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DISTRICT JUDGE CHIAH KOK KHUN
18 September 2026

IN THE STATE COURTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

[2026] SGDC 307

District Court Originating Claim No 1255 of 2025 (District Court Registrar's Appeal No 41 of 2026)

Between

Haweina Trading Co Ltd

… *Claimant*

And

(1) Bling Blink SG Pte Ltd
(2) Ng Hui Fen

… *Defendants*

JUDGMENT

[Tort — Defamation — Corporate claimant — Whether foreign corporate claimant had a Singapore reputation capable of been injured]

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v
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18 September 2026 Judgment reserved.

District Judge Chiah Kok Khun:

Introduction

1 This appeal ("RA") from the decision of the learned deputy registrar ("DR") is related to an assessment of damages ("AD"). The AD concerned the quantum of damages to be awarded to the claimant in a defamation claim. The DR held that no damages should be awarded: see *Haweina Trading Co Ltd v Bling Blink SG Pte Ltd and another* [2026] SGDC 230 ("GD"); and *Haweina Trading Co Ltd v Bling Blink SG Pte Ltd and another* [2026] SGDC 257 (Costs GD"). The claimant filed the RA against the DR's decision. For the reasons below, I am dismissing the RA.

2 The claimant is a Taiwan company in the business of providing eyelash beautification services and related products and training courses. It says that it reaches its market through social media and online advertising. The 1st

defendant is a Singapore incorporated company in the similar business of eyelash beautification related products. The 2nd defendant is an individual who owns and operates the 1st defendant.[1]

3 On 18 April 2025, a Korean supplier of eyelash products ("Supplier") informed the 1st defendant that it would no longer be allowed to purchase the Supplier's products. This stems from the Supplier's mistaken belief that the 1st defendant was reselling the Supplier's products overseas. The claimant is the official distributor of the Supplier's products in Taiwan. The defendants believed that the claimant was behind the Supplier's decision to stop selling its products to the 1st defendant.[2] Operating under this belief, the defendants fired off over 30 social media posts between 18 April and 26 May 2025, including postings on the 1st defendant's Instagram account, and republished on the 2nd defendant's Instagram account ("defamatory posts").[3] These posts comprised statements about the claimant, its representatives and its employees.[4] They included allusions to the claimant's lack of competence to provide eyelash related beauty services; the claimant's employees being too unattractive to provide quality eyelash related beauty services; the claimant taking advantage of its customers; the claimant overcharging its customers and conducting its business dishonestly; and the claimant intentionally sabotaging the 1st defendant.[5]

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1 Para 1 GD; para 5 claimant's written submissions dated 31 August 2026.

2 Para 6 of statement of claim.

3 Bundle of Documents ("BOD"), pp 103 to 104.

4 Para 6 claimant's written submissions dated 31 August 2026.

5 Para 11 of statement of claim.

4 The Supplier subsequently realised its mistake and informed the 1st defendant that it was a misunderstanding caused by mistranslation from the Chinese language to the Korean language.

5 The claimant commenced action against the defendants in Singapore for defamation over the defamatory posts. The defendants failed to file a notice of intention to contest or not contest the action and default interlocutory judgment was duly entered against them on 23 October 2025, with damages to be assessed and costs to be reserved to the registrar assessing damages.[6] The only question before the DR at the AD was therefore the quantum of general damages to be awarded to the claimant.

6 The 2nd defendant, who acts in person, appeared at the AD. She did not seek to set aside the interlocutory judgment nor challenge liability. But she contended that the claimant has not proved that it had a business or trading reputation in Singapore capable of being injured.[7]

Issue to be determined

7 The issue to be determined by me in this RA is whether the claimant has a trading or business reputation in Singapore.

Analysis and findings

8 It is noted at the outset that the claimant does not dispute that in assessing damages for defamation, a corporate claimant must prove that it had a reputation in the jurisdiction at the time of publication as a prerequisite. In the High Court

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6 BOD, pp 251 to 252.

