

VIDEO-ON-DEMAND PROGRAMME CODE

PREAMBLE

1 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 programmes. This Video-on-Demand (VOD) Programme Code ("the Code") seeks to ensure that programmes on VOD services are not against public interest or order, or national harmony, or 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 service provider who contravenes the Code.

2 Video-on-Demand (VOD) services refer to services which allow consumers to select and view programmes or other video content on a television, computer, or any other devices at any time on request.

3 This Code outlines the general standards to be observed for VOD services in Singapore regardless of a service's platform of delivery. In addition to paying attention to specific scenes or sequences in programmes, service providers must remain mindful of the overall context and themes of the programmes. The likely implications, influences or cumulative effects of such programmes on viewers must also be considered.

4 VOD service providers should ensure that all programmes comply fully with the applicable provisions of this Code. 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.

5 This Code comprises general guidelines which apply to all content carried on a VOD service. For services carrying content targeted at more mature consumers, they are required to include programme classification labels and consumer advice where applicable.

SECTION A - GENERIC PROGRAMME GUIDELINES

The following guidelines apply to all content on the service providers' VOD service unless otherwise stated in the Code (see Section B, Guidelines for Programmes Classified "16" and "18").

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 Programmes should be kept secular, and those that feature the views or beliefs of any race or religion should not be of a proselytic nature.
- 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 Children may not be able to distinguish real life from fiction and are likely to be disturbed by realistic portrayal of violence, horror etc. They are also more predisposed to imitative behaviour. As such, no advantage should be taken of children's natural credulity.
- 3.2 For the purposes of this Code, "children" refers to persons age 14 years and below.
- 3.3 Children's programmes should be wholesome and in general designed to impart a broader knowledge of the world around them as well as promote appreciation of good social and moral values.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 Portrayals of any dangerous or harmful behaviour are easily imitated by children and should be avoided. Animated programmes should avoid excessive violence, especially those featuring humans or life-like characters in realistic story lines. Although stylised violence can be entertaining or humorous in comedy and in animation, more serious representation of violence (for example, in children's drama) should always be editorially justified and should ensure that the consequences of violence are treated appropriately.
- 3.6 Programmes 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.
- 3.7 Programmes 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 programmes which may be frightening to pre-schoolers.

PART 4: SOCIAL VALUES

- 4.1 Portrayals of lifestyles such as homosexuality, bisexuality, paedophilia and incest, should not justify, promote or glamorise such behaviours and lifestyles.
- 4.2 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.

4.3 Kissing in Malay language programmes should be avoided.

PART 5: SEX & NUDITY

5.1 Programmes which deal with a variety of sexual themes and portrayals could cause offence to viewers if wrongly treated. 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 should always be kept in mind.

Sex

5.2 Portrayals of sexual behaviour should be moderate. Sexual innuendoes or suggestiveness should not be crude or offensive.

5.3 Explicit sequences of sexual activities should not be shown. Usage of techniques such as pixilation does not render such sequences as acceptable.

5.4 Programmes on sex education should be mindful of the target audience. Such programmes should not be presented in a sensational or exploitative manner, nor should they encourage or promote sexual permissiveness, promiscuity or unnatural sexual activities.

Nudity

5.5 Long profile shots of nude bodies are permitted. The back view of nude men and women including bare buttocks is also allowed.

5.6 Full-frontal nudity is not allowed unless under exceptional circumstances, taking into account the nature of the programme and relevance to the storyline and presentation. Examples where it is acceptable include programmes featuring historical or dramatised events e.g. the World War II Holocaust, tribal ways of life, or health programmes on breast feeding and breast cancer. When shown, their presentation should be fleeting, tasteful, non-titillating or sex exploitative.

PART 6: VIOLENCE & CRIME

Violence

6.1 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.

- 6.2 Caution must be exercised in handling themes, plots or scenes which depict sex and violence, including rape or other forms of sexual assault. Explicit sexual violence is not allowed.
- 6.3 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.

Crime

- 6.4 Care needs to be taken in programmes to avoid any impression that criminal activities, or illegal drugs and substance abuse are socially acceptable, glamorous, or harmless. Detailed methods of illegal drug-taking should not be shown.

