

## **SUBSCRIPTION TELEVISION PROGRAMME CODE**

### **PREAMBLE**

1 Television content, regardless of the delivery platform, exerts a strong influence on the community as a medium for entertainment, information and education. Because of its impact, the programmes on Television must at all times maintain a standard that is acceptable to viewers.

2 The Media Development Authority of Singapore ("the MDA") is empowered to issue, and from time to time, review codes of practice relating to the standards of broadcast or broadcast-like programmes. This Subscription Television Programme Code ("the Code") seeks to ensure that nothing is included in the programmes of any Subscription Television service which is against public interest or order, or national harmony, or which offends good taste and decency. The MDA is also empowered under the Broadcasting Act (Cap 28) to impose sanctions, including the imposition of financial penalties, on any broadcaster who contravenes the Code.

3 Subscription Television programme services are intended or available for reception by the public, on payment, whether periodically or otherwise. A major distinctive feature of Subscription Television is the direct contractual relationship between the service provider and the subscriber. This voluntary relationship between the service provider and the subscriber provides the latter with freedom of choice along with the capability and responsibility to select the channels they wish to receive. Within this context it enhances viewing options and complements free to air services.

4 The Code outlines the general standards to be observed for Subscription Television services in Singapore, and is only concerned with channels offering scheduled programming. Even though the responsibility of channel selection lies with subscribers, they do not have total control of the programmes offered by the channels. As such, service providers still have a responsibility to ensure that the programmes they offer are within acceptable standards. Pay-per-view (PPV) services that are pegged to a fixed schedule are still considered scheduled programming, and will be subjected to the guidelines in this code. Pay-per-view services that are not limited by schedule will be subjected to the VOD Programme Code.

5 Subscription Television service providers should ensure that programmes (whether transmitted in analogue or digital mode) comply fully with the applicable provisions of this Code. In addition to focusing on specific scenes or sequences in programmes, service providers must also remain mindful of the overall context and themes of the programmes. The likely implications, influences or cumulative effects of programmes on viewers must also be considered. The provisions set out in this Code have to be applied in spirit and should be read in conjunction with other relevant codes, legislation and/or licence conditions.

6 The Code deals in general principles and does not seek to address each and every case that could arise. Broadcasters may face a number of individual situations which are not specifically referred to in this Code. Examples included in the Code are not exhaustive. However, the principles, as outlined in the following sections, should make clear what the Code is designed to achieve and help service providers make the necessary judgments.

7 Some of the provisions in the Code are common to all categories of television programme services while others apply to a certain categories of rated programmes. This will be clearly stated in the headings or the concerned paragraphs or chapters.

8 This Code applies to all channels that are made available to viewers for personal/home consumption. These include those given as a group at a basic fee, as well as those that are available as ala carte or premium channels.

#### Classification, Advisory, and Scheduling

9 To aid parental guidance and at the same time allow for greater viewing choice, content suitable for more mature viewers need to be rated according to a classification system consisting of the following ratings:

- a. "16" (Not Recommended for Ages Below 16) Classification - Content labelled "16" indicate that they are not suitable for viewers below 16 years of age, as they may explore more mature themes (e.g. gangsterism, drug abuse) and could contain more graphic images. The treatment of such content must however be sensitive and suitable for 16-year olds.
- b. "18" (Not Recommended for Ages Below 18) Classification - Content labelled "18" indicate that they are not suitable for viewers below 18 years of age, as they may explore mature themes (e.g. prostitution, homosexuality) and contain graphic images. The portrayal and treatment of such themes should however be in a sensitive manner and be appropriate for 18-year olds. The quality and artistic integrity of the content should also be taken into consideration.

10 With the exception of channels targeting children, any channel can offer programmes that are rated "16" or "18", provided they are appropriately labelled and scheduled (for "18"-rated programmes), and follow the guidelines accordingly. However, only services that have parental locks can offer rated programmes.

11 The classification information of a content should be presented visually before the content commences, with a graphic stating the principal elements which have contributed to the classification and viewer discretion should be advised e.g. *"Rated 18 for Violence, Viewer Discretion is Advised"*. The information should be clearly presented so viewers can make informed choices. The graphic should be in a readily legible typeface and should remain visible for at least 5 seconds.

12 All programmes rated "18" should only be broadcast between 10pm to 6am. On-air programme promotions for "16" and "18" programmes should be edited and scheduled appropriately. For instance, they should not be shown on channels or programmes targeted at children or at a time when children are expected to be tuned in.

## **PROGRAMME GUIDELINES**

The following guidelines apply to all Subscription-Television channels unless otherwise stated in the clauses.

