

Speech by Mr Tan Kiat How, Minister of State, Ministry of Communications and Information, at the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore Public Relations in Service of Mankind (PRISM) Awards 2021, on Wednesday, 15 December 2021

Ms Koh Juat Muay, President, Institute of Public Relations Singapore (IPRS),

Council Members and Members of IPRS,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

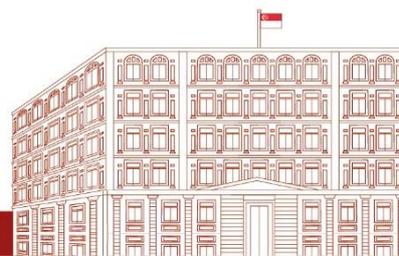
1. A very good morning to everyone. I am happy to join you today for the PRISM Awards 2021.
2. The past two years have not been easy for our community. For instance, safe management measures have disrupted traditional content creation processes and changed the way that the public interfaces with our campaigns.
3. Nevertheless, the campaigns up for awards today show how all of you have worked around these challenges and continued to achieve excellent levels of reach and impact. I am also glad that IPRS has continued to organise virtual courses, workshops, and seminars during this period, helping members improve their skills and stay relevant.
4. I would like to highlight some of the challenges of a shifting communication landscape, which have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thereafter, I will elaborate on how we can tackle these challenges as PR professionals.

A shifting communication landscape

5. Digitalisation has enabled us to reach out to our customers and the wider public in new ways such as through social media platforms. Yet, this trend has also led to the communication landscape becoming increasingly fragmented. Campaigns in the past operated on a few mediums such as print, broadcast and out-of-home media. Comparatively, campaigns today need to manage all of the above while maintaining a presence on many online platforms.
6. The current COVID-19 pandemic highlights some of the problems that a fragmented landscape can bring about. Social media apps have made the circulation of false information easy. For example, the spread of false claims of vaccine-related deaths can easily erode public confidence in COVID-19 vaccines, and the Government has had to make clarifications to address these falsehoods. Social media has also inadvertently given rise to divisive content, which threatens to pull our communities apart.
7. However, in the right hands, social media can be harnessed to amplify campaigns and achieve positive objectives as we have seen in the awards today. As PR professionals, we can play important roles as both “navigators” and “connectors”, to address these challenges.

PR professionals as “navigators” and “connectors”

8. Firstly, in times of crisis, the public is reliant on trustworthy sources of information in a crowded landscape. We can play important roles as “navigators”, providing the public with greater clarity on the issues and guidance to inform how they should act during a crisis.



9. Many organisations in the private sector have contributed to COVID-19 communications through their campaigns. This includes firms present today like Gojek, whose campaign communicated the importance of vaccinations and motivated Singaporeans to get vaccinated. Similarly, AIA and Ogilvy encouraged Singaporeans to embrace the new normal of living with COVID-19 and find ways to stay healthy through their #EmbracingNewNorms campaign.

10. On our end, the Government sought to provide clear and reliable communications during the crisis. This includes tapping on widely used channels like WhatsApp and Telegram to ensure the timely dissemination of COVID-19 related information. Both channels have attracted a total of more than 1.5 million subscribers to date.

11. The Government has also brought traditional entertainment online through initiatives like our e-Getai livestreams. Our livestreams allowed us to entertain seniors safely while also updating them on the latest COVID-19 guidelines. We also collaborated with artistes and online influencers to put together music videos using iconic songs like “We Will Get There” to lessen anxiety amongst Singaporeans and strengthen public confidence in Singapore’s ability to manage the crisis.

12. We cannot do this alone. Your efforts to assist the public in navigating this crisis are reflected in the significant growth in public trust in Singapore from 2020 to 2021. This is according to Edelman’s annual Trust Barometer, which measures public trust in businesses, NGOs, the government, and the media. I would like to thank all of you for your efforts, and for playing your part in supporting the public during this COVID-19 pandemic.

13. Likewise, fake news and divisive content threaten to pull communities apart. PR professionals also play an important role as “connectors”, helping to bridge gaps between communities by ensuring that accurate and credible information is widely disseminated across diverse channels. This includes employing creative strategies to amplify content and messages to a wider audience.

14. A good example would be Prudential’s #DOgood campaign, which used an emotive video to address issues of COVID-19 misinformation. The campaign also called on the public to combat discrimination against frontline workers early on in the COVID-19 crisis.

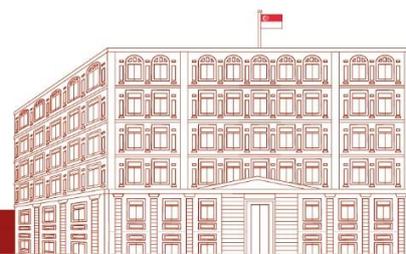
Developing expertise and talent in the field

15. However, the ability to be a “navigator” and “connector” may not come naturally. Given the rapid pace of change in the sector, we will need to be equipped with the right technical skills. For example, being able to utilise a variety of data analytical tools including social media analytics and post-campaign surveys to maximise the impact of our campaigns. We will also need good analytical and communication skills to distil information and present it effectively to audiences.

16. It is encouraging to see efforts led by both the public and private sector to develop talents in the field of communications and media. This includes initiatives by PR firms such as Asia PR Werkz that recently launched a Student Development Fund with NTU’s Wee Kim Wee School to nurture young communicators.

17. Similarly, MCI and IMDA are working closely with industry partners to help upskill local talent. We have partnered YouTube to provide local content creators with training in audience engagement and data analytics. We have also collaborated with Facebook to provide upskilling programmes on digital marketing.

18. If we want to stay ahead of changes in the landscape, there remains a need for both the public and private sector to develop expertise and talent for the field, both amongst existing



professionals and those aspiring to be one. As the saying goes, “a rising tide lifts all boats” – PR firms will be able to reap the benefits of a growing talent pool in the wider Information & Communications (I&C) sector.

19. In conclusion, MCI recognises the importance of excellence in public relations and communications across all sectors of the economy. I am highly appreciative of the work done by IPRS, including organising the PRISM Awards. The awards give recognition to exemplary campaigns and facilitate the sharing of best practices amongst practitioners.

20. There will undoubtedly be challenges ahead for all of us. I am confident that we will turn these challenges into opportunities if we continue to work together. On that note, I would also like to congratulate some of my public sector colleagues. I was informed this morning that the Government has received some awards at the international Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) Awards 2021, which I understand is the world’s largest media intelligence and insights professional body. We were awarded Gold awards for MCI’s National COVID-19 Communications and for the Digital Display Panels Parameter Study. We were also awarded one of two Grand Prix Platinum awards – this is given to outstanding Gold submissions. These awards are not just for the Government or the public sector – it is a recognition of Singapore and all PR practitioners in the community. I would like to thank you for your support, and the hard work you have put in over the years. I look forward to working with you in the future.

21. Thank you.

