

CENSORSHIP REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT OF
2003





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REPORT OF
CENSORSHIP REVIEW COMMITTEE 2003

Date: 10 July 2003

Dr Lee Boon Yang

Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts

Dear Minister

REPORT OF CENSORSHIP REVIEW COMMITTEE 2003

Since its appointment in April 2002, the Censorship Review Committee has held 22 meetings and met with more than 150 people representing 13 focus groups. The Committee also commissioned a representative survey of about 1,000 respondents to gauge the public's attitudes and views on censorship issues.

2 We are pleased to submit herewith the Report of our deliberations and recommendations. In compiling this Report, we have looked at censorship practices in other parts of the world, drawn up our own objectives and principles of censorship guidelines, discussed with practitioners the main censorship issues and taken note of the responses to our survey.

3 In our deliberations we were mindful of the heterogeneous makeup of our society, the diverse views of the people and the need to protect our core values and the young. We were also mindful of the impact of globalisation, the free flow of ideas as well as the influences and advances of technology and communications, which defy conventional approaches safeguarding and regulating media content.

4 The Committee believes that the responsibility to guide and control will have to be increasingly borne by the individual, the public, particularly parents, and the industry. While the regulator may define and regulate sensitive areas like race and religion, in the areas of morality, the responsibility will have to be devolved to the public and citizen advisory committees.

5 The Committee suggests adopting a tetrapartite formula involving the regulators, industry players, community and the artists. All the four parties need to be pro-actively involved in the censorship process if Singapore wants to develop into a vibrant Renaissance City without sacrificing its core values.

6 In conclusion, the Committee wishes to thank the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts and Media Development Authority staff for the secretariat support and the invaluable inputs on Singapore's current censorship regime.



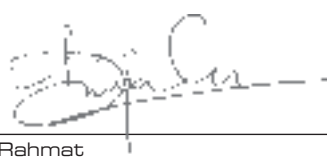

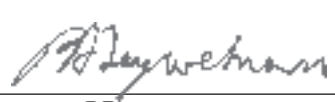
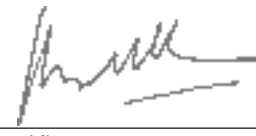

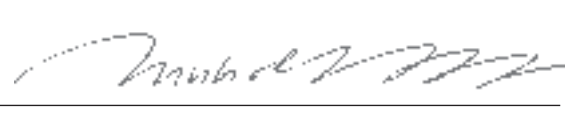
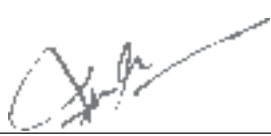



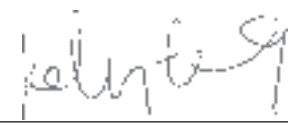

Best regards.

Yours sincerely



Liu Thai Ker

CHAIRMAN
CENSORSHIP REVIEW COMMITTEE


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Ahmad Nizam Bin Abbas
Assoc Prof Ang Peng Hwa
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MINISTER FOR INFORMATION,
COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS
SINGAPORE

18 July 2003

Mr Liu Thai Ker

Chairman
Censorship Review Committee

Dear Mr Liu

I am pleased to receive the report of the Censorship Review Committee 2003 (CRC).

2 Since the last review, Singapore has undergone a significant transformation. The influence and effects of globalisation are now even more pervasive. The Internet and infocomm technologies have had an enormous impact on many aspects of our life, work and leisure. Innovation and creativity have become important economic imperatives. Looking ahead, it is quite apparent that these changes will continue to exert enormous influence and impact on our society.

3 Hence, in the context of these changes, the 2003 CRC Report is not merely an assessment of the relevance of the present framework of regulating the content of various mediums. More importantly, the 2003 CRC Report lays the groundwork for evolving our censorship framework to adjust to the inevitable changes ahead of us. MITA will now study the details, give our response and implement the accepted recommendations over a period of time.

4 Your Committee has succeeded in keeping the report relevant against the backdrop of our social evolution and changing global landscape. While understanding the need to fan the creative flames of the new generation and to accommodate the diversity of views, you were sensitive not to weaken the 'glue' that bonds our society - our core values, our identity, our shared memories, our religious and racial harmony.

5 Your Committee also sees censorship as a shared responsibility, thus your approach of encouraging participation comprising regulators, industry players, community and artists in the process. I share your assessment and would like to encourage more synergy among the stakeholders. Our common challenge is to achieve a balance where adults can have wider access, whilst our young are provided with a conducive environment to develop morally and socially, without compromising the development of creativity and social capital. These objectives may be difficult but certainly are not incompatible.

6 You have very kindly undertaken the mantle as Chairman of the CRC. In formulating this report, the CRC had canvassed a wide range of views. Despite the divergence of viewpoints, you had capably managed the expectations of various parties and came to an agreement on a common set of recommendations. This is undoubtedly a difficult task, and I would like to place on record my deepest appreciation of your unwavering commitment.

7 On behalf of the Government, I thank you and the members of the Committee for your invaluable contribution and hard work. I am confident that this report will continue the process of evolving and developing our censorship framework.

Yours sincerely



Lee Boon Yang



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1 It has been 10 years since the last censorship review committee completed its report under Professor Tommy Koh. During this decade, many technological and social changes have taken place, both globally and locally. Against this backdrop of rapid changes, then Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts (MITA), Mr David T E Lim, appointed a Censorship Review Committee (CRC) in April 2002 to review and recommend changes to censorship policies and guidelines. The CRC's terms of reference were:
 - a. To review and recommend changes to existing censorship policies and guidelines in the light of social and technological changes that have occurred since the CRC 1992, for publications, films, audio and video content, broadcast media, arts entertainment, as well as new and converging media;
 - b. To review censorship laws and structures;
 - c. To review the role of public education; and
 - d. To consider other related matters.
- 2 The evolution of censorship practices runs parallel with the evolution of a society. In this sense, the recommendations in this report are essentially an update, reflecting the continuous changes in our society. Singapore is no different from other countries in that censorship policies and guidelines must be well tailored to the unique needs of our society.
- 3 In making the recommendations, this CRC has taken into consideration the factors outlined below.

GLOBALISATION AND TECHNOLOGY

- 4 Current censorship policies and guidelines have served us well, with surveys showing a consistently high level of public acceptance¹. But no policy or guideline is immutable, especially in light of globalisation and technological advancements. While exposure to diverse cultural values has brought about changes in mindsets, technological advancements in the last decade have spawned a new array of media formats and communication platforms, which have in turn challenged existing censorship policies and guidelines.

¹ The Censorship Survey 2002 conducted by this CRC reflects that on average 70% of respondents were satisfied with current censorship standards.

MANAGING SENSITIVITIES

- 5 In the ever-changing scenario, our multi-racial and multi-religious society, and the need to protect the young remain constant. We have to be sensitive to the feelings of every ethnic and religious group and the widespread concern for morality of the young, as was clearly registered in the Censorship Survey 2002. Censorship guidelines are needed to keep out content that may denigrate race and religion, harm the young, prejudice public order and erode the community's moral norms.

SETTING OUR OWN PARAMETERS

- 6 Parameters of acceptable expression in content vary from country to country, due to different cultural, economic and political set-ups. While content on pornography and deviant sexual practices such as paedophilia and sexual violence are clearly unacceptable to most, others like race and religion, violence, sexual content and nudity, homosexuality and coarse language are less clear-cut. Even within Singapore, while some segments of our society may find the existing parameters too confining, others have cautioned against loosening up. We have to set our own parameters taking into consideration the general values of the community.

PROVIDING DIVERSITY

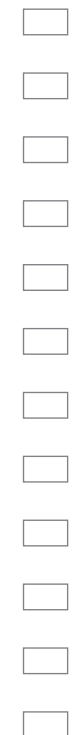
- 7 A "one-size-fits-all" approach in censorship is becoming less tenable for our society. There is an increase in demand from younger Singaporeans and arts groups for greater diversity in choice, though the Censorship Survey 2002 shows a high level of public acceptance of current censorship policies and guidelines. There is therefore a need to address these diverging, conflicting views.

EDUCATING THE CONSUMERS AND PARENTS

- 8 Especially with the acceleration of technological advancement and growth of Internet access, censorship guidelines alone are not sufficient. Whether we are able to protect the young against unsuitable content also depends on parental guidance and education. The Media Development Authority (MDA) should work hand in hand with the industry players, the mass media, the schools and the parents in educating media consumers.

INVOLVING THE INDUSTRY PLAYERS

- 9 The industry players in film, video, broadcast media, arts entertainment, video game and publication should be aware of the community's sensitivities and be self-responsible. Whether industry players should be given more responsibility in self-regulating their content, with less interference from MDA and relevant regulators, depends on how much they work as responsible industry teams in their respective mediums.