### **PART 1: NATIONAL INTEREST**

- 1.1 Programmes should not undermine public security interests or public confidence in the law and its enforcement in Singapore.
- 1.2 Programmes should not contain extremist or anarchic messages, such as advocating or promoting the use of violence for political ends or other purposes.

### **PART 2: RACIAL & RELIGIOUS HARMONY**

- 2.1 Matters pertaining to race and religion are sensitive and capable of evoking strong passions and emotion. Therefore, service providers must exercise due caution when featuring the activities, beliefs, practices, or views of any racial or religious group in a programme.
- 2.2 For the purposes of this Code, race includes dialect groups and ethnic groups.

#### **Race & Religion**

- 2.3 Television as a mass medium should be kept secular. Programmes of a proselytic nature should not be broadcast.
- 2.4 Programmes which denigrate or are likely to offend the sensitivities of any racial or religious group must not be broadcast.
- 2.5 Programmes which incite or are likely to incite racial and/or religious intolerance or misunderstanding, must not be broadcast
- 2.6 References to race and religion should be presented accurately and in a dignified and sensitive manner.
- 2.7 Service providers must bear in mind the main religious faiths practised in Singapore, especially when dealing with programmes which make reference to or touch upon religious beliefs or views. In featuring any religious belief or view, service providers should ensure these do not in any way disparage or cast other faiths in poor light.
- 2.8 Racial and religious stereotyping should be avoided.

### **PART 3: CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMES**

- 3.1 For the purposes of this Code, "children's programmes" refers to programmes which are designed specifically for children of different age groups up to the age of 15.

- 3.2 Children's programmes should not contain scenes depicting the consumption of liquor or tobacco products unless an educational point is being made, or in very exceptional cases if the dramatic context makes such scenes absolutely necessary. Swear words must also not be used in programmes.
- 3.3 Children may not be able to distinguish real life from fiction and are likely to be disturbed by realistic portrayal of violence, horror etc. As such, children's content should not be presented in a manner which may be disturbing or distressing to children or which may in any way adversely affect their general well being.
- 3.4 Programmes meant for younger children require special care as they may find violence and horror scenes/programmes in both realistic and fantasy settings to be disturbing. For example, viewing advisories should be provided to alert parents about such content which may be frightening to pre-schoolers.
- 3.5 Any programme containing portrayals of dangerous and harmful behaviour that are easily imitated by children in a manner that is likely to result in physical/mental harm, should be avoided.

#### **PART 4: SOCIAL VALUES**

- 4.1 Service providers should bear in mind the importance of the family as the basic unit of society. The sanctity of marriage should be respected and divorce should not be treated casually. Adultery, cohabitation and promiscuity should not be promoted, but can be explored to a greater detail in content rated "16" and "18" if justified by the context.
- 4.2 Information, themes and subplots on lifestyles such as homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexualism and transvestism should be treated with caution. Content with subplots on such lifestyles, or containing secondary characters that portray such behaviours in a subtle or indirect way without depiction of physical intimacy, are allowed for a "16" rating. Content which explores these lifestyles in the main theme/plot, or where the main characters portray such behaviours, without explicit depiction of physical intimacy, would require an "18" rating. Overall, the promotion of these lifestyles is not allowed.
- 4.3 Information, themes and subplots on deviant practices like paedophilia, incest, bestiality and necrophilia, should be treated with caution. Their treatment should not in any way promote or depict explicitly such lifestyle or behaviour.
- 4.4 Obscene or offensive jokes, gestures, songs, dialogues and subtitles should not be broadcast. Foul words and gestures that have obscene and vulgar connotations are not allowed. However, certain expressions denoting anger, frustration or impatience are allowed if they are not excessively used. For content rated "16" and "18", dialogue/subtitles with moderate/non-excessive expletives (e.g. "f\*\*\*\*") and strong expletives (e.g. "motherf\*\*\*\*\*") are respectively allowed if used sparingly and in non-sexual context. Gestures with obscene connotation are acceptable if used moderately in rated content.
- 4.5 Programmes should not make careless references to any class or group of persons as being inherently inferior. Programmes should not encourage or in any way lead to discrimination against any section of the community on account of gender, age, disability or occupational status.
- 4.6 Kissing in content targeting Malay viewers should be avoided.

## **PART 5: SEX & NUDITY**

- 5.1 Programmes that deal with a variety of sexual themes and portrayals are capable, if wrongly treated, of causing offence to viewers. It is, therefore, necessary for service providers to exercise due care in their treatment of sex and nudity in programmes. The need for viewing advisories and appropriate scheduling for material of this kind should always be kept in mind.

