

CHAPTER 2

CONSUMER PROTECTION & EMPOWERMENT

As a media regulator, MDA performs the role of a trusted steward of public values by putting in place content classification standards to help consumers make more informed media choices and to have wider access to content, while reflecting community standards, values and mores.

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FOSTERING A SAFER AND MORE RESPONSIBLE CYBERSPACE

Singapore is one of the most highly-wired countries in the world. According to the International Telecommunications Union's 2012 Global Internet Report, Singapore ranks fourth in the adoption of high-speed broadband, behind Korea, Hong Kong and Japan. The same report also puts Singapore at the front of the pack when it comes to mobile broadband adoption.

Given the borderless nature of the Internet, the Government is focused on public education to help people navigate the media environment, especially the Internet, safely and responsibly.



MLC works closely with various community groups and schools on a series of initiatives to promote responsible digital citizenship such as the 10th Global Safer Internet Day.

MDA has been supporting this effort through cyber wellness education and media literacy education, in particular working with schools to equip students with the knowledge to navigate cyberspace responsibly and safely. To take this effort even further, the Media Literacy Council (MLC) was also formed in August last year.

The MLC was established with 21 members appointed by Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Communications and Information (then Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts). MDA took on the role of the secretariat of the council. (www.medialiteracycouncil.sg)

The council was tasked to spearhead public education programmes and initiatives on media literacy and cyber wellness. With support from MDA, the council marked Singapore's inaugural participation in "Safer Internet Day", a global initiative that originated in Europe, with a Youth Conference comprising panel discussions involving speakers such as well-known bloggers and youth counsellors. The council also plans to reach out to students in schools through their co-curricular activities, incorporating media literacy into schools' orientation programmes and by developing readily-accessible information resources for parents and the general public.

As secretariat, MDA will continue to support the council's programmes to build awareness of media literacy issues and inculcate astute consumption of media offerings and responsible participation on media platforms.

PROVIDING MORE MEDIA CHOICES

MDA's content classification approach enables consumers to make informed media choices, whilst encouraging media companies to explore and provide a wider range of content that adheres to community standards.

In line with this approach, MDA introduced the co-classification initiative for the video industry in 2011. Industry representatives are trained to classify films under General (G), Parental Guidance (PG) and Parental Guidance 13 (PG13) ratings. By the end of 2012, 47 content assessors were accredited under the pilot scheme.

In the area of pay-TV, MDA granted SingNet's mio TV (mio TV) and StarHub the approval for the launch of Restricted 21 (R21) content on their Video-on-Demand (VOD) platforms, as a step towards increasing media offerings for consumers while ensuring that safeguards are put in place to protect the young.

To prevent unauthorised access by the under-aged, the pay-TV operators are required to lock the R21 content by default and issue a unique R21 PIN only after verification of the customers' identity and age. mio TV launched its R21 content on its VOD service in October 2012, and StarHub followed suit in January 2013.

In 2012, MDA also classified 10,525 videos, 1,178 films and 635 video game titles for distribution. The same year also saw MDA issuing 1,293 arts entertainment licences, facilitating the introduction of 214 new local publications and processing 682 imported publications.



MEDIA CONVERGENCE REVIEW

To keep pace with the advent of media technologies and new consumer trends, MDA is reviewing the regulatory frameworks to ensure they remain relevant to the industry and the public.

To this end, Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Communications and Information (then Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts) appointed a Media Convergence Review Panel in March 2012 – chaired by Mr Koh Boon Hwee, Chairman, Board of Trustees, Nanyang Technological University, and comprising 11 other distinguished individuals – to study the issues impacting consumers, industry and society in the converged media environment, and to put forth recommendations to address such challenges. The objectives of the Review are to support industry growth, empower and protect consumers, and foster a cohesive and inclusive society.

Four key recommendations were put forth by the panel:

1. Update the framework for regulating content to encourage industry development, empower consumers and safeguard interests of society
2. Enhance the vibrancy of local content to build shared experiences and strengthen communities
3. Develop policy and regulatory response to copyright and digital piracy challenges
4. Update licensing frameworks to provide greater clarity and consistency in a converged media environment

The Panel issued an interim report containing its preliminary recommendations for consultation with representatives from a wide range of industries and community organisations from August to September 2012.

After careful evaluation of the feedback provided by the industry and community stakeholders, the panel updated the initial recommendations and submitted its final report to the Government on 28 November 2012.

The Government agreed with the principles behind the Panel's recommendations and MDA is now exploring how best to implement the recommendations, which would entail further engagement with both the industry and general public.

SAFEGUARDING CONSUMER INTERESTS

Consumer protection is an important objective in MDA's regulatory remit. The cross-carriage measure was rolled out in March 2010 with the aim of addressing the high degree of content fragmentation in Singapore's pay-TV landscape. Under this measure, pay-TV retailers who acquire exclusive content are required to widen the distribution of such content to subscribers via qualified platforms of other nationwide pay-TV retailers.

Since its introduction, more common channels have been made available to consumers across pay-TV retailers. Prior to the introduction of the measure in March 2010, there were only seven common channels available to consumers on StarHub and mio TV. As of 31 December 2012, consumers could enjoy over 50 common channels available on both platforms.

At the same time, pay-TV retailers are beginning to differentiate their services in other ways, such as originating their own content, offering subscription content online via computers and tablet devices, and delivering content via fibre networks.

The UEFA Euro 2012 tournament was the first qualified content to be cross-carried under the measure. StarHub, which held the exclusive rights to the tournament, allowed all customers – including subscribers on its own platform, as well as mio TV's subscribers – to purchase the content à la carte without a basic subscription.

In a move to ensure that programmes of national significance are not foreclosed to FTA-TV viewers, the anti-siphoning list was also reviewed in 2012.

The revised list, which came into effect on 12 January 2013, comprises two categories of programmes, Category A – where pay-TV retailers cannot acquire any exclusive rights, whether it is "live" or "delayed" broadcasts; and Category B – where pay-TV retailers can acquire exclusive "live" rights, but not exclusive "delayed" rights to broadcast all or part of the programme.

New programmes added to Category A include Formula 1 Singapore, and the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup (opening, semi-finals and finals matches and the Singapore Team matches). The review also saw the introduction of programmes to Category B, namely the AFF Suzuki Cup, Malaysia Cup (Singapore club team matches), Summer Paralympics and the Summer Youth Olympic Games.

To safeguard consumer and public interest, MDA will not hesitate to take firm action against licensees that breach their licensing conditions or our content guidelines. In the year of review, MDA looked into 41 content and 83 licensing breaches. For example, two radio deejays – one from SPH Unionworks' Hot FM91.3 and the other from MediaCorp's Gold 90.5FM – were found to have breached the FTA Programme Code for inappropriate remarks made during their shows, and both stations incurred financial penalties for the breaches. MDA also fined SingNet for failing to comply with the licensing condition of the quality of service when some 115,000 mio TV subscribers experienced an island-wide service disruption on 13 May 2012 during the concluding matches of the 2011/2012 Barclays Premier League.