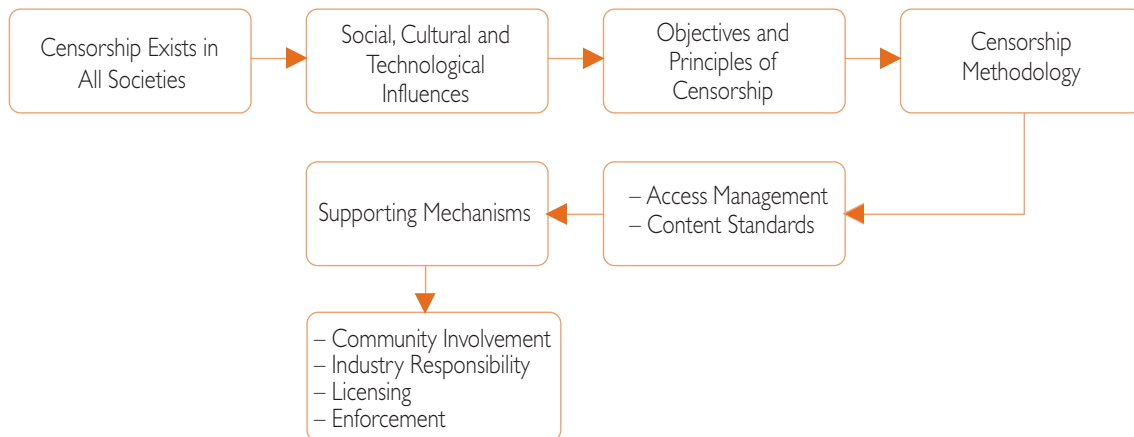
INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

- 10 Members of our community are already involved in the implementation of censorship guidelines. They sit on various MITA-appointed advisory and appeal committees on censorship. Such participation helps MITA and MDA gauge the community's sentiments on censorship issues. Though the Censorship Survey 2002 shows strong public support for the government to continue with its leading role in censorship, this CRC calls on the community to play an even greater advisory role.

FRAMEWORK OF REVIEW

- 11 The framework used for this censorship review is shown in the following diagram. First, this CRC studied the censorship practices in other countries and the factors affecting censorship. This helped develop objectives and principles, which in turn were translated into recommendations for changes to current practices. The two key aspects of censorship practices are access management and content standards. Supporting mechanisms, like industry responsibility, community involvement, licensing and enforcement, complement the effective and continuous evolution of censorship.

DIAGRAM OF FRAMEWORK OF REVIEW



OBJECTIVES OF CENSORSHIP

- 12 Having surveyed and discussed social, cultural and technological influences on censorship, this CRC summarises the censorship objectives in six areas:
- Fostering an environment conducive to developing creativity and social capital through due recognition of artistic merit, discussion in a rational manner, greater transparency in censorship matters and provision of wider access to choice.
 - Building greater shared responsibility among the regulators, industry players, community and artists by creating more platforms for them to work together.

- c. Providing wider and more informed choices for adults through classification, zoning, belting and other suitable regulatory measures.
- d. Protecting the young by applying stricter standards for content that is easily accessible by them, introducing consumer advice and promoting parental guidance.
- e. Safeguarding national interests by disallowing content harmful to public order and national interests.
- f. Safeguarding moral values and acknowledging community values by reflecting them in censorship policies and guidelines through timely review.

CRC RECOMMENDATIONS

13 The following is a summary of this CRC's recommendations.

ACCESS MANAGEMENT

Films

- Replace current film ratings with Restricted 21 (R21), Mature 18 (M18), No Children Under 15 (NC15), Parental Guidance (PG) and General (G) and make necessary adjustments to their content standards. Cinema operators are to enforce age restrictions according to MDA's licensing conditions.
- Allow sequential dual rating for films to provide wider choice to consumers.
- Allow up to M18 films in cinemas within Housing Development Board (HDB) estates but regulate their marketing to avoid offending residents in HDB estates.
- Continue to disallow R21 films in cinemas in HDB estates.

Videos

- Introduce a full video classification system similar to that for film. But the sale of videos should be allowed up to M18 only, with no zoning that restricts location of sale outlets. MDA should, however, regulate the sale and marketing to prevent abuse.
- Allow R21 videos at educational institutions and libraries approved by MDA for in-house reference.
- MDA should determine the rating of a video title, based on its original content, to avoid multiple ratings of the same title.

Advertisements for NC15 and M18 Films and Videos

- Continue to confine the showing of in-cinema trailers for R21 films to during the screening of R21 films.
- In-cinema trailers of NC15 and M18 films should correspond to or be of a lower rating to the film during which they are shown.
- NC15 and M18 trailers should be allowed on FTA TV if edited to a standard suitable to the general TV viewers.



Broadcast Media

- Provide adults a wider choice by progressively allowing NC15 standard programmes on FTA TV after 10.00 pm and M18 programmes on Cable TV international and premium tiers after 10.00 pm and VOD services. These programmes are to be accompanied by appropriate consumer advice.
- MDA should apply the same content standards for all TV programmes regardless of whether they are locally produced or otherwise.

Arts Entertainment

- Continue to allow greater leeway to arts entertainment in terms of content standards, due to its niche audience.
- Exempt pre-vetting of scripts if content of a play is not on race, religion or does not undermine national stability or core values.
- Replace current event-based licence with a two-year term licence.
- Extend current exemption from licensing to more categories of innocuous arts entertainment.
- Although not a censorship issue, this CRC supports the call by arts groups for government agencies to give funding support to performance art and forum theatre, as with other forms of arts entertainment.

Video Games

- Introduce video game classification based on the classification system of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) in the US. But, content currently unacceptable to MDA should continue to be disallowed.
- MDA should ensure that video game importers implement the ESRB classification system within two years, preferably by an association of the game industry. Otherwise, MDA should find alternative ways to enforce the classification.

Advertisements

- Continue with current policy of imposing stricter content standards for advertisements in public places and in mediums that have greater impact on the general audience.
- Assess the suitability of an advertisement on the presentation of the content and not on the product advertised.
- The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS) and MDA should continue to work together in regulating the content standards for advertisements.

Publications

- A full classification system, as in the case for films and videos, is not necessary or practical for local and foreign publications.
- But, allow permissible publications where content may be sensitive to some, through suitable channels to adult readers.

Sound Recordings

- Continue to allow the industry players to regulate sound recordings in accordance with MDA's content guidelines. But, MDA should require them to display consumer advice, alerting potential buyers to sensitive content in songs.

Internet

- Continue with light-touch regulation.
- Update the symbolic ban on the 100 websites to include sites with other harmful content such as paedophilia and child pornography. This symbolic ban will remain until MDA finds a viable alternative.
- Internet Content Providers should label their websites using any reputable international content rating system.
- Internet Service Providers should develop and subscribe to a code of conduct and put greater effort in protecting the young by developing an effective filtering system within a period of two years. Otherwise MDA should impose other effective measures.
- MDA should set up a multi-agency task force to study the inculcation of appropriate Net culture among the young through public education programmes.

MEDIA CONTENT STANDARDS

Content Disallowed

- Continue to disallow content that undermines public order and the nation's security, denigrates race and religion or erodes moral values through pornography, deviant sexual practices, sexual violence, child pornography, bestiality, etc.
- Gradually enlarge common space for discussion of racial and religious issues through the various mediums, as a long-term approach in fostering racial and religious understanding and harmony.
- Continue to strike a balance between allowing more space for creativity and maintaining moral standards.

Homosexuality

- Take a more flexible and contextual approach when dealing with homosexual themes and scenes in content.
- Allow greater leeway for adults, through suitable channels, to access such content provided it is not exploitative.

Violence

- Impose stricter standards for content with strong violence or elements of torture, targeting the young through higher ratings, late hour belting, control of sale and provision of consumer advice.



Sexual Content and Nudity

- Allow greater leeway to non-exploitative sex and nudity relevant to the context in content for adults. But, continue to impose stricter standards for such content in public space.
- Allow adults access to magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and programmes such as *Sex and the City* through suitable distribution channels.

Coarse Language

- Impose a stricter standard for coarse language in content, especially those for the young.
- Apply the same standard for coarse language in local and foreign content, taking into consideration the impact.

Chinese Dialects

- Continue to allow films with limited use of dialects, and full dialect use on Cable TV, Arts Central on FTA TV, videos, and some radio news. But, extend this further by allowing limited screening of full Chinese dialect films at cinemas on a single film print per title basis.