7 Para 4 of the defendants' written submissions dated 31 August 2026.

decision of *Qingdao Bohai Construction Group Co, Ltd v Goh Teck Beng* [2016] 4 SLR 977 ("*Qingdao Bohai*"), it was held as [48], [50] & [59] as follows:

> 48 Before proceeding further, however, a preliminary point should be dealt with. This concerns the fact that P1, P2 and P3 are corporations and not natural persons. In this regard, the defendants referred to *Jameel (Mohammed) v Wall Street Journal Europe Sprl* [2007] 1 AC 359 ("*Wall Street Journal*") and *Atlantis World Group of Companies NV v Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso* SPA [2008] EWHC 1323 (QB) ("*Atlantis*") for the proposition that a corporation must prove that it had a reputation in the jurisdiction at the time of publication as a prerequisite for pursuing a libel claim.
>
> …
>
> 50 It is trite that a corporate plaintiff in defamation actions cannot be injured in its feelings, and that it can only be "injured in its pocket" (*Basil Anthony Herman v Premier Security Co-operative Ltd* [2010] 3 SLR 110 at [65]; *ATU v ATY* [2015] 4 SLR 1159 at [28], both citing *Rubber Improvement Ltd v Daily Telegraph Ltd* [1964] AC 234 at 262). Unlike individuals, a corporate plaintiff is not presumed to have a reputation; it must prove that it has a reputation that is capable of being injured by the alleged libel.
>
> …
>
> 59 Clearly, the inquiry in establishing the requisite reputation in the local jurisdiction is highly factual and has to be proven with evidence by the foreign corporate plaintiff on a balance of probabilities. From the survey of the cases above, the following non-exhaustive considerations would seem to be relevant as evidence of such requisite reputation:
>
> > (a) the evidence of actual or intended clients, investors or competitors (*Atlantis* at [49]);
> >
> > (b) knowledge of the existence of the foreign corporate plaintiff in the jurisdiction (*Multigroup* at [37]);
> >
> > (c) presence of international brand recognition in the jurisdiction (*McDonald's*);
> >
> > (d) similarity of commercial activity and trading identity with related company in the jurisdiction (*Multigroup* at [40], cf *McDonald's* and *Palace* at [36]–[37]); and

> (e) the extent of management role by the foreign corporate plaintiff in the related company in the jurisdiction, as opposed to merely owning shares in them, for the alleged publication to be able to have damaged the plaintiff in the eyes of investors in the jurisdiction (*Multigroup* at [31]–[32]).

9 It is seen that unlike individuals, a corporate claimant is not presumed to have a reputation. Instead, it must prove that it has a reputation that is capable of being injured by any alleged defamation. Therefore, the court must consider a threshold question in this case of whether the claimant has a trading or business reputation in Singapore. It is noted that the claimant does not dispute that such a threshold test applies.

10 The burden of showing that the claimant has a trading or business reputation Singapore lies with the claimant. The claimant must produce the evidence to show that it has a Singapore reputation. Guidance on what such evidence might look like is given in *Qingdao Bohai* at [59], where a list of relevant considerations was enumerated. Before analysing the list of considerations, it should be noted that the foreign corporate claimant in *Qingdao Bohai* seeking to prove the requisite reputation has a wholly owned subsidiary in Singapore (see *Qingdao Bohai* at [49]). The foreign corporate claimant pleaded that its connection with Singapore is through its wholly owned subsidiary, thereby giving the claimant a Singapore reputation. The High Court however held that the claimant failed to prove a Singapore reputation despite the presence of its wholly owned subsidiary in the Singapore market.

11 The following considerations referred to in *Qingdao Bohai* in determining whether there is evidence of the requisite reputation would be applicable in the present case:

(a) the evidence given by actual or intended clients, investors or competitors of such reputation;

(b) knowledge of the existence of the foreign corporate claimant in the jurisdiction; and

(c) presence of international brand recognition in the jurisdiction.

