

## **New media: Why young can't tell good from bad Critical thinking skills lag behind speed of tech changes: NUS don**

***Ken Kwek***

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WHEN young Singaporeans surf the Internet, many are unable to discern the good from the bad and ugly, said a media lecturer.

Often, they are also ill-prepared to defend what they post on the Internet, said Ms Lim Sun Sun, an assistant professor at the National University of Singapore.

This inability to process and analyse the content of new media such as the Internet can be traced to one factor - their critical thinking skills.

While many know how to use the Internet, many have not learnt how to think critically of the flood of information they encounter daily on the worldwide Web.

Prof Lim made the observation at a conference yesterday, when speaking on the topic New Technologies And Social Change.

While noting that the Internet has resulted in opportunities for a new kind of social interaction, Prof Lim said it has also created problems and posed risks.

The form and extent of information available on the Internet, as well as its virtual nature, made it difficult for teachers and parents to give children as complete a level of guidance as they would like, she added.

'How can a parent keep abreast of new media trends, so he can tell a child why a particular medium is produced in a particular way?' she asked.

The job of improving media literacy, she felt, should be a focus of the Government, the media and schools.

A member of the audience asked why there was a particular need for such instruction now, more than in the past.

Prof Lim's reply: because there is a 'growing atrophy' in students' critical thinking skills, a situation which suggests media literacy lags behind development of new media technology.

Beyond the family, the new media also has an effect on politics and public debate, said another panellist.

Dr Cherian George, who teaches at Nanyang Technological University, noted that the mainstream media provides news content of higher quality.

However, it lacks the 'authenticity' and 'informality' of discourse which an increasingly diverse population seek from alternative media such as the Internet.

To bridge this distinction, the Today freesheet tried to combine mainstream and alternative media by hiring blogger Lee Kin Mun, better known as 'mr brown', as a regular columnist, he said.

But it turned out to be a 'failed experiment' as Mr Lee was suspended by Today after the Government criticised his satirical column on rising costs in July last year.

Dr George saw the incident as 'a step backward' for the mainstream media, which he feels needs to do more to harness the qualities of alternative media.

'For the mainstream media's own good as well as Singapore's, we should avoid erecting a 'firewall' between mainstream and alternative media. We need ideas to flow between the two,' he said.