Contextual Approach

- In implementing the content guidelines, MDA and relevant regulators should take into consideration the artistic merit and context.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Advisory and Appeal Committees

- Continue with the current consultation process with greater participation from the community. Allow a third of members in advisory and appeal committees to be nominated by the public, subject to the Minister's approval on the final member list.
- Establish an appeal committee for arts entertainment to advise the Minister.
- In the longer term, appeal committees should be given greater arbitrating power on appeal cases.
- MDA should explore more platforms to involve industry players, community and consumer groups, like Consumer Association of Singapore (CASE), in the consultation process.

Timely Reviews

- Continue to convene major comprehensive reviews of censorship policies and guidelines like the CRC, at shorter intervals. MDA should also evaluate specific censorship issues as and when the need arises.

Public Education

MDA should:

- Work with industry players to explore ways to educate consumers on sensitive content to help them make informed choices.
- Expand its public education programmes to include setting up a website and a central hotline for censorship issues.
- Create a multi-agency council to inculcate community and parental guidance in censorship as a long-term public education strategy.

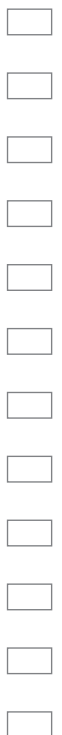
INDUSTRY RESPONSIBILITY

Consumer Advice

- Industry players to make greater use of consumer advice for sensitive content such as violence, gore, horror, sexual content and nudity, coarse language, drug consumption, homosexuality, race and religion, to promote parental guidance and informed choice.
- While MDA should provide standard wordings for use in mandatory consumer advice for films and videos as part of the rating requirement, industry players should continue to provide consumer advice for broadcast media and arts entertainment. For other mediums like publications and sound recordings, consumer advice should be provided when the need arises. For video games, consumer advice should be provided when ESRB classification is introduced.
- MDA should:
 - Work with industry players for a set of suitable advisory labels to prevent exploitation of consumer advice for marketing purposes.
 - Enforce compliance to ensure that industry players issue suitable consumer advice for sensitive content.
- Industry players are encouraged to explore the use of online consumer advice, in addition to traditional methods of displaying consumer advice on product packaging, advertising materials and points of sale.

Joint Regulation

- To promote joint regulation with industry players, MDA should:
 - Encourage industry players to organise themselves as credible industry groups and take on a greater role in regulation, like the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore.
 - Provide broadly-framed content guidelines to industry players, explain censorship decisions clearly and make them readily available to industry players.
- To promote greater industry responsibility, film distributors, not the Board of Film Censors, to take up the role of editing a film to meet classification guidelines.
- Rename “Board of Film Censors” under MDA as “Board of Film Classification”.



LICENSING

- MDA should continue using the licensing mechanism to enforce censorship policies and guidelines, with simplified procedures.

ENFORCEMENT

- Continue with current policy of focusing enforcement action on distributors, exhibitors and makers of content.
- MDA should exercise adequate enforcement effort to support the implementation of the revised censorship policies and guidelines.

IMPLEMENTATION

- 14 In its deliberations, this CRC focused on the creation of an environment that is good for the society as a whole. This report proposes a gradual expansion of the current censorship policies, guidelines and mechanisms that will facilitate the process of transforming Singapore into a diverse, vibrant and creative global city and yet preserve our core social values. This is the basis of our decisions on such controversial censorship icons such as the age restriction for R21 films, the ban on *Playboy* magazine and the treatment of arts entertainment.
- 15 In the implementation of censorship policies and guidelines, controversy often stems not from the guidelines themselves, but from the interpretation of these guidelines. While this CRC notes the demand for greater transparency and more specific censorship guidelines, it also recognises that, because of the subjective nature of censorship, it would not be possible to cast such guidelines in stone. Rather, we would urge that regulators adopt a flexible and contextual approach in the implementation of these guidelines, with the assistance of their respective advisory committees.
- 16 The community can also facilitate a more flexible approach by recognising the distinction between “allowing” and “endorsing”. There are some content which are clearly unacceptable and should continue to be disallowed. There are yet other content which may fall within the grey area. Allowing such content is quite different from endorsing them. Allowing wider choices for the adult Singaporean should not be misinterpreted as the regulators’ or the community’s endorsement of the content.
- 17 Finally, the objectives, principles and recommendations in this report only provide a general framework for the regulators, industry players, community and the artists to work together. Undertaken in the right spirit, this framework can take us a step forward to a new phase, characterised by greater industry responsibility and community involvement.

PART I:

1.0 CENSORSHIP ENVIRONMENT

The first step in censorship review involves knowing and evaluating practices in other countries and in Singapore, as well as understanding the forces and influences which might shape our censorship policies and guidelines.

This section takes stock of these agents of change.



PART I: 1.0 CENSORSHIP ENVIRONMENT

CENSORSHIP EXISTS IN ALL SOCIETIES

- 1.1 Although rapid advances in communications technology make it more difficult to enforce censorship, it still has a place in society. However, each censorship model is unique and reflects a country's cultural, political, and social environment. Western countries, for instance, are generally more particular about violent content than their Asian counterparts. Even among Western countries, some tend to come down harder on the use of coarse language than others.
- 1.2 Despite these differences, virtually all countries share a common desire to protect their young from unsuitable content. Increasingly, they use classification and belting, rather than an outright ban, as censorship tools. More countries, principally in the west, are also stepping up public education to complement their censorship measures.
- 1.3 In Singapore, censorship policies and guidelines have gone through a gradual change over the past two decades. The community has found them acceptable, with as high as 70% of respondents indicating their support, as shown in the Censorship Survey 2002. Our emphasis has also gradually shifted from heavy reliance on the government to more active involvement of industry players and the community.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

- 1.4 To ensure the relevance of censorship policies and guidelines, this CRC examined the key factors that shape them. As in any society, there are strong push and pull forces within our society.

Heterogeneous Society

- a. As a heterogeneous society of different races and religions, sensitivity and respect need to be maintained among the various groups. After the tragedy of September 11, 2001 in the US and subsequent terrorist acts elsewhere, racial and religious harmony has become an even more important consideration in censorship around the world. Singapore is similarly affected.

Community Values

- b. The majority of Singaporeans are comparatively conservative, as there has been little change in attitudes towards censorship issues such as sexual content and nudity between the 1992 and 2002 Censorship Surveys. Further changes should be made with our community values in mind.

High Educational Level

- c. On the other hand, as Singaporeans become better educated, they are more receptive to different views, even unorthodox ones. An increasing number of them demand freer access to content and more creative space for self-expression.

Globalisation

- d. Globalisation also creates diverse demand in content choice among Singaporeans.

Advances in Communications Technology

- e. The Internet has a tremendous impact on censorship. Internet access in Singapore is one of the highest in the world, after Finland and the US². Our Internet penetration rate is 59.4%³ while 24.2% of our households have broadband access. There has been a steep rise in the number of young users, mainly students aged 15 to 24, who make up about 45% of broadband users. Both useful and undesirable content is now transmitted easily to our young through the Internet. This development has challenged MDA to review its current censorship policies and guidelines to maintain their relevance.

Attracting Talent

- f. In the Economic Review Committee Report 2003, talent is identified as the key driver of the New Economy. To attract talent, there are calls for an environment with less restrictive censorship guidelines and more diverse choices.

² The Straits Times 20 February 2003, pg A18.
³ Annual Survey on Infocomm Usage in Households and by Individuals for 2002.



PART I:
2.0 OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES
OF CENSORSHIP

With different factors at play, we need to update censorship objectives and principles to meet the long-term interests of our society. This section spells out the objectives and principles developed in this review. They serve as very useful points of reference in reviewing the complex sets of censorship guidelines and related measures.

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PART I: 2.0 OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES OF CENSORSHIP

DEVELOPING OUR OWN APPROACHES

- 2.1 This CRC generally endorses the existing objectives and principles, evolved from recommendations of the CRC 1982 and CRC 1992 reports and refined over the years to reflect the changing environment.
- 2.2 In moving forward, we further update the censorship objectives and principles as follows:

OBJECTIVE 1: FOSTERING AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO DEVELOPING CREATIVITY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

- 2.3 While censorship safeguards society's morals, it should take care not to stifle creativity by being heavy handed. In seeking an optimal balance, we should observe the following:
 - a. Censorship guidelines should be applied with due consideration to the artistic merits of the content.
 - b. Allowing a particular content does not necessarily mean endorsing it.
 - c. The perennial tension between the desire to grant greater artistic freedom and the need to protect moral standards should be discussed through debates in a rational and non-emotional manner.
 - d. To help better understanding and facilitate discussion, there should be broadly-framed content guidelines with greater transparency in censorship matters.

