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COMMUNICATION, TECHNOLOGY AND GROWTH

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Yang Berbahagia Timbalan-Timbalan Naib Canselor,

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Yang Berusaha Profesor Madya Illias Md Salleh, Dekan Fakulti Komunikasi Dan Pengajian Media, Universiti Teknologi Mara,

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Distinguished Participants, Ladies And Gentlemen,

Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh And A Very Good Morning.

Firstly, I would like to thank the organizers of this International Conference – Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, and Corporate Communications and International Relations Office, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) for inviting me here to officiate the opening of this conference.

This is a commendable effort given the topic and the size of the conference. The Malaysian government views the communication and media industries as an important part of the economic development. Therefore, we welcome this noble effort of idea-sharing sessions among scholars, industry representatives and government officials to improve further what we have now for the betterment of our society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take the liberty to compare today's gathering to the idea of the public sphere – as advanced by German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas – not too long ago cited by the newsweekly Time magazine as a leading world intellectual. This is where participants engage in a sharing session of ideas to determine through rationalized processes of issues of public concerns, hence contributing to society. This is what you have gathered here to do and I support and welcome the effort.

Mass communication and media technologies started when Guttenberg invented printing machine, and now communication have gone through a tremendous transformation over the last five centuries. The growth and development of the new media has led to their wide diffusion and application, thus increasing their economic and social impact. This prevalent trend is particularly characterized by the hybridization of various media forms, as implied in the theme mediamorphosis.

Traditional media, telecommunications and digital technology are converging in the

new media environment. The ways we share information, the ways we receive information, and the ways this information is produced are all changing rapidly. No type of media exists in isolation; rather, each incorporates features of new technology and adapts to the new landscape that technology brings forth. This, media convergence, is the key concept in the discourse of new media technology.

Mediamorphosis, a term coined by Roger Fidler in 1990, refers to the transformation of communication media, as a result of the complex interplay of social and technological innovations, perceived needs and competitive and political pressures. The changing global media environment is signified by the coexistence and coevolution of media forms, gradual metamorphosis of new media forms from old ones and the challenges brought about by the adoption of new media.

Communication technology has been the catalyst in the transition of many developing countries from energy intensive societies and infrastructures towards information intensive societies and infostructures. At an international level, the forces of communication technologies and globalisation are now mutually reinforcing each other. Globalisation is the result of such immense information and communication technology proliferation. In such a seamless and borderless environment, transformation in the economy, society, governance, businesses and technology is inevitable. Immediacy is the end result of the death of distance and the interconnected, ever-smaller world. The ability to retrieve, recall, retransmit at a moment's notice reshapes the way we live.

Today we witness the emergence of the new economy based on knowledge, information and knowledge society, new corporate governance, and the knowledge-based information technology. In the context of this new trend, one envisions potential improvement in all facets of converging media and communication technologies, including its role, usage, applications, research and management.

The dynamics progression of media convergence has revolved from a one-way communication to the much-demanded two-way interactive communication. And with digitalization, we have landed to where we are today. The World Wide Web is yet another phase in technological advancement, having ramifications on every aspect of life and modern civilization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The media play a significant role in our lives. Both the traditional and new media are increasingly pervasive as a social institution. These media inform our ideas and opinions, our values and our beliefs. They reflect and influence our culture through arts and entertainment. Mass media coverage can be utilized by the public and governmental and international relief organizations, to promote the government's position, to inform the citizenry, and to move people to contribute to humanitarian aid.

As such, they play a vital role in democratizing and shaping citizens' understanding of social and political issues and functioning as gatekeepers through which issues, people, and events must pass. The media influence the perceptions of citizens and policymakers, affecting the policies that touch us all.

As the epitome of the new media, the Internet can help individuals and organizations share timely and accurate information with the global community, and promote

vigilance and democracy. The Web can also be effectively leveraged at times of natural disasters like earthquakes and floods which often strike Asia, disseminating information about survivors and raising funds online. On the other hand, small mobile phone exchanges can be activated for emergency communication services.

The rapid and phenomenal growth of the Internet has resulted in an influx of content. New ideologies, values and 'religions' are being transmitted regardless of time and space. Traditional media practitioners in print and broadcast have joined the 'net' community in aligning and strengthening their brand names and to sustain their existence as the expert in gathering and disseminating news. Technology has created that transcendence.

The Internet is making the world without borders like all things, which have its advantages and disadvantages, the net while we can access information for example getting breaking news on the computer, we could also have access to unhealthy pornographic materials. As we have heard recently, there are 33 million web pages of pornographic material and Malaysians are exposed to 1.5 millions of non-restricted pornographic sites and this is including our children. How are we to curb this dilemma especially when the technology is moving into 3G wireless?

This phase in technological advancement has transformed the character and identity of the Malaysian society and conditioned the country's response to the outside world. It has greatly enhanced the urgency of Malaysians to participate and contribute to global developments. In convergence, all these forms of medium of communication coexist in a complex communication delivery system that ultimately has not only given the public infinite choices, but also limitless opportunities.

The government is improving its infrastructure to prepare for more changes in telecommunication, Information technology and broadcasting industries. The choice for Malaysia is endless. But we have to benchmark and be benchmarked.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The role of the media is generally to transmit values. Some values are definite but some are dynamic and change through time. Our values now have to embrace the technological changes and growth ushered by man's desire to compete and achieve the highest form of civilization conceivable. In our quest to attain what we desire, we need to be conscious of ourselves, and the meaning of technology, of convergence, of the material and the non-material dimensions of what we have created. During my time, we enjoyed games on the field and on courts. Nowadays our children are contented playing games where only their thumbs are exercising. Letter writing is taking a back seat to text messaging and e-mail. Everything is brief, short and fast like the fast food that most our youngsters go for these days. Nowadays even shopping is done on the net, which is the norm not to mention e-banking.

