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Description	The Speak Good English Movement targets the youth with online platforms such as blogs and social networking sites like Twiter and Facebook. In this commentary, the writer suggests that these online youths can make the best and as well as the worst audience. The best, because blogs, Twitter and Facebook are fast making up a diverse social universe parallel to the real world. They form the worst audience, however, because many of them have little or not motivation to improve their English.		

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All that Twitters is not good English

THE Speak Good English Movement should find youths online at once the best and the worst audience to target in its campaign this year. The best, because weblogs, brief-message services such as Twitter and networking sites like Facebook and Friendster are fast making up a diverse social universe paralleling the real world. More than 500,000 people in Singapore are Facebook members. Singapore is among the top 10 countries accessing Friendster. The young make up a high if not the highest proportion of these Internet communities.

They form the worst audience, however, because many of them have little

or no motivation to improve their English. Of 1,243 Singaporeans aged between 15 and 39 the Good English campaign polled a year ago, four in 10 – notably those in their late 20s – saw no need to speak proper English. Nearly half of those aged between 25 and 29 felt their command of English was already good enough. Just as it wants Singaporeans to “impress, inspire and intoxicate” others by expressing themselves in good English, the movement will need to “impress, inspire and intoxicate” the young with reasons why they should do so. It is no small challenge. A casual browsing among Singapore-related sites will turn up much, too much, Singlish and other non-standard Eng-

lish usage, not to mention countless grammatical and spelling errors. Bloggers, Twitterers and Friendsters have not only put Singlish online, but have widened its divergence from proper English in spelling out its unique expressions in all their colourful finery. If spoken Singlish makes some listeners wince, written Singlish makes some readers blanch.

The Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan famously focused on the intrinsic effects of the media with his aphorism “the medium is the message”. The medium is also now the language, as new media make the “global village” (another coinage of his) more global. Twittering and SMS tex-

ting favour or even require vowel-less and verb-less contractions thumb-typed on handheld devices. While efficient within its own context, it hardly engenders good language habits that thumb-typists need to develop for other situations online or off. Besides, if they contract expressions that, in Singlish, are often already abbreviated, online Singaporeans will gradually isolate themselves until they no longer can be part of a global village. So, while it is a worthwhile and necessary try, this year’s campaign should not depart too far from the movement’s strategy to help parents and teachers motivate the young towards “grammatically correct English that is universally understood”.