OBJECTIVE 2: BUILDING GREATER SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AMONG THE REGULATORS, INDUSTRY PLAYERS, THE COMMUNITY AND ARTISTS

- 2.4 Censorship Survey 2002 indicated that most people still expect the government to continue playing a leading role in censorship. This is becoming increasingly difficult due to globalisation and technological developments. A more sustainable approach, in the long term, is for the regulators to put in place a set of censorship system and content guidelines and for industry players, community and parents to play the role of a moral marker and to help in the implementation. To effect this change of mindset as early as possible, we need to:

- a. Put in place a framework and momentum that will help encourage greater industry and community involvement in censorship.
- b. Create more opportunities for a tetrapartite partnership involving the regulators, industry players, community and artists.

OBJECTIVE 3: PROVIDING WIDER CHOICE FOR ADULTS

2.5 In response to rising demand for diversity of choice in lifestyle and entertainment and for greater creative space, we should strive to:

- a. Allow greater space and wider choice to adults through suitable distribution channels like classification, zoning and belting.

OBJECTIVE 4: PROTECTING THE YOUNG FROM HARMFUL AND UNSUITABLE CONTENT

2.6 The current policy of protecting the young from harmful and unsuitable content should continue, while allowing wider choice to adults. To achieve this objective, we should:

- a. Impose stricter content standards, especially with regards to violence, for content targeting the young.
- b. Provide consumer advice for sensitive content.
- c. Promote parental guidance in media consumption, particularly as related to censorship.

OBJECTIVE 5: SAFEGUARDING PUBLIC ORDER AND NATIONAL INTERESTS

2.7 We should disallow content that:

- a. Undermines public order or national interests.
- b. Denigrates a race or religion.

2.8 We should nevertheless give some room for public discussion of these issues in a responsible manner, in order to achieve better understanding among the population.

OBJECTIVE 6: SAFEGUARDING MORAL VALUES AND RESPECTING COMMUNITY VALUES

- 2.9 Certain content is clearly immoral and demeaning. We should disallow pornography, deviant sexual practices, sexual violence, child pornography, bestiality, etc. Opinions on other content are less clear-cut, like violence, nudity and homosexuality. Disagreements on these issues among various segments of our society are not unusual. It is therefore necessary to:
- a. Create opportunities for public discussion on sensitive moral issues in a rational manner.
 - b. Adjust content guidelines regularly, taking into consideration changing community values.

OBJECTIVE 7: PROTECTING THE PUBLIC FROM UNSOLICITED CONTENT

- 2.10 When the public is confronted with unsolicited content without a choice, the potential to offend is greater. We should therefore:
- a. Impose stricter standards on content in public spaces.

PART II:
3.0 CENSORSHIP METHODOLOGY:
MANAGING ACCESS AND CONTENT STANDARDS

The methodology of censorship evolves principally around two areas: managing access and fine-tuning content standards to reflect the changing environment. This section looks at how these matters are developed, guided by the strategic directions of censorship objectives and principles.

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PART II: 3.0 CENSORSHIP METHODOLOGY: MANAGING ACCESS AND CONTENT STANDARDS

MANAGING ACCESS

3.1 Access management principally consists of classification, zoning, belting and other regulatory measures.

Classification

3.2 This is the most common censorship tool used by countries in allocating content according to its suitability for the different age groups. The content standards allocated to each age restriction in a classification model, however, differ from country to country largely due to respective social and cultural conditions. In some countries, the age guideline is enforced, but in others it only serves as an advisory.

3.3 Classification is used largely for mediums that are easily classifiable and have wide impact, like films and videos. It is not normally used for mediums that have a high circulation volume and with a time-sensitive market, like daily newspapers and sound recordings.

3.4 Classification is also done through other measures like restricting the sale of a particular publication through subscription, wrapping to prevent unsolicited viewing or displaying consumer advice on its cover about its sensitive content.

Zoning

3.5 Zoning normally refers to confining the access of a particular content to a specific location. An example of this is the current policy of allowing the screening of R(A) films only in cinemas outside HDB estates.

Belting

3.6 Belting refers to confining screening or broadcast time of a particular sensitive content to either late at night or early in the morning to keep it away from unintended viewers, like children.

3.7 Table I shows how the access of various mediums is currently regulated and the proposed changes to the regulations.

| TABLE 1: ACCESS MANAGEMENT BY MEDIUMS | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Mediums | Classification | Zoning | Belting | Other measures ⁱ | Recommendations |
| Films | ◆ | ◆ | – | ◆ ✚ | To fine-tune classification system and introduce consumer advice. |
| Videos | ◆ ⁱⁱ | – | – | ✚ | To extend classification system and introduce consumer advice. To regulate sale and promotion of videos given higher rating. |
| Video Games | ✚ | – | – | ◆ | To introduce classification and consumer advice. |
| Broadcast Media ⁱⁱⁱ | ◆ | – | ◆ | ✚ | To allow more programmes with adult theme and scenes with consumer advice provided, after watershed time. |
| Publications | ✚ | – | – | ◆ | To classify sensitive or adult content through suitable consumer advice or packaging or other regulatory measures. |
| Sound Recordings | – | – | – | ◆ ✚ | To provide consumer advice for sensitive content. |
| In-cinema advertisements and trailers | ◆ | ◆ ^{iv} | ◆ ^v | – | To allow advertisements and trailers with higher ratings if their content standards are suitable for the audience. |
| Arts Entertainment | ◆ | – | – | ◆ ✚ | To exempt pre-vetting of scripts by content. To refine licensing and exemption system. To extend licensing exemption. |
| Internet | ✚ | | | ◆ | To continue with light-touch regulatory approach, and to get industry players to produce an effective filtering system. To encourage adoption of Internet content rating system. |
| Advertisements ^{vi} | – | – | – | ◆ | To continue with current practice of applying stricter standards on advertisements for public display. |

- ◆ Current
- ✚ Proposed

i. Other measures include licensing or provision of MDA's content guidelines to content owners, etc.
 ii. Classification up to PG standard.
 iii. Refers to television and radio broadcast, including Cable and Video-On-Demand.
 iv. In-cinema trailers for R(A) films are restricted to cinemas screening R(A) films.
 v. Advertisements on TV that are unsuitable for children are shown at a late timeslot.
 vi. All mediums are regulated by MDA. Advertisements are regulated jointly with the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS).



MANAGING CONTENT STANDARDS

- 3.8 Content standards are strongly influenced by a country's level of tolerance, acceptance and sensitivity to issues such as race, religion, moral values, violence, sexual content and nudity, homosexuality, coarse language, etc. Content standards are unique to each country.
- 3.9 Apart from these influences, the major issues related to content standards, discussed specifically in Section 5, are also determined by the following general guidelines:
- a. Greater leeway for content:
 - i. Given a higher classification;
 - ii. Targeting a niche audience such as films shown at Singapore International Film Festival;
 - iii. With artistic and educational merits;
 - iv. Wholly consisting of printed words;
 - v. Where the scene is relevant to the context.
 - b. Stricter approach for content when in a medium which has:
 - i. Direct access to homes such as TV or in public space;
 - ii. Higher impact on its audience.

3.10 The current and proposed classifications by mediums and content standards are summarised in Tables 2 and 3.

| TABLE 2: CLASSIFICATION BY MEDIUMS | | |
|---|--|---|
| Mediums | Maximum Standards ⁱ | |
| | Current | Proposed |
| Broadcast media: FTA Cable VOD | PG PG PG | NC15 M18 M18 |
| Films | R(A) | R21 |
| Videos | PG | M18 (for sale) R21 (for approved institutions) |
| Arts entertainment | R18 | R18 |
| Video games | PG | NC15 or equivalent |
| Internet | Internet is not classified but the Class Licensing guidelines stipulate that content which is against public order, public interests and national harmony or offends good taste and decency should not be made available. | |
| Other mediums not classified, such as publications, sound recordings and advertisements | Standards are generally subject to factors such as whether they comprise images or printed words; intrude into public space; easily accessible by the masses and the young; considerations of artistic and educational merits; and contextual relevance. | |

i. The content standards for various ratings are largely based on the film classification system but there may be minor variations among the mediums because of their different reach to audiences.



| TABLE 3: CONTENT STANDARDS | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Issues | Current | Proposed |
| Disallowed categories | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disallow content that undermines public order and the nation's security, denigrates race and religion, or erodes moral values. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue with same approach. |
| Race & Religion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cautious approach adopted. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue with the same approach but to promote better understanding, discussion of sensitive racial and religious issues in films, videos, arts entertainment should be allowed for a higher rating. |
| Moral values | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strike a balance between allowing more space for creativity and maintaining moral standards. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue with the same approach. |
| Homosexuality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content that promotes homosexuality to be disallowed. Films with non-exploitative homosexual theme or scenes allowed only at film festivals. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To allow greater leeway to non-exploitative theme or scenes for adults through suitable channels. |
| Violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More liberal approach is adopted for violence in content. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tighten content standards for violence in lower ratings or content targeting the young. Medium or strong scenes of violence and torture should be given higher ratings. |
| Sexual content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A stricter approach is adopted. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To give greater leeway for content targeting the adult. Depictions of sexual activity and nudity, although non-exploitative, should not be given a lower rating. |
| Coarse language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strict standard is applied for local films and broadcast media. A more liberal approach is practised for sound recordings and imported films. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coarse language should not be used in G rating. Stronger coarse language should be given higher ratings depending on the degree. The same content standards should apply to both imported and local content. |

PART II: 4.0 MANAGING ACCESS

As the impact on audience varies according to mediums, this section examines current guidelines for access management by mediums and proposes changes to keep pace with changing circumstances.



