Journal of Engineering Science and Technology
Special Issue on SU18, February (2019) 68 - 77
© School of Engineering, Taylor's University

CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIONS IN MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF CENSORABLE FILM CONTENT IN THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA INDUSTRY

JESSICA SIM KHAI YIN[1,*], RAMACHANDRAN PONNAN[2]

[1]Postgraduate Centre, Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, Cyberjaya, Malaysia
[2]School of Media and Communication, No. 1 Jalan Taylor's, 47500,
Subang Jaya, Selangor DE, Malaysia
*Corresponding Author: jesskyin92@gmail.com

Abstract

Challenges are mounting in the management practices of content censorship in the electronic media, especially with technological disruption affecting every aspect of industry. The objectives of this study: 1. to identify the challenges faced by the censorship board; 2. to propose innovations to the management practices of the censorship board. 3. To explore the effectiveness of self-censorship practices. The *Lembaga Penapisan Filem* (LPF) or National Film Censorship Board plays the role of gatekeeper for all forms of audiovisual content to maintain harmony in the country. Besides LPF, self-censorship is being delegated to respective content producers and broadcasters in assisting the LPF in the process of gatekeeping the flow of content to audiences. Parents' role in self-censorship is important, as LPF is not able to control what the youth are watching on their own. The study followed the qualitative methods in gathering data. The study arrived at three conclusions. 1. LPF can reinforce Act 620 and their guidelines of practices. 2. LPF should enhance ineffective practices and introduce interventions for stakeholders. 3. Representatives of LPF at self-censorship broadcasting stations need to be more effective.

Keywords: Film censorship, Gatekeeping, Self-censorship.

1. Introduction

The film is also known as motion pictures, which means a sequence of pictures that are played and projected on a screen. Lembaga Penapis Filem [1] reported on the Guidelines on Film Censorship, the film includes film, advertising film, trailer (promotional) and film publicity material [1]. As mentioned in the Film Censorship Act 2002 (Act 620) [2], the definition of the film includes movie, videotape, diskette, laser disc, compact disc, hard disc and other records that consist of a sequence of moving pictures with or without audio [1].

Now films are published through multiple platforms, across all kinds of electronic media including television, movie theatre, internet, DVD, mobile phone, tablet, etc. Nowadays, films are no longer limited to the "big screens". It has evolved to being offered on other platforms such as over-the-top (OTT) and video-on-demand (VoD) where people can excess it anywhere at any time. It is at the fingertips of the audience with the existence of the internet. According to a statistic report from Statista (2017), in March 2017, there are 3.58 billion people who are active internet users and the statistics had increased by 5.6% compared to the year 2016 [3].

From another research done by Malaysian Communication Multimedia Commission (MCMC) [4] (2017), 70.0% of the internet users are streaming/downloading video or watch TV. The pervasiveness of film content is higher than before with the growing number of distribution platforms such as YouTube and iflix that youths now have alternative pathways to possible uncensored content. This trend follows customer's perspective about free-of-charge streaming model represented in the study by YouTube [5].

Film censorship in Malaya can be traced back to the early 20th century when with the enactment of the Cinematograph Film Ordinance No. 76 of 1952 in the Federation of Malaya and the Cinematograph Film Ordinance No. 25 of 1953 in Singapore, a Censorship Board was officially established (LPF). Back then, police officers were put in charge of determining the suitability of a film for the public. The film censorship's regulation was greatly influenced by early British films and Film Censorship Board [6].

The National Film Censorship Board of Malaysia (*Lembaga Penapis Filem*, LPF) was established on 1 May 1954. To date, it functions as the Quality Management System of the Film Control and Enforcement Division under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance to the Quality Management System Standards of ISO 9001:2008 and MS ISO 9001:2008 [2] qualifies its management practices. The certification is applicable to management of film, publicity materials censorship and the enforcement of the Film Censorship Act 2002.

