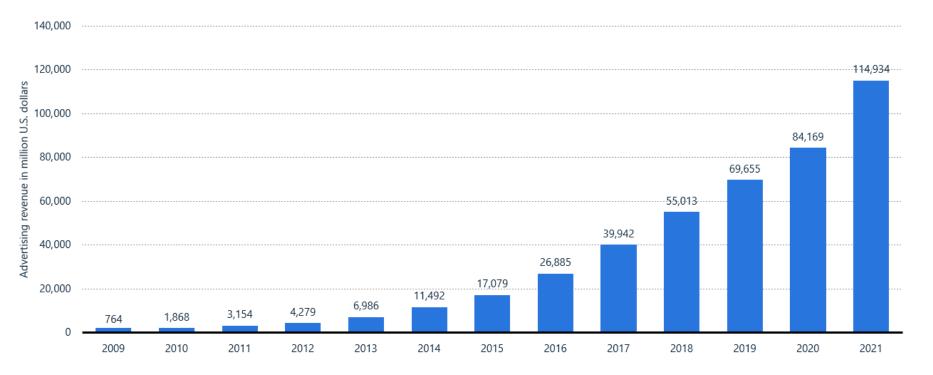
Google: annual advertising revenue 2001-2021



Source: Statista

# Meta's (formerly Facebook Inc) advertising revenue worldwide from 2009 to 2021 (in million US dollars)

Meta: advertising revenue worldwide 2009-2021



## We don't really have an audience problem



## Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act (1996)

"No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider."

## SPH Media Trust: A New Model

- Annual government funding of \$180m for 5 years
- Invest in technology and capabilities
- Acknowledgement that trusted media is a public good
- Assurance of editorial independence
- A new "commercial-public" model



#### Patrick Daniel, 65 SPH Editor-in-Chief, English/Malay/Tamil Media Group (2007 to 2016)

"The days when ST enjoyed profit margins above 30 per cent are gone – savaged by the technology platforms which have sucked up the bulk of advertising revenues. I'm convinced that newspapers have to find a new ownership model to survive - either be owned by a billionaire or convert to a public trust. I much prefer the latter, and predict ST will go that way and live to celebrate its 200th anniversary."

What you are, the world is. And without your transformation, there can be no transformation of the world. Krishnamurti