New media technology blurs time and space, geographic and cultural distances, and it pushes us into a global communication environment. This in turn changes societies, economics, and the audience of mass media. The media and the messages they communicate are evolving. And today, communication purposes are more integrated. The technology changes how the information is disseminated and increases its breadth. It seems clear that the people who work in media must understand and also incorporate the changes.

New media technology also brings up important social and economic issues. Some key issues raised in connection with the changing media landscape include access to information and knowledge gap. The rhetoric of 'Global Village' seamlessly connected in cyberspace is now being replaced by concerns over growing digital divides. Thirty percent of the population in developed countries have access to the Internet but only two per cent of the population in developing nations are online. Modern communication technologies have hardly developed into instrument of an all-embracing empowerment, as they have by passed ninety five per cent of the world's population.

About half the world's population as well as two-thirds of the world's poor live in Asia, and considerable planning, resources and creativity will be needed to reduce the digital deficit in the region along with other socio-economic problems. Technologically advanced countries should help developing ones to master the techniques of the digital age, giving them a chance to become globally competitive.

Investment in education in order to master the new information and communication tools is also essential for the developing nations. It will become one of the major societal goals for the coming years. The information and communication technology revolution provides powerful tools to meet such a challenge. Broadband Internet connection, interactive multimedia television, and CD-Roms as part of the e-learning methods should be utilized to help the young generation. Online educational ventures will play an important role in the emerging society which fosters a culture of lifelong learning.

On the regulatory front, policymakers are faced with a complex set of challenges revolving around copyright, defamation, intellectual property, privacy and censorship. Intellectual creation will represent one of the most important asset and wealth of the coming decades and therefore it is of paramount importance for governments to promote laws that protect intellectual property rights.

The breed of this convergence, for example, can be seen in many instances and forms. It is a standard way of life everywhere. Corporations can improve their data flow and can train their employees all over the world at the same duration of time. People can have a wireless auction through eBay and people in France can watch a live telecast of a medical transplant performed in Malaysia. The transformation takes place in all spheres of life and at all levels of human existence. It is like a deity impinging on and internalized by all sectors, both in times of war and peace.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The level of Information technology varies in different countries especially in Asia. The term 'service provider' in some countries can be understood as to mean a large corporation that enables its thousands of customers to surf the internet and communicate via text messaging and e-mails through its huge advanced computerized system. In others, it may be referred as to a business minded person who rents his/her mobile phone to customers and tourists to call up friends and relatives in other parts of the country, the world over. New communication technology as the term is used now has redefined the way people live and work.

There is much room for improvement. Thirty-five percent of our population are online but only 1% use broadband. We envisage a 5-6% increase in broadband users by 2008.

There are a lot of activities that have been done to prepare and enhance the infrastructure. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) through its Information Sharing Forums will initiate discussion to benefit our infrastructure systems. For example, we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) and Korean Information Security Agency (KISA) in countering spam.

Future changes in technology, media and telecommunication are moving towards nanotechnology and by end of 2005 there will be two billion cellular subscribers worldwide. Malaysia is aiming to be a global hub for communication and multimedia services.

Malaysia plans to provide an infrastructure to support all sectors of society and ensure adequate financial resources to nurture the growth of technology, media and telecommunication industries. We also will encourage the proliferation of knowledge, content, skills and smart-partnerships with international and regional players.

Our challenges are to upgrade network capabilities, improve our quality of services, manage our resources and regulate the whole process effectively. The challenges and questions that I pose to all of you are how can we to promote critical thinking among the youths with the advance of the Digital Media? What do we do to enhance the reading culture of Malaysians with the advent of the Internet? How can technological advancement and globalization be used to our advantage? How do we get our youths to use web blogging not only to enhance their writing skills but also to project an understanding of the topics that they have learnt in class?

All of us here will have to play a role in participating either through content distribution or training our younger generation to prepare them and equip them with all the necessary skills and expertise to succeed in this advanced world.

I hope that through discussions during the two-day conference, new ideas on media and communication practices and policies may be generated for the benefit of society at large.

This conference not only gathered scholars, practitioners, regulators from Asia but also from the world over. The mission is to explore, understand and ultimately contribute their ideas and data to policy makers. I sincerely hope that more empirical work will be carried out by academicians to support the industry and professions as well as the public sector which are grappling with the ever changing and fluid nature of medium and content. Such findings are useful at the policy level. The Malaysian government is fully supportive of any initiative that reflects towards improving our knowledge and expertise in the areas of communication and media convergence.

I would like to thank the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies for organizing this conference, which is in conjunction with the eve of UiTM's 50th anniversary celebration. The topic is in sync with the country's emphasis on ICT convergence as it impinges upon the media and mass communication. I understand that the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies has existed for more than three decades and has nearly ten thousand alumni some of whom are part of the country's luminaries. I urge you to continue moulding our younger generation to be responsible media practitioners contributing to building and managing the nation for now and in the future. The government will as always support any endeavor undertaken by UiTM for

the development of professionals in the country.

On that note, I take great pleasure in officiating the International Conference 2005 on Mediamorphosis – Communication, Technology and Growth.

Thank you. Wabillahi Taufiq Walhidayah Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.