Censorship of electronic media is applied at different levels depending on the types of the screen. Big screens such as movie theatre and television are for general viewing, thus the censorship panel must look into details in criteria such as themes, storyline, background, and language (including subtitles). The LPF officers will look into the content in detail by following the censorship guidelines. Small screen for VoD or OTT content has more lenient censorship. Regardless of the size of the screen, the editor or broadcasters should follow the guidelines of censorship.

1.1. Problem statement

Films are produced according to the latest trends, culture, lifestyle, and background of the audiences. The LPF suggests that some films portray the negative side of society such as excessive violence, adultery, and premature sex, meager or no respect for law and order, the popularity of social evils, which are unacceptable role models for local culture. Films that contain high levels of violence, according to researchers, may not be the major factor for the youth's degradation of attitude in society but high levels of violence do implant thoughts of aggression. These are the aspects of concern to any censorship. In contrast, technology has changed audiences' viewing behavior. Audiences can easily excess content that comes from beyond the national borders. Their perception and acceptance of multicultural content from overseas and locally may be different from those tasked with censoring content. According to LPF, audiences are questioning why the censorship board decides what the audience can or cannot view. With the disruption of technology favoring audience to access content freely, censorship is becoming a challenge to control the consumption of multimedia content, especially from beyond the national borders.

1.2. Research questions

The research process of this study is guided by the following research questions:

i. What challenges do the Censorship Board experience?

ii. What are the current self-censorship practices?

iii. What innovations can be proposed to the management practices of the censorship board?

1.3. Significance of the study

Appropriate and timely censorship of media content is crucial to maintaining peace, harmony, and security of a nation. The dissemination of elements that threaten the security and misinformation through films, electronic media or in any other forms can be harmful to a developing multicultural society. The outcome of this research is to suggest innovative management practices for the LPF management to consider for policymaking. Additionally, the findings can form guidelines for parents to monitor the content their children are watching.

2. Literature Review

Film enjoyment and consumption habits are evolving. Growing literature informs that audiences are watching content on multiple devices anyhow. Multiplatform content distribution and the sudden burst of the internet of things (IoT) have allowed the overflow and free excess of uncensored content for the audience

2.1. Evolution of electronic media

Traditional electronic media such as television, movie theatre and DVDs are facing challenges to sustain their audience. Audience's media consumption habits are changing; moving on to watching media content on multiple devices. Thus, traditional broadcasters are shifting to multiplatform content distribution as well.

The internet has allowed the overflow and free excess of uncensored content for the audience.

There are many online service providers such as HyppTV, iflix, and Netflix or even social media broadcasters such as Facebook providing alternative screens for content. They pose new problems. For example, Netflix, one of the leading Internet TV streaming services claims that it has no censored content - of the shows and movies that are available [7]. There is an uncensored version of movies or dramas in Netflix, which may contain scenes that are not suitable for youths such as vulgar words, sex, nudity and excessive violence, which the LPF prohibits.

2.2. Film censorship

The LPF and the MCMC are the gatekeepers of media content that censor content to maintain public harmony. Films intended for cinema screens and TV stations without self-censorship permission must submit their products to LPF for evaluation. According to Lembaga Penapis Filem [1, 2], the films are evaluated according to the *Garis Panduan Penapisan Filem*. After a film is view and evaluated, filmmakers or producers will receive their feedback from the LPF on whether the film is ready to be published or to be edited according to the comments of the censor board committee.

Refworld [8] stated that the film censorship guidelines are based on four aspects, which are i. Security and public order; ii. Religion; iii. Socio-culture; and iv. Decorum and morality. This is to ensure that films do not breach sensitivities such as religion, politics, the sovereignty of the Malay rulers, matters, which are clearly articulated and the principles of the Rukun Negara [9]. In terms of theme, storyline, scene or dialogue films that contain sensitive elements that may lead to controversies or create unrest among the public will be given attention and scrutinized closely by the LPF.