PART 7: GAMBLING

- 7.1 Service providers must take into account the likely cumulative effects of programme content normalising gambling. Regular and recurrent portrayals of such content may lead viewers to become more callous about the ills of 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. Such scenes are acceptable only if they are relevant to the development of the plot or as an appropriate background to the story.
- 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.

PART 8: HORROR, SUPERNATURAL, FORTUNE TELLING & OTHER BELIEFS

- 8.1 Service providers should bear in mind that programmes with horror and supernatural content may be frightening to children, and thus should carry appropriate viewing advisory and rating, if required.
- 8.2 Belief in superstition should not be promoted.

Occult and 'Psychic' Practices

- 8.3 Programmes exploring occult or other 'psychic' practices, particularly those with actual demonstrations of exorcisms or occult practices involving supposed contact with spirits or the dead, should be treated with caution.

Fortune Telling & Other Beliefs

- 8.4 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 give the impression that these practices are exact sciences.

PART 9: NEWS & OTHER FACTUAL PROGRAMMES

- 9.1 Factual programmes such as news, current affairs and documentary programmes should present information in a fair, objective, accurate and balanced manner.
- 9.2 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 service provider to give an aggrieved party the opportunity to respond over an appropriate medium.
- 9.3 Significant errors in factual programmes such as news, current affairs and documentary programmes should be corrected and made available at the earliest opportunity.

PART 10: MUSIC & VARIETY PROGRAMMES

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 Entertainment programmes involving children (e.g. talent contests for children) should not be exploitative or distasteful.

PART 11: LANGUAGE

Dialect

- 11.1 Dialect content shall not exceed 50% of the programmes offered on any one service unless otherwise approved by the MDA.

PART 12: STIMULI BEYOND NORMAL PERCEPTION THRESHOLD

Subliminal Messages

- 12.1 Service providers should not employ the process known as “subliminal perception” or any other techniques or devices (e.g. by using images of very brief duration) which attempt to convey information to the viewer by transmitting messages beyond the normal threshold of awareness.

Flashing Images and Regular Patterns

- 12.2 Flashing lights and certain types of regular visual patterns may cause problems for some viewers suffering from photosensitive epilepsy or other related conditions. Care must be taken to minimise these risks in all programmes, but especially programmes where young persons are likely to be watching as they could be more susceptible.

Hypnotism

- 12.3 For any broadcast demonstration of hypnotism for entertainment, care must be taken to minimise the risk of hypnosis being induced in susceptible viewers. In particular, the hypnotist must not be shown performing straight into the camera.

SECTION B: GUIDELINES FOR CONTENT RATED “16” AND “18”

Overview

The MDA has implemented a programme classification system to allow for greater viewing choice for subscription services and this extends to Video-on-Demand services. The guidelines draw reference from the Board of Film Censors’ (BFC) film classification system. Programmes labelled "16" indicate that they are not suitable for viewers below 16 years of age and programmes labelled "18" indicate that they are not suitable for viewers below 18 years of age.

VOD service providers should however consider if the classification system should be applied to all its offerings. Content rated “16” and “18” should not be applicable to programmes targeted at children or those for family viewing.

The Code contains fundamental guidelines such as those addressing national interest and racial/religious harmony which are applicable to all content offered on a service as well as differentiated guidelines which apply specifically to rated programmes. As such, the guidelines in Section B of the Code are specific only to content rated “16” or “18”. Guidelines from Section A of the Code remain applicable to the service if a corresponding section is not stated below. (E.g.

Guidelines from Section A, Part 2 on racial/religious harmony, apply to all content rated “16” or “18” as well).

(I) **PROGRAMME CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM - GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAMMES RATED “16” AND “18”**

The following guidelines apply to programmes classified “16” and “18”.

(A) **“16” (NOT SUITABLE FOR AGES BELOW 16) CLASSIFICATION**

Programmes rated “16” are not suitable for viewers below the age of 16 as they may explore more mature themes (e.g. gangsterism, drug abuse) and could contain more graphic images. The treatment of such programmes must however be sensitive and suitable for 16-year olds.