PART II: 4.0 MANAGING ACCESS

4.1 MEDIUMS CONSIDERED

4.1.1 The mediums discussed in this section include films, videos, broadcast media, arts entertainment, video games, advertisements, publications, sound recordings and the Internet.

4.2 FILMS

4.2.1 Film classification was first introduced in 1991 as a three-tier system — General (G), Parental Guidance (PG) and Restricted (Artistic)-21 or R(A). An additional rating, No Children Under 16 (NC16), was introduced in 1992. Since then, the content guidelines for these ratings have been refined over time, in consultation with community groups.

Retaining Age 21 and Renaming R(A) to R21

4.2.2 The age restriction of 21 for R(A) is the highest among countries that have a film rating system. There has been constant public debate on whether the age restriction should be lowered to allow greater access and reflect the maturity of our population. Some have found it ironical that people who are considered old enough to defend the country (National Service) or attend university (for females) are barred from watching R(A) films. The high age restriction has caused some film distributors to cut their films to qualify for a lower rating in order to reach a wider viewer market.

4.2.3 On the other hand, the Censorship Survey 2002 indicates strong public support (65%) for the retention of the age 21 restriction, only a slight dip from 70% in Censorship Survey 1992. This CRC recommends that the age restriction of 21 should continue. Recognising that Singaporeans at the age of 21 are more educated and cosmopolitan, content standards for R(A) films should be given greater leeway in terms of themes and scenes. As “artistic” elements are also found in films shown under the other age restrictions, it is more appropriate to rename R(A) R21 to be in line with the other age-based ratings. Dropping “artistic”, however, does not signal an acceptance of sexually exploitative films.

Introducing Mature 18 (M18)

4.2.4 The age restriction of 21 has deprived the 18-21 age group, which forms a high percentage of cinema-goers, the opportunity to watch good R(A) films. A new age rating of M18 (Mature 18) will allow people in the 18-21 age group to view films such as *Shakespeare in Love* and *American Beauty*. The lower age restriction will

also enable film distributors to reach out to a wider viewer market with minimal or no cuts to films. Such a move is likely to encourage film distributors to accept higher ratings than edit films for a lower rating.

Modifying NCI6 to NC15

- 4.2.5 With the introduction of M18, the age gap between this rating and the current NCI6 would be too narrow. The age restriction of the NCI6 rating should hence be lowered to 15. Given its wider viewer market, this lower age restriction may encourage film distributors to place some films currently edited to a PG standard in the proposed NC15 rating without editing. MDA should make use of the proposed rating to move current PG films with strong violence to NC15, to address the concerns of many parents.

TABLE 4: CURRENT FILM CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

| | | |
|------|--------------------------|----------|
| G | General | Advisory |
| PG | Parental Guidance | Advisory |
| NCI6 | No Children under 16 | Enforced |
| R(A) | Restricted (Artistic) 21 | Enforced |
| RC | Refused Classification | Enforced |

TABLE 5: PROPOSED FILM CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

| | | |
|------|------------------------|----------|
| G | General | Advisory |
| PG | Parental Guidance | Advisory |
| NC15 | No Children under 15 | Enforced |
| M18 | Mature 18 | Enforced |
| R21 | Restricted 21 | Enforced |
| RC | Refused Classification | Enforced |

Releasing Films under a Different Rating

- 4.2.6 Simultaneous dual rating for a film is generally not practised in other countries as it may confuse consumers. This CRC recommends that a film distributor be given a choice to request for the re-release of a previously rated film under a new rating to cater to a different age group of consumers on the condition that the two versions are not screened simultaneously. Sequential dual rating will minimise confusion to the consumers.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Replace current film ratings with Restricted 21 (R21), Mature 18 (M18), No Children Under 15 (NC15), Parental Guidance (PG) and General (G) and make necessary adjustments to their content standards. Cinema operators are to enforce age restrictions according to MDA's licensing conditions.
- Allow sequential dual rating to provide choice to consumers.

Zoning for R21 and M18 Films

- 4.2.7 Following the public outcry in 1991, R(A) films are currently kept away from cinemas within Housing Development Board (HDB) estates to retain their wholesome ambience. The film and video industries have argued that such zoning has forced them to edit films to qualify for a lower rating in order to reach a wider viewer market. If M18 is restricted to cinemas outside HDB estates, it may face similar commercial difficulties, as half the cinemas are now located within HDB estates.
- 4.2.8 This CRC recommends that films up to M18 be allowed in cinemas within HDB estates as the Censorship Survey 2002 shows little divergence of views on censorship matters between HDB and non-HDB dwellers. However, MDA should supervise closely the marketing of M18 films in HDB estates to avoid offending HDB residents in general.
- 4.2.9 The request by cinema operators to allow R21 films in cinemas within HDB estates, however, should be deferred at least until MDA conducts a proper assessment of residents' reactions to the screening of M18 films in cinemas within HDB estates.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Allow up to M18 films in cinemas within HDB estates but regulate their marketing to avoid offending residents in HDB estates.
- Continue to disallow R21 films in cinemas in HDB estates.

4.3 VIDEOS

- 4.3.1 Video classification is commonly practised in countries with film classification. A full video classification similar to that for films is, however, not practised here due to the concerns of CRC 1992 that society was not ready for NC16 and R(A) videos, and enforcement difficulties foreseen. Videos in circulation now are therefore up to PG standard.

4.3.2 Censorship Survey 2002 shows strong public support for applying the film classification system to videos to allow a wider choice to consumers. The video industry has also been calling for such a move.

Sale of Video up to M18 Rating

4.3.3 This CRC agrees with the use of a classification system for videos. For a start, the sale of videos should be allowed up to M18. MDA should also supervise closely their sale and marketing materials to calm the fears of some parents. The circulation of R21 videos should still be disallowed, except in educational institutions and libraries approved by MDA as an in-house reference service to persons aged 21 and above.

4.3.4 A video title is normally owned or distributed by more than one company, unlike a film title, which usually has one distributor only. Allowing each individual video distributor to opt for his choice of rating through editing may lead to multiple ratings of a video title, which will confuse consumers. For this reason, MDA should decide on the rating of a video title, based on its original content.

4.3.5 There should be no restrictions on the location of outlets selling NC15 and M18 videos. However, as the young may frequent such outlets, the sale and marketing of NC15 and M18 videos should be regulated by MDA to reduce their attraction to the under-aged.

TABLE 6: CURRENT VIDEO CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

| | | |
|----|------------------------|----------|
| G | General | Advisory |
| PG | Parental Guidance | Advisory |
| RC | Refused Classification | Enforced |

TABLE 7: PROPOSED VIDEO CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

| | | |
|------|------------------------|----------|
| G | General | Advisory |
| PG | Parental Guidance | Advisory |
| NC15 | No Children Under 15 | Enforced |
| M18 | Mature 18 | Enforced |
| RC | Refused Classification | Enforced |



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Introduce a full video classification system similar to that for film. But the sale of videos should be allowed up to M18 only, with no zoning that restricts location of sale outlets. MDA should, however, regulate the sale and marketing to prevent abuse.
- Allow R21 videos at educational institutions and libraries approved by MDA for in-house reference.
- MDA should determine the rating of a video title, based on its original content, to avoid multiple ratings of the same title.

4.4 ADVERTISEMENTS FOR NC15 AND M18 FILMS AND VIDEOS

4.4.1 Many countries closely regulate the marketing of adult rated films and videos to avoid offending unsolicited viewers and attracting the under-aged. For the same reasons, MDA currently allows trailers for R(A) films only during the screening of R(A) films in cinemas, and those for NC16 films only during the screening of NC16 or R(A) films or after 10.00 pm on FTA TV.