In 2010, LPF introduced a new film censorship and classification system in replacing the previous ratings of 18SX, 18SG, 18PL, and 18PA. According to the Lembaga Penapis Filem [1], films approved by LPF will be classified under three categories, which are U, PG13 and 18. Category "U" represents general viewing without age restriction; "PG13" are films that contain some violence and horror scenes that require parental guidance for an audience under the age of 13; Films classified as "18" are meant for an audience who are 18 years old and above only.

Films for public screens like the cinema and TV broadcasts will only show films that have been approved by LPF. However, the audience at home and youths can access uncensored content through downloads from sites which are beyond the control of LPF.

2.3. Gatekeeping

The Mass Society Theory emerged to explain the meanings of media intrusion to the mass society and the mass culture. The view of elevating the quality of human life on one side and the other was the view of looking at media as the destroyer of social orders. This theory believes in the persuasive effects of media in promoting homogeneity in society [10]. Hence the need to order society through some form of gatekeeping. Gatekeeping to limit viewership into categories of audiences in terms of maturity of audience reception as articulated in Fig. 1.

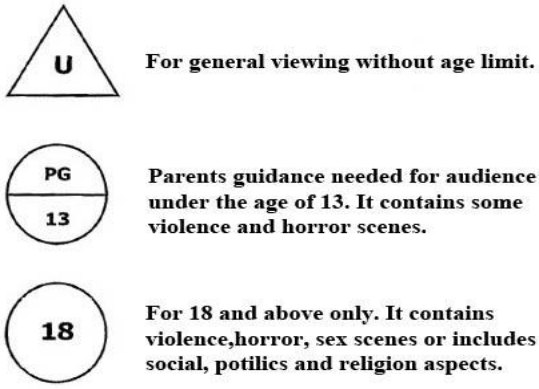

Fig. 1. LPF Guidelines; Source: *Lembaga Penpisan Filem* 2010.

According to Shoemaker et al. [11], Fig. 2, is an early theory that is still very much applicable to today's dynamic communication environment. In the theory by Lewin [12], the role of mass media content dissemination in terms of few-to-many dynamics, it addresses face-to-face communication and the many-to-many dynamic is inherent. However, gatekeeping is at times simplistically interpreted as to block censorable content by using a checkpoint where people make decisions called 'Gatekeeping'.

In the field of communication in the newsroom, it is known to check what goes out is essentially edited material. This process has been applied to the films and electronic content now.

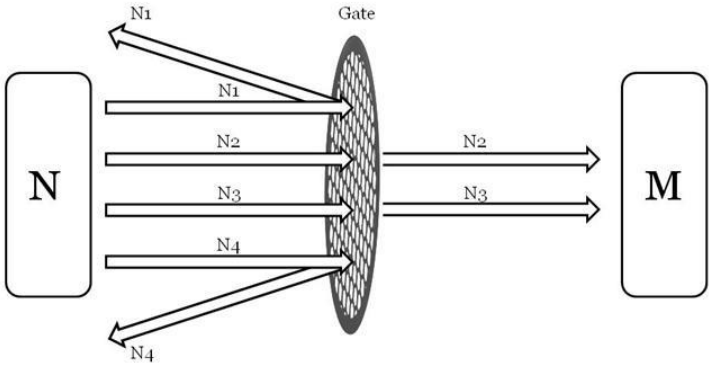

Fig. 2. Visualization of David Manning White's gatekeeper model by Stacks and Salwen [13].

Note: N- Source of news item; N1, 2, 3, 4 - News items; M- Audience, N1, 4 - Discard item; N2, 3 - Selected item

3. Method

A qualitative approach is used in this study where explanations were sought for the subjective nature of the research objectives to be answered. It was a purposive sampling method, where only specific and targeted groups of professionals could respond to a structured set of questions. The researcher conducted face-to-face

interviews with three LPF officers with the Ministry of Home Affairs in Putrajaya and one LPF reviewer in Radio TV Malaysia, and one self-censorship officer from ASTRO. The researcher also interviewed two content providers whose films and videos were often subjected to censorship. These interviews, which took about an hour each, were conducted at their respective work premises. The interviews used open-ended structured questions based on the research objectives.