PART 1: SOCIAL VALUES

- 1.1 Portrayals of lifestyles such as homosexuality, bisexuality, paedophilia and incest, should not justify, promote or glamorise such habits and lifestyles.
- 1.2 Dialogue and subtitles with moderate and non-excessive expletives that are justified by context are allowed (e.g. “f***”). Gestures with obscene connotation are acceptable if used moderately. Expletives should however not be used in a sexual context.

PART 2: SEX & NUDITY

- 2.1 Portrayals of sexual behaviour should be moderate.
- 2.2 Explicit sequences of unnatural sexual activities such as homosexual/lesbian behaviour and incest should not be shown.
- 2.3 Profile shots of nude bodies are also permitted. The back view of nude men and women including bare buttocks are also allowed.
- 2.4 Full-frontal nudity is not allowed unless under exceptional circumstances such as programmes featuring historical or dramatised events e.g. the World War II Holocaust, tribal way of life, or health programmes. When included, their presentation should be fleeting, tasteful, non-titillating or sex exploitative.

PART 3: VIOLENCE & CRIME

Violence

- 3.1 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. Explicit sexual violence is not allowed.

Crime

- 3.2 Illegal drug taking may be shown but clear, instructive detail is not allowed. The programme as a whole must not promote or encourage drug use.

(B) “18” (NOT RECOMMENDED FOR AGES BELOW 18) CLASSIFICATION

Programmes rated “18” are not suitable for viewers below the age of 18 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 programmes should also be taken into consideration.

PART 1: SOCIAL VALUES

- 1.1 Portrayals of lifestyles such as homosexuality, bisexuality, paedophilia and incest, should not justify, promote or glamorise such habits and lifestyles.
- 1.2 Dialogue and subtitles with strong expletives that are justified by context and used sparingly are allowed (e.g. “motherf*****”). Gestures with obscene connotations are acceptable if used moderately. Expletives should however not be used in a sexual context.

PART 2: SEX AND NUDITY

- 2.1 Lovemaking scenes with foreplay and the sex act are allowed but should not be detailed in depiction.
- 2.2 Explicit sequences of unnatural sexual activities such as homosexual/lesbian behaviour and incest should not be shown.
- 2.3 Profile shots of nude bodies are permitted. The back view of nude men and women including buttocks are also allowed.
- 2.4 The infrequent, brief and discreet portrayal of non-sexual top frontal nudity may be allowed if justified by context. Nudity in the afore-mentioned instance should not be exploitative.

- 2.5 Full-frontal nudity is not allowed unless under exceptional circumstances such as programmes which feature historical or dramatised events e.g. the World War II Holocaust, tribal ways of life, or health programmes. When included, their presentation should be fleeting, tasteful, non-titillating or sex exploitative.

PART 3: VIOLENCE & CRIME

Violence

- 3.1 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. Explicit sexual violence is not allowed.

Crime

- 3.2 The depiction of drug use is allowed if the instructive details are moderate and if the programme does not promote, glamorise or endorse drug abuse.

(C) DISPLAY OF CLASSIFICATION SYMBOLS & VIEWING ADVICE

- 1.1 The classification information of a programme should be presented visually and prominently such that a consumer is aware of the programme's rating before making a decision to view. This may be done by reflecting a classification symbol representing the classification category of the programme. Consumer advice should also accompany the rating, stating the principal elements which have contributed to the classification e.g. Rated "18" for Violence.

(D) PROGRAMME PROMOTIONS

- 1.1 A service provider should make reasonable efforts to carry the appropriate programme rating symbols and viewing advice in its promotional material whether in print or in electronic form e.g. "18" (Violence).
- 1.2 Any tag-on promotional trailers to a programme made available must be edited to a level that is equivalent to or lower than the classification standard of that offering. E.g. The trailer of an "18" programme tagged on to a "16" programme must be edited to "16" standards.
- 1.3 Tag-on promotional trailers for rated programmes are not allowed as part of an offering targeted at children.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE

This Code shall come into effect on 3 March 2008 and replaces the Code that took effect from 1 October 1998. 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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