12 The claimant fails on all three counts at the outset. The claimant did not adduce any evidence of its trading or business reputation in Singapore given by any actual or intended clients, investors or competitors. There is also no evidence adduced of any knowledge of the existence of the claimant in Singapore. There is certainly no evidence of the presence of international brand recognition of the claimant in Singapore.

13 In this regard, I will refer to the two matters that the claimant is relying on to prove a Singapore reputation. The first is the purported evidence of a potential client in Singapore.[8] The claimant refers to the evidence given by the director of the claimant, Ms Yeh that she had been informed by a "potential client" ("Jeslyn") from Singapore that she had seen the defamatory statements.[9] The text messages between Ms Yeh and Jeslyn, which were in English, were exhibited and were before the court.[10] However, a perusal of the text messages exchanged between Ms Yeh and Jeslyn is revealing. They show that the entire exchange was centred on Jeslyn asking for a refund of her deposit for a course conducted by the claimant in Taiwan, as she was unable to travel to Taiwan for the course. Ms Yeh in response started pressing Jeslyn for an answer on whether

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8 Paras 30-45 of the claimant's written submissions dated 31 August 2026.

9 BOD pp 110 to 113.

10 Para 6 of GD.

she had seen any of the defamatory posts and whether the posts caused her to cancel her course. Jeslyn in turn repeatedly emphasised that it was a change of her travelling plans that caused her to cancel the course. Upon further pressing, Jeslyn said she saw one of the defamatory posts, but repeated that that was not the reason for her to cancel the course. This text message exchange is the sum total of the claimant's evidence of a Singapore reputation from an "intended client". Plainly, it falls far short of the requisite evidence. First, there is no evidence at all that Jeslyn was an intended client. We only know that she was going to Taiwan to attend a course run by the claimant. Second, there is a complete absence of evidence from Jeslyn that the claimant has a trading or business reputation in Singapore. Third, taken at the highest, the text messages exchange shows that there is publication of one of the defamatory posts to Jeslyn. But publication is not to be conflated with trading and business reputation. Fourth, and for completeness, no evidence has been adduced that Jeslyn is based in Singapore. I do not see in what remote way this matter assists the claimant.

14 The second matter is the claimant's allusion to the defendant's statement about the claimant's reputation. The claimant referred to an Instagram story wherein the 1st defendant stated: "You want to stir up trouble? I'll trash your reputation in Singapore!"[11] The claimant contends that this was not only an admission that the claimant has a trading and business reputation in Singapore, but it was an admission made by the 1st defendant who is a competitor. By this, the claimant is saying that there is evidence of a Singapore reputation given by a competitor. This is entirely misconceived. First, there is no evidence that the 1st defendant is a competitor of the claimant in Singapore. In fact, it is not even

[11] Paras 30-45 of the claimant's written submissions dated 31 August 2026.

established that the claimant has a trading or business presence in Singapore. The question of whether it has any competitors in Singapore has not arisen. By assuming that the claimant has a business presence in Singapore and thus making the 1st defendant a competitor, and then contending the 1st defendant admitted to the claimant having a business reputation in Singapore is a circular argument. It begs the question. It is tantamount to assuming that the claimant has a business reputation here to prove that it has one. Second and in any event, to rely on a statement "I'll trash your reputation in Singapore!" made by one of the defendants to prove a trading and business reputation in Singapore is plainly tenuous and wholly inadequate.

15 It follows from all of the foregoing that contrary to the claimant's assertion, there is no basis at all for any inference to be made that the claimant had acquired any degree of reputation in Singapore. The claimant has failed to show any evidence that it has a Singapore business or trading reputation. As the claimant has failed to show on a balance of probabilities that it has a Singapore reputation, it does not cross the requisite threshold test. It cannot be said that it has a reputation to protect in Singapore. There is no basis to award any damages to the claimant. The RA is accordingly dismissed.

