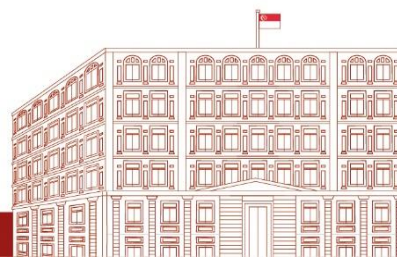


**Transcript of Speech delivered by Mr Tan Kiat How,
Senior Minister of State,
Ministry of Communications and Information,
at NTU Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information Panel Discussion event (9 Jan
2023)**

Professor May O. Lwin, Chair of Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

1. A very good morning to all of you.
2. It's certainly my pleasure to be here this morning to join you on this happy occasion as we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, and my heartiest congratulations to students, faculty staff and alumni on this very important milestone.
3. As the advent of the Internet brought about a sea change in the communications and information landscape, today we don't think twice before turning to "google" to find anything under the sun. We binge watch K-drama on our mobile devices, we check out the latest trends on social media like Tiktok and Instagram. We keep current on the globally latest developments on our newsfeed all times of the day. None of us could have imagined today's communication and information landscape 30 years ago.
4. An average Singaporean spends about seven and a half hours online every day¹ and for many of us, this is more than the number of hours we actually sleep. Young digital natives who grew up very comfortable in the online world, like many of you in the audience today, are perhaps spending even more time than seven and a half hours a day.
5. However, be it online or offline, these are common and shared spaces for society to gather to connect, to socially interact, exchange information, get to know the community and the world around us. I would like to speak on how each of us can continue to play a part in shaping these common spaces.
6. Digital natives may interact online and use online tools in their unique ways – for instance, adapting words to evolve their own lingo or using memes as a creative way of expression.
7. These may be different ways to communicate, but I believe youth of today are surely not indifferent. I am happy to see various youth-led initiatives transforming online impact into real life outcomes. In fact, some of these have been spearheaded by students and graduates from the Wee Kim Wee School to engage wider audiences on meaningful topics.
8. For instance, amidst the growing awareness of mental wellness especially during the pandemic, a group of final-year students started a health communication campaign to encourage deeper conversations about mental health. Their campaign, titled "How Are You, Really?", helped

¹ *Digital 2022 Global Overview Report*, by We Are Social and Hootsuite. This data point pertains to the average Singapore user; no public data specific to youths in Singapore.



to empower fellow youths with the tools and knowledge to support people around them who are in the recovery process for depression.

9. I am also glad to learn that what started as a photojournalism project in the school became much more when it was brought together the co-founders of the company, which we now come to know as Our Grandfather Story. With compelling visual storytelling, they have built a solid base of over 300,000 YouTube subscribers and substantial following based on other platforms. The videos by Our Grandfather Story give a voice to the stories of people from all walks of life. Their productions inspire viewers to keep an open mind in understanding different segments of society and their experiences.

10. These are just but a few of the many inspiring examples of how youths have harnessed the online space to drive positive shifts in society.

11. Indeed, online platforms have significant reach and impact on all of us – they bring new prospects and benefits. However, harmful content can have serious consequences for us, our loved ones, and our society. So how can all of us and our society approach the online domain, to harness the good and diminish the bad?

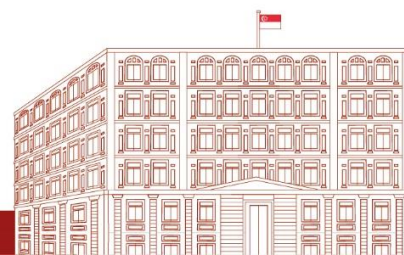
12. Let me just offer a few perspectives. First, we should protect the shared online space given the prevalence and impact of harmful content. The government plays our part and we take a multi-pronged approach. Firstly, by strengthening online safety, we have introduced new laws recently after extensive consultation with members of the public, academics, and industry partners.

13. We have taken several steps including requiring social media platforms to play a more active role by limiting local users' exposure to harmful content, especially for children of young ages. We have been careful to strike a balance between protecting user safety, ensuring data privacy, while encouraging healthy online discourse.

14. That said, regulations alone will not be enough. It needs to be coupled with robust public education to empower and equip our users. For instance, the Media Literacy Council has programmes to actively promote responsible online behaviour and a kinder internet. The Council has also worked with social media services to design projects and resources on digital literacy for users to guard against online harms and threats. These efforts go a long way in building a safer and kinder online space for everyone. I'm very thankful for the participation by industry partners and I'd like to encourage all of you to join us and MLC in this very meaningful journey.