4.4.2 The film and video industry has asked for removal of the restriction on in-cinema trailers for R(A) films. This CRC recommends that the restriction on in-cinema R21 trailers should continue, while the screening of in-cinema trailers for M18 and NC15 films should be allowed if their content corresponds to or is of a lower rating than the film during which they are shown. Similarly the trailers of NC15 and M18 films should be allowed on FTA TV if they are edited to suit the general audience.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to confine the showing of in-cinema trailers for R21 films to during the screening of R21 films.
- In-cinema trailers of NC15 and M18 films should correspond to or be of a lower rating to the film during which they are shown.
- NC15 and M18 trailers should be allowed on FTA TV if edited to a standard suitable to the general TV viewers.

4.5 BROADCAST MEDIA

Providing Wider Choice in Programmes

4.5.1 At present, classification of broadcast media is limited to a PG rating imposed on programmes which may have some adult content. Broadcasters regulate their programmes in accordance with the Programme Codes issued by MDA. Under the Codes, broadcast media observes stricter content standards than

films and videos because of its easy access in homes. Among the various broadcast media, Cable TV international and premium tiers and Video-on-Demand (VOD) services are given greater leeway than FTA TV as the former two are available only to subscribers.

4.5.2 There have been criticisms that the choice of TV programmes available to the Singapore adult is rather limited, compared with other countries. An example given is the absence of the series *Sex and the City*. About 58% of respondents in the Censorship Survey 2002 favour some degree of relaxation for FTA TV programmes through belting. Nevertheless, some parents still fear that despite the late hours, it is still possible for children to gain access to adult-content programmes.

4.5.3 This CRC recommends the use of classification and belting to widen the choice of TV programmes for adult viewers. For FTA TV, programmes up to NC15 content standards should be allowed after 10.00 pm. For Cable TV international and premium tiers and VOD services which have 'lock up' capabilities to prevent access by children, programmes with content standards up to M18 programmes should be allowed but confining M18 content on Cable TV after 10.00 pm. Consumer advice should be provided to complement the screening of NC15 and M18 programmes.

4.5.4 Another issue of contention is the stricter content standards applied to local TV productions than imported ones. The current FTA TV Programme Code assumes that local productions have a greater influence on local viewers because they can more easily identify themselves with the lifestyle and values being portrayed. This CRC does not believe that local content has a greater influence and that they should be subject to more restrictions than foreign ones. Both should be equally subject to the same content standards.



| TABLE 8: CLASSIFICATION FOR FTA TV, CABLE TV INTERNATIONAL AND PREMIUM TIERS, AND VOD SERVICES | | |
|--|--|--|
| | Current | Proposed |
| FTA TV | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PG standard after 10.00 pm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to NC15 progressively after 10.00 pm with consumer advice |
| Cable TV | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to PG | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> M18 programmes after 10.00 pm with consumer advice |
| VOD | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to PG | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to M18 with consumer advice |

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Provide adults a wider choice by progressively allowing NC15 standard programmes on FTA TV after 10.00 pm and M18 programmes on Cable TV international and premium tiers after 10.00 pm and VOD services. These programmes are to be accompanied by appropriate consumer advice.
- MDA should apply the same content standards for all TV programmes regardless of whether they are locally produced or otherwise.

4.6 ARTS ENTERTAINMENT

4.6.1 Arts entertainment refers to variety shows, dramas, performance art, forum theatre, arts exhibitions and related activities regulated by MDA under the Public Entertainments and Meetings Act (PEMA). Currently, an arts event requires a licence from MDA, except for certain exempted events such as Chinese opera, busking and lion or dragon dances. A theatre group needs to submit the script of a play to MDA for prior consultation, unless it is one of the theatre groups which have been exempted because of their proven track record. MDA seeks the views of the Drama Review Committee set up after CRC 1992 on the suitability of the script, if necessary.

4.6.2 In the name of creativity, some arts groups⁴ have asked that script pre-vetting and arts licensing be replaced by rating, zoning and belting as regulatory tools for arts entertainment. They feel that no arts entertainment should be banned or disallowed through censorship. If an arts entertainment is sensitive, it should still be allowed to a niche audience but kept away from unsolicited audiences through rating, zoning and belting. Dispute on the content of arts entertainment should be debated in public forums. If it undermines public order, enforcement action by the regulators can be taken against the arts group after the event. Parallels have been drawn with other countries where there is no licensing or script pre-vetting of arts entertainment.

4.6.3 There are several reasons for the request to adopt a light-touch approach:

- a. Through international arts festivals and cultural exchanges, artists are aware of the creative space in other countries and want to be treated the same way in Singapore.
- b. It is in the nature of arts to challenge convention. Artists will push the creative envelope in their bid to explore new artistic limits.

⁴ Arts Community Proposal was submitted by some arts groups in October 2002 to the CRC when it held its public consultation process.

4.6.4 There are dissenting views too. Some have argued that while it is right for artists to challenge the artistic limits, it is also their duty to educate their audience to preserve social harmony. Artists must know whether the people are ready for change and, if so, must find ways to do it in an acceptable manner. Besides the arts groups, participants in other focus group discussions have expressed concern against allowing complete freedom for arts entertainment, as the young comprise an increasing proportion of the theatre-going audiences⁵. In fact, surveys commissioned by various agencies show that arts entertainment appeals mainly to a niche market of young and educated adults. Arts activities are most popular among the younger age groups of 15-19 and 20-34⁶.

Taking a balanced approach

4.6.5 Considering the various arguments, there is a need to design a regulatory system to provide access to a greater diversity of creative expression. But the system should also protect minors and safeguard against social disorder. This system consists of script vetting, licensing, classification and consumer advice and involvement of the citizenry committees as summarised in the following table:

| TABLE 9: RECOMMENDATIONS ON ARTS ENTERTAINMENT | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| | Script Pre-Vetting | Licensing | Classification & Consumer Advice | Citizenry Committees |
| Current | Only 18 theatre groups exempted from pre-vetting of scripts. | Event-based licensing for all performances except those exempted from licensing. | R18 - Enforce the age restriction. Consumer advice only for selected sensitive content. | Drama Review Committee advises MDA on suitability of scripts for staging. |
| Proposed | No pre-vetting of scripts except for sensitive content for all theatre groups. Replace current exemption given to selected theatre groups from pre-vetting of scripts. | Two-year term licensing for all performances except those already exempted from licensing. Extend exemption from licensing to more categories. | R18 - Enforce the age restriction. Prominent display of consumer advice for all sensitive content, especially R18 plays for which advice should be compulsory. | Drama Review Committee to continue to advise MDA on suitability of scripts for staging. Appeal Committee to be appointed by MITA Minister to give advice on appeal cases. |

⁵ In the National Population Survey on Arts 2002 conducted by the National Arts Council, the number of older teens (15-19) attending arts performances and exhibitions doubled from 1999.

⁶ National Population Survey on Arts 1999 and 2002.



Script Vetting

- a. Abolition of censorship is not advisable in the context of our multi-racial and multi-religious society. However, this CRC recommends no pre-vetting of scripts except for plays on race and religion or on subjects which could potentially undermine national stability or core moral values. MDA should work with the National Arts Council (NAC) and the arts groups to draw up specific guidelines to achieve better understanding of the acceptable parameters. This should replace the present system where arts groups are exempted from pre-vetting of scripts based on their track record. The new approach would benefit all arts groups rather than just those currently exempted.

Licensing

- b. Licensing for arts entertainment is still necessary. Licensing allows the regulator to attach content guidelines for industry players to observe. But the present event-based licensing should be replaced with a two-year term licence to better facilitate arts groups. MDA should also put in place mechanisms to give automatic renewal of licence for arts groups with a good track record.
- c. MDA should also extend the current exemption from licensing to more innocuous arts genres, such as activities for and by children, traditional performances and instrumental music.

Classification

- d. The current rating of PG and R(A) for plays should continue. R18, replacing R(A), should be an enforceable category. The age restriction of 18 is lower for plays than for films, as the former serves a niche audience.
- e. The current practice of using consumer advice should be continued for all plays with sensitive content, especially those rated R18, for which consumer advice should be made compulsory.

Citizenry Committees

- f. Involvement of citizenry committees in arts entertainment is discussed in Section 6, Part III.