### **Sex**

- 5.2 For unrated content, portrayals of sexual behaviour should be discreet, infrequent, incidental and appropriate to the storyline or context. Sexual innuendoes or suggestiveness should not be crude or offensive. Content rated “16” can contain moderate portrayals of sexual behaviour, but lovemaking scenes with foreplay and sex acts are only allowed in “18”-rated content if they are not detailed in depiction. Explicit sequences of sexual activities should not be shown in any content.
- 5.3 Non-consenting sexual relations should not be presented as desirable. When a scene involves rape or indecent assault, strong consideration must be given to minimising the depiction of the details of the crime. Subjects on the sexual abuse of children must be treated with extreme sensitivity and not be exploitative.
- 5.4 Content on sex education should be mindful of the target audience. Such content should not be presented in a sensational or exploitative manner, nor should they encourage or promote sexual permissiveness, promiscuity or unnatural sex acts.

### **Nudity**

- 5.5 As a general rule, there should be no frontal nudity in programmes. Shots of bare breasts and the pubic area should not be shown. Bare buttocks can be shown in a non-sexual context but should not be sexually suggestive or exploitative.
- 5.6 For unrated content, long profile shots of nude bodies are permitted, and the back view of nude men and women including buttocks are also allowed. Top frontal nudity in females may be allowed only under exceptional circumstances. The considerations taken into account should include the nature of the content and its relevance to the storyline and presentation. For example, some nudity may be appropriate and may be shown in content featuring historical or dramatised events such as the World War II Holocaust, tribal ways of life, or in health content on breast feeding and breast cancer. When included, their presentation should be fleeting, tasteful, non-titillating or sex exploitative.
- 5.7 For “16”-rated programmes, profile shots of nude bodies are permitted. In addition to those allowed in general programmes, full-frontal nudity is only allowed under exceptional circumstances in historical, info-educational or dramatised programmes on war holocaust or tribal ways of life. When included, their presentation should be fleeting, tasteful, non-titillating or sex exploitative.
- 5.8 For “18”-rated programmes, in addition to those allowed in general and “16”-rated programmes, the infrequent, brief and discreet portrayal of non-sexual female top frontal nudity may be allowed if justified by context. Nudity in the afore-mentioned instance should not be exploitative.

## **PART 6: VIOLENCE & CRIME**

### **Violence**

- 6.1 Violence must not be depicted solely for its own sake, or for the gratuitous exploitation of sadistic or other perverted practices. Scenes with excessive violence or suffering such as close-up shots of persons being brutally tortured and killed, and visual depictions of rape scenes should be minimised. Gratuitous and graphic portrayals of violence, such as the cutting up of body parts or disembowelling should be avoided.
- 6.2 Depiction and treatment of animals, while having to be consistent with plot and context of the programme, should conform to accepted standards of humane treatment.
- 6.3 Extreme caution must be exercised in handling themes, plots or scenes which depict sex and violence, including rape or other sexual assaults. Explicit sexual violence is not allowed in all programmes.
- 6.4 Suicide and euthanasia should be handled with discretion and care, and should not be glamorised. Detailed demonstration or description of the means or method of suicide or assisted-killing should be avoided.
- 6.5 For “16”-rated programmes, violence with moderate impact is allowed if justified by context. The portrayal of infliction of pain and injuries may be allowed if it is not prolonged or detailed. For “18”-rated programmes, the realistic depiction of violence with strong impact is allowed if justified by context e.g. war movies. However, the portrayal should not be excessive, gratuitous or exploitative.

### **Crime**

- 6.6 Programmes in general should not glamorise or in any way promote persons, groups or organisations who use or advocate the use of violence or engage in any criminal activities. Activities of gangs and secret societies should not be promoted or glamourised. Realistic depiction of ritualistic initiation processes should not be shown.
- 6.7 Service providers should not broadcast any information from any source which may endanger lives or prejudice the success of attempts by law enforcement agencies to deal with any crime such as a hijacking or kidnapping.
- 6.8 Only discreet references to illegal drug use are allowed in general content, and such references should not promote or endorse drug abuse and should be justified by context. Care needs to be taken in content to avoid any impression that illegal drugs and substance abuse are socially acceptable, glamorous, or harmless. Detailed depiction of methods of illegal drug-taking should not be shown.
- 6.9 For “16”-rated programmes, illegal drug taking may be shown but clear, instructive detail is not allowed. For “18”-rated programmes, the depiction of drug use is allowed if the instructive details are moderate. For either case, the programme as a whole must not promote, glamorise or endorse illegal drug abuse.

## **PART 7: GAMBLING & ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

- 7.1 Service providers must take into account the likely cumulative effects of programme content normalising anti-social behaviour or gambling. Regular and recurrent portrayals of such content may lead viewers to become more callous about anti-social behaviour or the ills of gambling.