16 I turn now to two contentions of the claimant I found in its written submissions filed in the RA that give rise to some concern. First is the claimant's contention that the DR "assessed the question of reputation against the wrong measure. In assessing the evidence, he treated the absence of a local trading presence as determinative of the absence of a trading or business reputation …". I find the claimant's assertion inexplicable. A perusal of the GD shows that nowhere in his GD does the DR state that this was his approach. On the contrary, the DR's finding is that there is no certain or necessary relationship between the number of followers that a company has gathered on its social media accounts

and the existence of its business or trading reputation in a particular jurisdiction.[12] The DR made this finding in reference to the claimant's argument that it has a trading and business reputation in Singapore on the basis of the large number of followers it has on its social media accounts. Ms Yeh's stated in her affidavit of evidence-in-chief affirmed on 30 January 2026 ("AEIC") as follows:[13]

> The claimant is a company based in Taiwan […]. Given that the claimant has clientele across Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore, the claimant has, to date, amassed approximately 13,700 followers on Instagram and 2,517 followers on Threads [which are social media platforms]. The claimant primarily relies on social media to conduct and promote their business.

17 The DR's finding that the number of followers that a company has gathered on its social media accounts does not prove the existence of a business or trading reputation in a particular jurisdiction is eminently correct.[14] The DR then goes on to detail the evidence adduced at the AD which showed that there is no evidence that the claimant has any business presence in Singapore.[15] In fact the GD is centred entirely on the question of the sufficiency of the claimant's evidence that it had a business or trading reputation within Singapore as of April 2025.[16] I find it troubling that the claimant, who is represented, would deliberately mischaracterise a court's finding.

18 The second contention of concern made by the claimant is bizarre. At para 48 of the written submissions filed in the RA, it is stated as follows:

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12 Para 5 of GD.

13 Para 4 of AEIC of Yeh Yi-Wei.

14 Para 5 of GD.

15 Para 8 of GD.

16 Para 7 of GD.

> Finally, the claimant notes the time it took for the learned DR Ng to render the Merits Decision after the [claimant's written submissions] was submitted, and puts the point no higher. The CWS were filed at 6.41 pm on 16 July 2026. The Merits Decision was rendered at 9.52 am on 17 July 2026. The point here that the claimant is making is one of principle: the reasons for rejecting a party's substantive case ought to be set out in the decision on the merits.

19 First, the claimant appears to suggest that the quick turnaround of the court with its verdict is somehow objectionable. The ludicrousness of this submission speaks for itself, and I need say no more. Second, and more troubling is the suggestion that the DR did not give reasons for his decision. This is patently untrue not only as seen in the published GD where the DR's reasons are set out in plain sight, but also in the claimant's own written submissions which addressed the reasons given by the DR in the GD. The point here that I am making is one of gravity. It is one thing to disagree with the court's decision and entirely another to assert that no reasons were given for the decision. The claimant is equating not agreeing with the DR's reasons with no reasons being given by the DR. Such baseless assertion is wholly uncalled for and highly improper. In referring to these two contentions of concern, I would note that the written submissions for the RA were filed by solicitors.

Conclusion

20 The claimant has failed to show on a balance of probabilities that it has a Singapore reputation. It cannot be said that it has a reputation to protect in Singapore. There is no basis to award any damages to the claimant and the RA is dismissed.

21 I turn to the question of costs. The general principle is for costs to follow the event. The claimant is therefore to pay the costs of the RA. After considering the respective submissions on costs, the amount of work done, the time spent

by parties, the issues involved in the RA, the manner in which the RA was conducted by the claimant, and the 2nd defendant acting in person, I fix costs at $1,700 (inclusive of disbursements), to be paid by the claimant to the 2nd defendant. The costs order of the DR is to stand.

Chiah Kok Khun
District Judge

Ms Tiffanie Lim Jing Wen and Mr Leng Ji En, Paul (Forward Legal LLC) for claimants;
defendants in person.