The study used open coding analysis to analyze the data collected from the interviews. The recorded data was transcribed thematically. The themes were then analyzed reiteratively and described according to the research objectives.

4. Findings and Discussion

The study found that LPF's guidelines of practices could be reinforced; that their ineffective practices can be restructured. In addition, representatives of LPF at self-censorship broadcasting stations need to be more effective.

4.1. Challenges faced by the censorship board

According to Mr. Inau, to censor a music video is even more challenging than censoring a movie. In music videos, the panel must go through every word in the lyrics, the background etc. Mr. Inau, LPF officer (Informant 1) gave an example, "I want to make love with you through the night", will not be allowed by LPF because there is the sexual connotation. The whole song will be banned instead of just muting one or two lines of lyrics.

There are issues LPF faces with the vendors, which are when the vendors are not satisfied with the decision made by the LPF panels. Informant 1 said, "If they are not happy with our decision, they can appeal to the Jawatankuasa Rayuan (JKRF)" appeals board. Then JKRF can overrule LPF to decide whether to accept or reject the appeal.

The LPF is often questioned by stakeholders asking, "Who appointed you (LPF) as our moral guardian" said Dr. Safaruddin, LPF Officer (Informant 2). LPF asserts that they control what should or should not be on a screen that every decision made by the LPF is for the sake of the people and country. For instance, Beauty and the Beast (2017), a film that became controversial when it did not fulfill the requirement of the *Garis Panduan Penapisan Filem* (Guidelines on Film Censorship) due to the 'gay moment'. Informant 2 said, "It's just that we don't want to portray gay moment too much" as homosexuality is against religious and cultural practices in Malaysia. Allowing such scenes may create controversy and doubt among the general audiences [1]. However, after going through an appeal process the LPF finally approved the movie and with a PG13 rating [14].

4.2. Role and practices of self-censorship

The Minister of Home Affairs exclusively awards self-censorship status. ASTRO and TV3 were granted self-censorship status by the Home Affairs Minister. Mr. Inau clarified on the status of self-censorship, "Even though they were accorded self-censorship status, they still follow our rules and regulations". There are still instances where producers flout the law as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Offences and implicating laws.

		Offense	Law/ACT	Fine/Punishment
1.	**Rasathi Hendry, 32, Activist**	Airing "No Fire Zone: The Killing Fields of Sri Lanka' before getting approval from LPF	Section 6(1)(b) Film Censorship Act 2002	Fined RM10,000
2.	**Patriots Day (2017)**	Producer held a gala premier before LPF gives approval upon the publishing date	Section 11(3) Film Censorship Act 2002	Fined (unknown figure)
3.	**ASTRO**	Airing expired TUT (Disapproved for Exhibit) Films	Section 8(2)(a) Film Censorship Act 2002	LPF will give advice
4	**ASTRO airing "The Danish Girl"**	The movie was listed under TUT as the LGBT agenda was obvious, but ASTRO aired it in 2017	Section 7(3) Film Censorship Act 2002	Fined (unknown figure)

Meanwhile, efforts to curb piracy have had some positive outcome. Websites containing censorable content have been blocked. This has significantly reduced online piracy, with a 74% fall in traffic to pirate websites recorded in the six months after the government initiated its sixth effort to block such sites [15].

ASTRO keep repeating the mistakes such as it does not censor vulgar words that are not allowed in television and airing TUT films and etc. Informant 2 said that LPF could not monitor ASTRO all the time as the station was supposed to be monitored by MCMC. The decision is up to MCMC who govern electronic media.

For stations that do not have self-censorships such as TV Al-Hijrah Station, RTM, TM NET Station (Hypp TV), and ABN Station, LPF will send their officers to be stationed there for monitoring and evaluating content. Informant 2 added, "Like TV3, despite having self-censorship status, they are still FTA, free-to-air channels. Therefore, they must follow the TV censorship guidelines. The same applies to radio stations".