### **Gambling**

- 7.2 Programmes depicting gambling or the use of gambling devices should be presented with discretion and in a manner that does not encourage viewers to gamble or offer gambling instruction to viewers.
- 7.3 The broadcast of all forms of gambling tips is strictly prohibited. No programme should encourage, promote or in any way offer instruction on gambling even in relation to legalised forms of gambling.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

- 7.4 Hooliganism, vandalism, juvenile delinquency and any forms of anti-social behaviours should not be glamorised or presented in a favourable light.

## **PART 8: HORROR & THE SUPERNATURAL**

- 8.1 Programmes containing horror sequences that may be frightening to viewers, in particular, children, should be appropriately rated.
- 8.2 Programmes exploring occult or other 'psychic' phenomena, particularly those with actual demonstrations of exorcisms or occult practices (e.g., supposed contact with spirits, the dead or the conjuring of demons), should be treated with caution.

## **PART 9: SUPERSTITION**

- 9.1 Programmes should not promote superstitious beliefs.
- 9.2 Programmes based on or dealing with fortune-telling, fengshui, palm-reading, numerology, mind-reading, tarot reading, astrology, new age healing and the like should not encourage viewers to regard such activities as providing commonly accepted appraisals of life, and should not give the impression that these practices are exact sciences.

## **PART 10: NEWS & OTHER FACTUAL PROGRAMMES**

- 10.1 Factual programmes such as news, current affairs and documentary programmes should present information in a fair, objective, accurate and balanced manner.
- 10.2 A right of reply or an opportunity to respond shall be granted to the Government or its agencies, to correct mistakes, wrongful reporting or misrepresentations. For private individuals or groups, an opportunity to respond should be considered based on the merits of each case. The MDA may direct a broadcaster to give an aggrieved party the opportunity to respond over an appropriate medium.

- 10.3 Significant errors in factual programmes such as news, current affairs and documentary programmes should be corrected and broadcast at the earliest opportunity.
- 10.4 Factual content that contain violent/graphic real-life images (e.g. on news or current affairs) should carry consumer advice to alert viewers who may be offended by such visuals.

## **PART 11: MUSIC & VARIETY PROGRAMMES**

- 11.1 Songs and music videos disallowed or otherwise prohibited under the applicable laws and regulations in Singapore must not be offered. However, if suitable edits can be made, such content may be made available. Music promoting drugs or the worship of the devil or the occult should not be offered.
- 11.2 Entertainment programmes involving children (e.g. talent contests for children) should not be exploitative or distasteful.

## **PART 12: LANGUAGE**

### **Language Standards**

- 12.1 Standard English, which is grammatically correct, should be used for locally produced programmes such as news, current affairs and documentaries. Local English, which is also grammatically correct but pronounced with a Singaporean accent and which may include local terms and expressions, can be used for programmes like dramas, comedies and variety shows.
- 12.2 The use of Bahasa Melayu Baku (standard pronunciation of Malay) is encouraged for all Malay programmes, particularly news, current affairs and information programmes. Specific guidelines are as follows:
  - (a) For local programmes, info-educational and current affairs programmes must be in Bahasa Melayu Baku. Some flexibility can be exercised by service providers in relation to drama and variety shows.
  - (b) Foreign or acquired programmes that require dubbing should be in Bahasa Melayu Baku. However, acquired programmes that are already in Malay need not be re-dubbed into Bahasa Melayu Baku.

### **Dialect**

- 12.3 All content on Chinese services must be in Mandarin. The only exceptions allowed are:
  - i. operatic performances;
  - ii. one dialect art-house movie per week per Chinese channel/service;
  - iii. in every clock hour, up to 30% of songs/music videos broadcast on a music channel may be in dialect;
  - iv. dialogue and songs in dialect may be allowed in content provided the context justifies usage and are used sparingly; and
  - v. any other content or channels specially approved by the Authority.



- 12.4 Chinese dialect is allowed in content of other languages if used sparingly and the context justifies usage. Examples of justifiable context are: dialect interviews given by older people or foreigners who can only converse in dialect.

### **PART 13: 'LIVE' & INTERACTIVE CONTENT**

#### **'Live' & Interactive Content**

- 13.1 For interactive services, service providers must exercise particular care when streaming 'live' video, sms messages and audio response from users, especially where topics involved are sensitive ones, and comments made may be derogatory or offensive. Offensive content should be removed immediately upon detection.
- 13.2 Where users are allowed to interact with one another via mediums such as short message service (SMS) and instant messaging (IM), service providers are to ensure that all SMS/chats should be moderated to the best of their ability.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE**

This Code shall come into effect on 10 March 2010 and replaces the Code that took effect from 1 July 2004. The MDA may from time to time revise or update the Code to maintain currency. The Code should be read in conjunction with the prevailing TV Advertising Code and the TV Programme Sponsorship Code.

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