

**KEY POINTS SHARED IN MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION  
MRS JOSEPHINE TEO'S WRAP-UP INTERVIEW ON HER WORKING VISIT TO THE US,  
28 JUNE 2022 (EST)**

<b>Media:</b>	You were in San Francisco during this visit. Could you share more on what you were doing there, and on the new Codes that MCI has announced? What do they involve and why now?
<b>Minister:</b>	<p>Firstly, Singapore is host to some of the leading companies in tech. It was important for us to get in touch with them, reconnect and also to explore what more they can do in Singapore. We met with quite a number of companies that are familiar names including Microsoft, Google, Meta, Twitter, and Nvidia.</p> <p>For a number of those companies, there was an added dimension to our discussion. Companies like Google, Meta and Twitter will be impacted by the new Codes of Practice that we intend to introduce to enhance online safety. This does not mean that they are the only companies that will be impacted.</p> <p>As you have heard before, we have two sets of codes that are coming out. One set relates to system-level safeguards that we want the social media services to build into their platforms.<sup>1</sup> The other relates to ex-post measures. That means, for content that is already made available and has the potential to create societal harm – we need to be able to act on them.<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Why is it necessary for us to introduce these Codes of Practice?</p> <p>We are <b>not the only country</b> looking at it – other jurisdictions include the EU, UK, and Australia<sup>3</sup>. Very similarly, we are considering the <b>voluminous amount of user generated content</b> that are made available through social media platforms and asking ourselves what <b>safeguards need to be put in place</b> so that the individuals engaging in online activities feel a <b>greater sense of safety</b>. At the same time, where there are user-generated content that could threaten society and in the case of Singapore, our <b>greatest concern will be our racial harmony and religious tolerance</b>. There must be a way for us to safeguard society's interests.</p> <p>The purpose of meeting up with these companies is to also share with them the approach we are taking for developing such codes. Essentially, we want to understand how their technology works and how these codes can be</p>

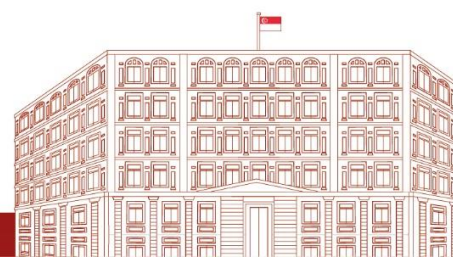
<sup>1</sup> Under the proposed Code of Practice for Online Safety, designated social media services with significant reach or impact are expected to put in place system-wide processes to enhance online safety for all users and have additional safeguards for young users.

<sup>2</sup> Under the proposed Content Code for Social Media Services, IMDA will be granted powers to direct any social media service to disable access to specified types of egregious harmful content for end users in Singapore.

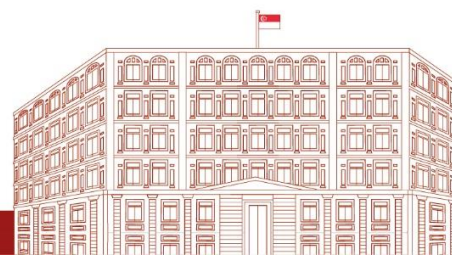
<sup>3</sup> For more information: [UK's Online Safety Bill](#); [Australia's Online Safety Act](#); [EU's proposed Digital Services Act](#); [Germany's Network Enforcement Act or NetzDG](#)