Funding for Performance Art and Forum Theatre

- 4.6.6 There has been considerable feedback and requests from the arts groups to reinstate funding for performance art and forum theatre. As the two art forms are currently not banned, this is not a censorship issue. This CRC, however, calls on government agencies to give the same funding support to the two art forms as to all other forms of arts entertainment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to allow greater leeway to arts entertainment in terms of content standards, due to its niche audience.
- Exempt pre-vetting of scripts if content of a play is not on race, religion or does not undermine national stability or core values.
- Replace current event-based licence with a two-year term licence.
- Extend current exemption from licensing to more categories of innocuous arts entertainment.
- Although not a censorship issue, this CRC supports the call by arts groups for government agencies to give funding support to performance art and forum theatre, as with other forms of arts entertainment.

4.7 VIDEO GAMES

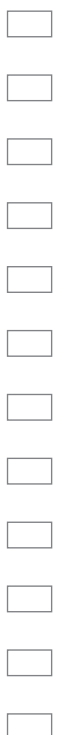
4.7.1 At present, there is no video game classification in Singapore. MDA only issues content guidelines to video game importers disallowing import of video games with content that exploits sex and violence or denigrates a race or religion.

4.7.2 Concerns have been expressed internationally and domestically over the potential harm of increasingly violent content in video games on children, psychologically and emotionally, due to the intense interactive nature of such games. With more than 4,000 video game titles imported yearly into Singapore and the number of video game centres increasing from 51 in 1999 to 170 in 2001, a similar concern was expressed by the Police Advisory Panel for Licensing in its 2001 report which examined licensing issues on public entertainment.

Classification

4.7.3 To address these concerns, this CRC calls for the introduction of classification for video games based on the system adopted by the US Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). The US classification system is recommended as it is well established and a majority of the games imported here is from the US. However, video games with content currently unacceptable to MDA or which are beyond the NC15 equivalent should continue to be disallowed.

4.7.4 Since the bulk of the video games would have already been classified by parent companies before they are exported to Singapore and the game importers are quite familiar with the game classification system, they should carry out the classification of the games. This will enable faster clearance of the games for a time-sensitive market and encourage greater industry responsibility. This CRC recommends that the video game importers form an industry group to work with MDA on the classification. The importers should implement the ESRB



classification system within two years. Otherwise, MDA should find alternative arrangements to enforce the classification of video games.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Introduce video game classification based on the classification system of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) in the US. But, content currently unacceptable to MDA should continue to be disallowed.
- MDA should ensure that video game importers implement the ESRB classification system within two years, preferably by an association of the game industry. Otherwise, MDA should find alternative ways to enforce the classification.

4.8 ADVERTISEMENTS

4.8.1 Advertisements refer to posters or billboards displayed in public places, and publicity materials for films, plays, publications, etc. At present, stricter content standards are applied to advertisements in public places (in view of their unsolicited viewing) and in mediums that have wider impact on the general public, such as advertisements on TV. The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS) lays down the broad industry codes for the advertising industry. These codes are reviewed periodically by ASAS, with the latest review taking place in March 2003. MDA guides the advertising industry as and when the need arises. For TV broadcasts, MDA issues advertising codes to broadcasters, which carry stricter standards than that for the print media due to its wider reach. Current content standards for advertisements received strong support (69%) from the respondents in the Censorship Survey 2002, even though the advertising industry has called for a relaxation of content guidelines for advertisements in public places.

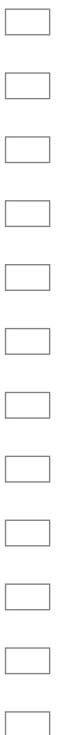
4.8.2 This CRC supports the current policy of according stricter content standards for advertisements in public places and in mediums that have wider impact. It also recommends that the standard of decency should be assessed from the presentation of content and not the product advertised.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue with current policy of imposing stricter content standards for advertisements in public places and in mediums that have greater impact on the general audience.
- Assess the suitability of an advertisement on the presentation of the content and not on the product advertised.
- The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore and MDA should continue to work together in regulating the content standards for advertisements.

4.9 PUBLICATIONS

- 4.9.1 The content standards for local and foreign publications are regulated through the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) and the Undesirable Publications Act (UPA) administered by MDA. Local publications require a permit under the NPPA. Importers of foreign publications are registered under the MDA's Registered Importers Scheme which requires them not to import publications that may denigrate race and religion, undermine the moral values of our society or prejudice public order.
- 4.9.2 In recent years, some popular local lifestyle magazines have become almost as liberal as their imported counterparts in terms of content standards. While this trend may have been brought about by readers who have become open-minded, it does raise a censorship concern.
- 4.9.3 At present, there is no classification system for publications. Hence, publications with sensitive content may be disallowed or banned as in the case of *Playboy* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines. Some have argued that unless a publication far exceeds society's acceptance level, like *Playboy*, it should be allowed access to adult readers through the following means:
- a. Classifying the publication by allowing its sale only to those above a certain age.
 - b. Allowing its sale through subscription only.
 - c. Using cellophane paper to wrap the publication to avoid unsolicited viewing and reading at retail outlets.
 - d. Using suitable consumer advice to alert potential buyers of sensitive content in the publication.
 - e. Regulating its promotion and advertising to reduce its appeal to non-targeted readers.



4.9.4 With the control measures in place, publications with content that may be sensitive to some should be allowed. Similarly, local publications like lifestyle magazines should be subjected to access controls, if their content standards pose a public concern.

4.9.5 This CRC does not recommend a full classification system for publications, as in the case for films and videos, as public concern is currently confined to certain content genres, like lifestyle magazines. Operationally, it is also difficult for MDA to implement and enforce a full classification system, in view of the high volume of publications in circulation and the time-sensitive nature of the publication market. There are about 1.5 million titles imported yearly and some 4,000 local publications in the market.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A full classification system, as in the case for films and videos, is not necessary or practical for local and foreign publications.
- But, allow permissible publications where content may be sensitive to some, through suitable channels to adult readers.

4.10 SOUND RECORDINGS

4.10.1 Sound recordings refer to audio tapes, compact discs, and other similar forms of products. MDA adopts a light-touch approach towards the regulation of sound recordings by requiring the importers to regulate content based on its guidelines. Public concern over sound recordings has been confined to some coarse language in songs. To address this, this CRC recommends that importers of sound recordings should display consumer advice, alerting potential buyers to sensitive content in songs. While some importers have already introduced such consumer advice, MDA should work with all importers for the introduction of consumer advice for all sensitive sound recordings.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Continue to allow the industry players to regulate sound recordings in accordance with MDA's content guidelines. But, MDA should require them to display consumer advice, alerting potential buyers to sensitive content in songs.

4.11 INTERNET

4.11.1 The popularity of the Internet has continued to grow unabated. With faster speed and better compression technology in the future, the Internet is rapidly evolving into a broadcast medium with the ability to deliver rich multimedia content.

Light-touch Approach

4.11.2 Currently, MDA regulates the Internet through a licensing scheme and the Internet Code of Practice, which is a set of MDA guidelines for the industry players to observe. This CRC agrees with the light-touch approach adopted for the Internet, considering the business costs of a prescriptive approach.

4.11.3 However, more can be done to promote industry responsibility over this area, particularly in the areas of Code of Conduct and Content Rating. The Internet Service Providers (ISPs) should develop and voluntarily subscribe to Industry Codes of Conduct, which could eventually replace the MDA guidelines. The UK Home Office's Good Practice Models and Guidance for the Internet is a good example of such a code of conduct. Internet Content Providers (ICPs) who operate their own websites should label and rate their online content using any reputable Internet classification system available, such as that used by the Internet Content Rating Agency, based in Geneva.

Family Access Network

4.11.4 MDA works with the three main ISPs in Singapore to provide Family Access Network (FAN) services. These networks filter out pornographic and other undesirable sites to help parents manage their children's Internet access. The take-up rate for FAN, however, remains low.

4.11.5 To address this, the existing ISPs should be encouraged to speed up the development of user-friendly filtering features for parents within the next two years, with support from MDA in research and development. The system should also be marketed extensively by the ISPs. If the industry does not devote sufficient effort to develop an appropriate system, MDA should impose other measures to protect the young from harmful content.

100 Banned Websites

4.11.6 The symbolic ban on the list of 100 websites has attracted international attention. It has served as a symbolic statement on the kind of content unacceptable to society. The 100 banned sites should be updated to include other harmful content such as those which promote paedophilia and child pornography. This symbolic ban should remain until MDA or industry players find a viable alternative.