In RTM, the LPF unit has nine officers to censor media content, TV programmes and DVDs to be aired over RTM. According to Mr. Sarathee, LPF officer (Informant 3), based in RTM, this unit in RTM is called "Kawalan Kualiti", which means Quality Control. He says, "The unit looks into the various aspects of the production. Initially, producers will pitch their ideas to the unit of Kawalan Kualiti, upon modification and approval they will proceed to produce. Finally, after

the production, the movie will be sent to the LPF officers for evaluation based on the Guidelines on Film Censorship 2002. [1].

From what Informant 3 shared, "RTM has their own quality control unit to censor their in-house productions such as dramas, LIVE shows, LIVE coverage and etc. The LPF unit in RTM will censor the movies sent by the vendors as well".

At home, parents are also playing the role of 'gatekeepers' in controlling what source of entertainment media their children are watching. Informant 2 said that we should educate the parents first and not just the children on the practice of self-censorship.

4.3. Innovations to the management practices on censorship for multiple screens

According to Informant 1, the content shown on the linear channels will have more detailed censorship (*tapisan halus*). On the other hand, films that are aired in VOD or ASTRO First have censorship that is more lenient where they can follow the standard of the cinema. Informant 2 mentioned that in cinema, films rated '18' could allow, "Fuck" if it is referring to cursing not action. However, for TV, "small details in terms of *Tapisan Halus*, means you seriously scrutinize the act and language". For instance, the word "fuck" is not allowed on TV.

For local productions, in order to avoid too many cuts from the LPF panel, LPF always has "engagement programmes" with the filmmakers where LPF meets and discusses with them the latest issues on censorship. "We call it the "town hall," said Informant 1. The producers, directors, and scriptwriters then come in as a team to meet with the LPF officers.

The management practices of the film Censorship Broad are generally guided by their book of rules, Guidelines on Film Censorship (2nd ed.), under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The guidelines follow a set of rules on acts, scenes, dialogues, visuals, and themes that can or cannot be passed based on the following four aspects: i. Security and public order; ii. Religion; iii. Socio-culture; and iv. Decorum and morality [16].

The Film Censorship Board had undertaken a rebranding of its services. It changed its name to the Film Classification Council or the Board of Film Classification. Conceptually, the task of the LPF is to classify films, thus the censoring function is still being carried out with a difference. Technological advancement in this sector of the industry has facilitated electronic transportation of content.

This strategy is also consistent with the Strategic Thrust of the Home Affairs Ministry's 2010 Integrity Plan, which wants to expand the use of ICT. The board now uses E-Filem portal featuring LPF censorship decisions. These are innovative and creative efforts currently used by stakeholders, vendors, and audiences. Films and other forms of content required to be censored do not have to be physically sent to LPF. They can be sent in an encrypted form and sent back in a similar password secure manner.

The Film Censorship Control and Enforcement Division (BUFF) of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), the secretariat to the LPF have stepped up

initiatives under the media literacy program to promote educational programs at schools, for audience and stakeholders.

The LPF has heightened the requirements for specialized skills among its board members. Officers are now recruited on their a) Extensive experience in areas such as administration, management, teaching, religious, enforcement, military, broadcasting and other appropriate fields. Next, b) Skills in various languages; c) Ability to write reports in good Malay; d) Knowledge of the film and entertainment industry; e) The right attitude toward the duties of office, an open mind and the high analytical skills.

Such innovations have been undertaken to change the public perception that members of the Censorship Board are merely "moral police" [17].

5. Conclusions

The study arrived at several conclusions. First, LPF can reinforce Act 620 and their guidelines of practices of 2011. The ACT itself has evolved from its inception in the year 1952, and then amended in 2002, each time incorporating changes to provide efficient services. Secondly, the study suggests that LPF should replace ineffective practices, and introduce interventions for stakeholders. LPF's portal has introduced e-film censorship. Producers need not be present at the LPF personally for film censorship transactions. Thirdly, representatives of LPF at self-censorship broadcasting stations can be more effective. As evidenced by Table 1 there were several instances where broadcasters breached censorship guidelines.