15. Secondly, the government itself needs to better communicate with young people, especially in the online space. We need to find different ways to communicate and engage with the various segments of all society, especially our young digital natives. We are experimenting with different modalities to connect with our audiences through fun and refreshing ways, even on many serious issues.

16. For example, during the nation-wide vaccination programme, the government used interactive game challenges on TikTok to help users improve their understanding of the topic and also created Instagram filters to encourage people to share photos of themselves after vaccination,



so as to nudge those around them to get vaccinated. Such creative communication approaches have reached out to a wider audience.

17. Even as we turn the chapter on Covid-19 which we hope to do so this year, the last two and a half years have been very tough on everyone. And we could only do so because we have a very high vaccination rate in Singapore, especially among our seniors. The strong compliance with safe management measures – wearing masks, keeping safe distancing from our loved ones, staying at home and away from workplaces and schools if we are not feeling well – have made a tremendous difference in safeguarding lives and livelihoods. And that’s why Singapore is in a much better position now, to slowly open up our borders to the rest of the world, even when there are new waves of Covid-19 infections in other countries. Communications approaches like what I mentioned earlier played a crucial role in our fight against Covid-19.

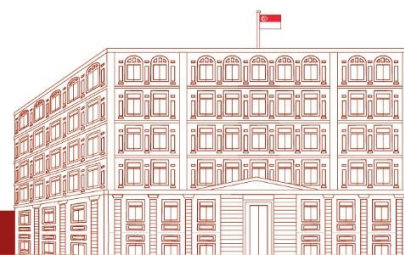
18. Beyond those creative communications, we have also engaged youths beyond the online space. Through multiple engagement sessions in schools, my colleagues at REACH have been connecting with youth segments in the ongoing Forward Singapore exercise – we meet up with them to understand their aspirations, concerns, and issues which they are passionate about.

19. Recently, we set up a dedicated Youth Advisory Panel comprising student representatives from different local institutions, because their involvement and action can be a driving force for good. This is the first time we are having a dedicated panel comprising young people and we brought youth student representatives, not just from traditional schools that we engage like the universities, but also polytechnics and ITEs, as well as specialised institutions like the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) because we want all youths to come in, play a part and take action. I certainly believe that many youths among all of you will be able to offer insights and perspectives on a range of national issues in the Forward Singapore conversations.

20. It takes collective effort to shape and drive good outcomes in both online and offline environments. The government alone cannot do this, so I am heartened to see the support from our stakeholders. It takes partnerships and commitment from the industry, so that digital tech can be used for good. For example, TikTok, a key industry player, has joined hands with public agencies like MCCY, MOE and the National Youth Council to empower young people through the “Youth for Good” initiative to raise awareness on social issues.

21. It also takes effort on the part of individuals– I have met young digital natives who tapped on their familiarity with the online world to help those who are less savvy. These include volunteers from the Youth Corps Singapore who help to run regular digital learning workshops for seniors under the Digital for Life movement. They served to close the digital gap and bring these seniors into part of the digital society. I welcome more of such collaborations and encourage all of you to lean forward and help work together with the government to have a more inclusive digital society for everyone.

22. As Singapore refreshes our social compact as part of the Forward Singapore exercise that DPM Lawrence Wong has launched, it is important that everyone plays their part to widen and strengthen our common spaces. We should look beyond the stereotypes or labels that people may have; and make it a point to engage respectfully with one another, be it in the online world or offline environment to avoid the risk of echo chambers and closed group groupthink.



23. My colleagues and I hope to hear from everyone, to grow a stronger social compact that will serve as a foundation for Singapore as we deepen our understanding, forge consensus, and achieve more ahead of us in the years to come.

24. Over the years, the government has set the foundations for a cohesive society through building such shared spaces and experiences. From familiar places like community centres, hawker centres within our neighbourhood to schools, to the online environment, these are common spaces where people come together. Let us build on these foundations and create new spaces, both online and offline, and keep them vibrant, open, and engaging for all.

25. In closing, let me once again congratulate the school on this significant 30th anniversary milestone. The school has supported and nurtured thousands of graduates over the years, contributing to different sectors and segments of society. As we pursue opportunities and tackle challenges in our common spaces new and old, I call upon all future graduates from your school to continue to play a part to build a more inclusive society across all domains.

26. Have a fruitful session and a panel discussion ahead and I wish you all the best in the coming year. Thank you very much.