	<p>implemented effectively. The reason for doing so is to ensure that we engage in the development of these codes in a <b>collaborative</b> manner. Because <b>ultimately, we want the same thing – we want people to feel a sense of safety when they engage online.</b></p> <p>Having met with the companies, I think they have a strong appreciation of why we see a need to enhance the safeguards. They also appreciate our collaborative approach.</p> <p>These companies are also innovating in terms of safety tools that could enhance the sense of safety that people have when using their services. <b>We secured commitment of these companies to promote awareness and utilisation of these tools in the Singapore context.</b> We will be working very closely with them to try and see how these kinds of efforts can also complement the introduction of the codes.</p>
<b>Media:</b>	<a href="#">Could you give examples of these innovations?</a>
<b>Minister:</b>	<p>The Media Literacy Council together with Instagram published a very useful guide for parents<sup>4</sup>. If I can refer you to this document, it would be an example of the kind of tools that these companies are introducing that would be quite useful for parents to have an awareness of and to enter into a conversation with their children – whatever the ages of their children may be when they start using a service like Instagram, to decide what works best for them.</p> <p>There are other innovations but suffice to say, we see them as a potential for parents to have a greater sense of assurance when their children engage in the digital space.</p>
<b>Media:</b>	<a href="#">Would you be able to give us a sense of how these codes might work? For example, Facebook takes down harmful content. Would this only work in Singapore? What if people use VPN to get around it?</a>
<b>Minister:</b>	<p>One of the common themes that has emerged in our consultations is that we would be better off <b>not taking a very prescriptive approach but instead, to be outcomes-based.</b> This means that we would want to articulate in our codes what we hope to see as a result of the social media services' interventions, rather than to detail the specific interventions.</p> <p>How Facebook, Instagram or any other of these designated social media services will intervene to achieve the same outcomes – that's the purpose of the consultation. We will make available to them a draft; they will then study it and come back to us to explain how it would work in their context. Then, we will have to see whether there are adjustments that we need to make in the way the code is being designed.</p>

<sup>4</sup> For more information: <https://www.betterinternet.sg/Resources/Resources-Listing/Parents-Guide-to-Instagram>



<b>Media:</b>	What happens if they don't work with us on this? Will there be legal punishments that apply to them?
<b>Minister:</b>	The purpose of having any sort of regulation with legal backing must be that it results in consequences if there are breaches. This point is not lost on the companies we met.
<b>Media:</b>	I'm curious why there is a need for these codes with Singapore already having POFMA and Protection from Harassment Act (POHA)? Those laws are already in place. What are the gaps that you feel these codes will cover?
<b>Minister:</b>	<p>They all <b>address different things</b>. With <b>POFMA</b>, we are trying to address <b>misinformation and disinformation</b>. With <b>FICA</b>, we are trying to address <b>foreign interference</b>. With <b>POHA</b>, we are trying to address <b>people feeling that they have been harassed</b>.</p> <p>For online safety, there is a broader spectrum. There is content that is very sexual in nature. There is content that is violent in nature. Should people be constantly exposed to this kind of content? I think even the social media platforms themselves believe there is a limit.</p> <p>There is also content that have consequences for society, not just individuals. For those kinds of content, the concerns vary across different societies. In the Singapore context, we will be <b>most concerned about will be content that relates to racial harmony and religious tolerance</b>. Now, if these things matter more to us, then we have to find a way to make it known to the social media services, and to find a way to ensure we can safeguard these kinds of values for our society.</p>
<b>Media:</b>	Online critics may say that this is equivalent to the "Great Firewall of China". How would you defend the need for this code against all sorts of criticism?
<b>Minister:</b>	You'll have to see the code in its draft form, and then make an assessment. Our intention really is to <b>ensure that people experience a greater sense of safety</b> when they engage individually online. We also want to <b>safeguard the sense of safety in our society</b> .
<b>Media:</b>	Were the tech representatives from the social media companies open to your situation and what you were saying? Were they open to taking it on board?
<b>Minister:</b>	Very much so. We have been engaging with their Singapore representatives, and we decided that it was useful to also meet with their colleagues back in headquarters, so that we are on the same page. Our approach is a collaborative one. We want the Codes of Practice to be effectively implemented – that must involve the effort to understand the technology more deeply.



<b>Media:</b>	<a href="#">Do you think this is something that the US could learn from Singapore?</a>
<b>Minister:</b>	Apart from meeting with Secretary Raimondo, I also had a chance to meet with the Chairperson of the Federal Trade Commission, Lina Khan. We had very good discussions on the kinds of efforts that are being advanced in the US. I would say that <b>when it comes to rules and regulation, there is always room to learn from one another.</b>

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