The suggested innovations to the management practices of content censorship would unlock best practices in censorship and deter content providers from malpractices. Interventions for audiences especially parents would reduce possibilities of their children being exposed to the censorable content.

Besides the overarching goals of security and peace, the goal of censorship is to preserve the values and cultural traditions of the peoples of Malaysia. Officials at the LPF do not agree that censorship is killing or limiting the creativity of producers. Filmmakers are in a dilemma over what is inappropriate and what the real 'creativity' is. As put by Mr. Inau, "Film is the reflection of a culture while the garis panduan represents the (majority) society." The guidelines on Film Censorship contains what the society wants. Anything that is too obscene, too violent or too sensitive in terms of religion is against the guidelines. Malaysia is a multicultural society, "We are very fragile. If we don't handle it properly, you can create havoc." Informant 1, LPF is located under The Ministry of Home Affairs because public security is involved.

References

1. Lembaga Penapis Filem (2011). Garis panduan penapisan filem. Putrajaya: Bahagian Kawalan Penapisan Filem dan Penguatkuasaan.
2. Lembaga Penapis Filem. (2011). Perkhidmatan. Retrieved March 18, 2018, from http://lpf.moha.gov.my/lpf/ index.php/ms/.
3. Statista. (2018). Number of internet users worldwide from 2005 to 2018 (in millions). Retrieved April 30, 2018, https://www.statista.com/statistics/ 273018/number-of-internet-users-worldwide/.

4. Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission. (2017). Internet users survey 2017. Statistical Brief Number Twenty-One. Retrieved April 30, 2018, from https://www.mcmc.gov.my/skmmgovmy/media/General/pdf/MCMC-Internet-Users-Survey-2017.pdf.
5. Chmielarz, W. (2014). Analysis of selected websites and commercial content distribution platforms in Poland. *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 10(2), 23-32.
6. Sarji, A. (2004). *Pengaruh persekitaran politik, dan sosio-budaya dalam perkembangan penyiaran radio di Malaya dari tahun 1920-1959.* Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia: Perpustakaan Tun Sri Lanang.
7. Mutharasu, N. (2016). *Netflix in Malaysia: cost, content and censorship - is it worth it?* New Straits Times. Retrieved March 15, 2018, from https://www.expatgo.com/my/2016/01/19/netflix-malaysia-cost-content-censorship-worth/.
8. Refworld. *(*1957). Malaysia: Federal constitution. Retrieved May 3, 2018, from http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5e40.html.
9. Perdana Leadership Foundation. (2016). Rukun Negara. Retrieved from http://www.perdana.org.my/~perdana/index.php/spotlight2/item/rukun-negara-the-national-principle-of-malaysia.
10. McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail's mass communication theory* (5th ed.). London: Sage Publication.
11. Shoemaker, P.J.; Eichholz, M.; Kim, E.; and Wrigley, B. (2001). Individual and routine forces in gate keeping. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78(2), 233-246.
12. Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics. *Human Relations*, 1(2), 5-41.
13. Stacks, D.W.; and Salwen, M.B. (1981). An integrated approach to communication theory and research. Retrieved July 30, 2018 from http://gatekeepingtheory.weebly.com/.
14. Mumford, G. (2017). Beauty and the Beast: Malaysian film censors back down in 'gay moment' row. Retrieved March 18, 2018, from https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/mar/21/beauty-and-the-beast-malaysian-film-censors-back-down-in-gay-moment-row.
15. Motion Picture Association. (2016). Website blocking in Malaysia has reduced online piracy. Retrieved from https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/website-blocking-malaysia-has-reduced-online-piracy-says-film-makers-body.
16. Wan Amizah, W.M.; Kee, C.P.; and Aziz, J. (2009). Film censorship in Malaysia: Sanctions of religious, culture and moral values. *Jurnal Komunikasi, Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 25, 42-49.
17. Murat, M.J. (2006). *Filem melayu atau Malaysia*? Mingguan Malaysia.