



What Does the Future Hold for Asian Storytelling in a Post-COVID-19 World?



“The single most amazing thing the entertainment industry has done incredibly well during this pandemic has been to keep the ‘show going’. New shows continue to be produced and even live broadcasts have resumed. This ‘never give up, can-do’ spirit has seen a lot of Asian artists continue to perform and we’ve found ways to continue producing shows in a safe manner even if it ended up costing more money. Ultimately, the industry as a whole has rallied to entertain the people and to keep the industry spirit up and going.”

- Mr. Ricky Ow, President, WarnerMedia Entertainment Networks Asia Pacific Chairman

From Picasso’s Guernica to Shakespeare’s King Lear, history has shown that great works of creativity can be borne out of crisis. In the unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic,



Asian storytellers have once again proven this theory and kept the show going.

Themed “Asian Storytelling, Reimagined”, the Singapore Media Festival 2020, returned for its seventh successful run to celebrate, showcase and connect content creators from around the region with fresh vision and purpose for a post-pandemic era.

As we gear up for 2021 and beyond, here are some Festival takeaways on the promising path ahead.

Greater demand for Asian content

In his opening speech at the Singapore Media Festival's Asia TV Forum & Market (ATF), Mr S Iswaran, Minister for Communications and Information, observed an upward trend for Asian content, *“There is a substantial growth in demand, fuelled by fast-growing access to the Internet and mobile devices in the region. As much as consumers enjoy big international blockbusters, they have also shown an appetite for stories and content that are tailored to our regional cultures and tastes.”*

Notably, big Asian media players like Chinese streaming giant, iQIYI, have announced regional rollout plans with Singapore as its overseas headquarters. OTT and streaming services like WarnerMedia Networks, ZEE5 and others have also doubled their digital transformation efforts.

As revenues for Southeast Asia's online video sector looks set to rise exponentially by 2024, global media players like Netflix, Amazon, Tencent and ByteDance, have turned their attention to Asian markets, presenting greater opportunities for Asian storytellers.

Evolving creative expressions

“The effects of the global pandemic have provided an impetus for the media industry as a whole to look at new and innovative ways, including use of technologies, to create content, distribute content and reach out to new audiences,” said IMDA board member, Mr Amit Malhotra, regional lead at Disney+ Southeast Asia.

Social distancing measures aimed at containing the pandemic have changed the way content is consumed, migrating audiences from offline events to online venues. In turn, Asia's content creators have responded positively to new media formats, collaborating closely with media partners to bring such content to consumers. One such example is Sendjoy, an online video message platform that combines technology and storytelling to connect media personalities to stay-home audiences.

Staying true to the story



Amidst uncertainty, what has remained certain in the media and entertainment sector is the importance of storytelling. If anything, the stellar productions this year have proven that creativity shines brighter in the darkness. Many content creators around the region were recognised for producing their best works on the virtual red carpet at the Asian Creative Academy Awards 2020.

IMDA board member Mr Robert Gilby, CEO & Founder, Blue Hat Ventures, expressed great admiration for the many small and medium-sized creative organisations around Asia, *“It has been an incredible strain on their resources as projects have been delayed and cancelled, and yet they continue to demonstrate resilience and agility in reallocating and realigning priorities. Many have been using this time to work on early-stage development of future projects and even hone their skills – as an industry we should rally to provide support through this difficult period.”*

Nurturing tomorrow’s storytellers

Setting the stage for future success requires strong collaborations between governing bodies, media players, technology firms and content creators, to create a holistic and sustainable innovation ecosystem.

“With our quality digital infrastructure, high technological penetration and vibrant multi-cultural society, Singapore is well-positioned to remain a key hub for both international content and for Asia-centric material,” Mr Iswaran shared.

Earlier this year, Singapore’s Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) launched an \$8 million Public Service Content (PSC) Fund, catalysing more production projects to benefit media professionals. Under this, local media partners like Mediacorp, Singapore Press Holdings and Vidsee have already begun commissioning short-form content for their digital platforms through Calls-for-Proposal. IMDA has also worked with international content partners like WarnerMedia Entertainment Networks APAC and ViacomCBS Networks Asia, to bring forward the implementation of the Capability Partnership Programme (CPP), which pairs media MNCs with local media companies to develop “Made-with-Singapore” content.

“The Government will continue to support our media companies and professionals as they weather this trying period, so that they can continue to create content that inspires, uplifts and binds us as one united people. Media companies can look forward to more project opportunities and reduced operating costs, while media professionals and freelancers can benefit from subsidised training fees to sharpen their craft during this downtime. Working together, we will overcome this period of uncertainty and emerge stronger as one,” Mr. Iswaran affirms.