Public Education

- 4.11.7 Regulation of the Internet is currently supported by the Parents Advisory Group for the Internet⁷ (PAGi). In addition to parents, a special multi-agency task force involving government, industry players and parents or civic groups should be set up by MDA to spearhead a high-profile, wide-ranging and sustained public education programme to inculcate a sound Net culture among users in Singapore.
- 4.11.8 The multi-agency task force could develop programmes to impart to our youths not just technical knowledge about the Internet but also the capacity to handle its content. Government support will be needed in particular, for a cyber youth mentoring programme that teaches youths to be responsible and discerning users of the medium.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue with light-touch regulation.
- Update the symbolic ban on the 100 websites to include sites with other harmful content such as paedophilia and child pornography. This symbolic ban will remain until MDA finds a viable alternative.
- Internet Content Providers should label their websites using any reputable international content rating system.
- Internet Service Providers should develop and subscribe to a code of conduct and put greater effort in protecting the young by developing an effective filtering system within a period of two years. Otherwise MDA should impose other effective measures.
- MDA should set up a multi-agency task force to study the inculcation of appropriate Net culture among the young through public education programmes.

⁷ Formed in Nov 99, PAGi is a parents volunteer group which aims to develop and sustain a long-term programme to educate and empower parents with the skills to guide their children when using the Internet

PART II:
5.0 CONTENT STANDARDS

Censorship is essentially about the level of tolerance, acceptance and sensitivity towards issues such as race and religion, moral values, violence, sexual content and nudity, and coarse language. This section looks at these issues in the Singapore context.



PART II: 5.0 CONTENT STANDARDS

5.1 ASPECTS OF CONTENT

5.1.1 The content discussed in this section covers race and religion, moral values, homosexuality, violence, sexual content and nudity, coarse language and a peculiarly Singaporean issue, Chinese dialects.

5.2 CONTENT DISALLOWED

5.2.1 It is difficult to enforce content guidelines on mediums such as the Internet. Nevertheless, the following guidelines for content standards should still be applicable to all mediums:

- a. Should not undermine public order and the nation's security.
- b. Should not denigrate race and religion.
- c. Should not erode the core moral values of society, through content such as pornography, deviant sexual practices, sexual violence, child pornography and bestiality, etc.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Continue to disallow content that undermines public order and the nation's security, denigrates race and religion or erodes moral values through pornography, deviant sexual practices, sexual violence, child pornography, bestiality, etc.

5.3 RACE AND RELIGION

5.3.1 Content that denigrates any race or religion should continue to be disallowed. However, as a long-term strategy, there is a need to gradually enlarge the common space for discussion of these sensitive issues through the various mediums to help promote greater understanding, tolerance and harmony among the different segments of our society.

5.3.2 Disagreements on the appropriate line to draw cannot be totally avoided. Such matters should continue to be resolved through the existing consultation process led by the advisory and the appeal committees representing various segments of society. Members of these committees should function in their individual capacity,

in order to maintain objectivity and to serve the common good of ordinary Singaporeans. Where necessary, there should be consultation with the relevant religious groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to disallow content that denigrates any race or religion.
- Gradually enlarge common space for discussion of racial and religious issues through the various mediums, as a long-term approach in fostering racial and religious understanding and harmony.

5.4 MORAL VALUES

5.4.1 In Singapore's context, censorship plays a role in fostering a morally wholesome and socially cohesive society. It helps safeguard core community values such as the importance of the family, respect for one's elders, moral integrity, etc. We have to strike a balance between allowing individuals more space for creativity and maintaining moral standards. Importing norms from societies that are culturally different from us would not work for our society.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Continue to strike a balance between allowing more space for creativity and maintaining moral standards.

5.5 HOMOSEXUALITY

5.5.1 Currently, MDA takes a cautious approach towards homosexual content, even though the CRC 1992 allowed it, if not promotional in nature. Publications and arts entertainment, unlike films, are given greater leeway in dealing with homosexual issues as their impact is either on individuals or on smaller audience sizes. Films dealing with homosexual themes and scenes in a non-exploitative or non-promotional manner are allowed only at the Singapore International Film Festival (SIFF) but not for commercial release.

5.5.2 Some sectors, especially arts groups, have called for greater space for content on homosexuality, especially in films. For example, they have requested for the same treatment given to SIFF to be given for commercial screening, with *Lan Yu*⁸ being the most notable example.

⁸ *Lan Yu* is based on a Chinese online gay novel, *Beijing Story*. It is the story of a businessman who finds true love with Lan Yu, a university student with whom he had originally only planned for a casual sexual relationship. It depicts the compelling nature of a same sex relationship. Under this CRC, *Lan Yu* should be allowed for commercial screening under R21 rating.

5.5.3 Censorship surveys have shown that half the respondents did not object to allowing access to non-exploitative content dealing with homosexuality. Similar sentiment was also expressed by most participants at this CRC's focus group discussions. Nevertheless, it is still a sensitive subject in our society. Some segments hold the view that allowing content on homosexuality in the public domain will be taken as an endorsement by the authorities. However, as a matter of principle, a decision made by the authorities to allow depiction of certain lifestyles or values under content guidelines should not mean official endorsement for the content. Consumers should exercise their judgement and take responsibility for their choice. There is a need for public education on this matter. In the final analysis, this CRC recommends that content with homosexual themes or scenes should be given greater leeway for adults, so long as they are not exploitative. In examining the issue, MDA should give greater consideration to factors like artistic merit of a content and whether a scene is relevant to the context.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Take a more flexible and contextual approach when dealing with homosexual themes and scenes in content.
- Allow greater leeway for adults, through suitable channels, to access such content provided it is not exploitative.

5.6 VIOLENCE

5.6.1 The wide availability of media content with a high level of violence, including some children's comics, is common to Asian societies. While there is still no conclusive link between a high level of violence in mediums and a high crime rate, there have been periodic concerns in the West over the linkage between the two, most recently after the school killings in the US. These have resulted in calls for tightening violent content, especially in their respective domestic TV. In fact, the US Federal Trade Commission recently called for a tightening of violence in video games, films and videos and controls over their promotion and advertising, after the shooting incidents in schools.

5.6.2 Participants at focus group discussions have also called for a tightening of violence in content meant for children, especially in TV programmes, and for more consumer advice. For example, films such as *The Patriot*, *Gladiator* and *We Were Soldiers*⁹ should have been given a higher rating here. This CRC recommends that MDA give higher ratings or require late hour TV broadcast for content with strong violence or elements of torture. MDA should also tighten the sale of children's comics with strong violence.

⁹ These films were given higher ratings of "I 8" in the US. Persons below 17 must be accompanied by an adult to watch these films.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Impose stricter standards for content with strong violence or elements of torture, targeting the young through higher ratings, late hour belting, control of sale and provision of consumer advice.

5.7 SEXUAL CONTENT AND NUDITY

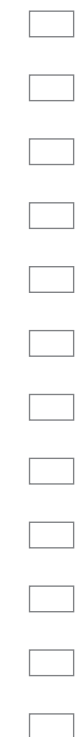
5.7.1 Currently, MDA is relatively strict with the depiction of sex and nudity in the various mediums. Hence, the TV programme *Sex and the City* is not allowed for Cable TV broadcast; *Playboy* is banned; and explicit sex scenes are edited from R(A) films. Some segments of our society are critical of such a conservative position, which contrasts with MDA's relatively liberal treatment towards violence.

5.7.2 Although some may not find content depicting sex and nudity offensive, censorship should also consider the views of those who feel differently. We need to strike a balance between these two opposing views. With the access controls in place, greater leeway should be accorded to depiction of non-exploitative sex and nudity targeting adults. Greater weightage should also be given to the relevance of the scenes to the context. In line with this stand, this CRC recommends lifting the ban on magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and allowing programmes such as *Sex and the City*. Such content can be made available through suitable distribution channels to prevent unsolicited viewing and protect the young. However, content that does not meet the general guidelines of MDA should still be disallowed. With regards to *Playboy* magazine, our community is not ready for its liberal use of sexually explicit photographs.

5.7.3 While allowing adults greater leeway in sexual content and nudity, MDA should continue to impose stricter control on the use of such content in public space, such as public billboards, video walls, advertising materials, general public performances, covers of magazines, newspapers etc. This CRC urges media owners and advertisers to exercise restraint when such content is intended for public space, easily accessible to the young.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Allow greater leeway to non-exploitative sex and nudity relevant to the context in content for adults. But, continue to impose stricter standards for such content in public space.
- Allow adults access to magazines such as *Comopolitan* and programmes such as *Sex and the City* through suitable distribution channels.



5.8 COARSE LANGUAGE

5.8.1 Coarse language is not a major censorship issue with MDA which has been relatively liberal towards it in sound recordings and imported films. But MDA adopts a stricter standard with coarse language in local films and the broadcast media, because of their greater impact on local audiences. This CRC recommends that content with strong coarse language be placed in appropriate higher ratings to protect the young. The same content standard should also be applied to coarse language in local and foreign content, taking into consideration the impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Impose a stricter standard for coarse language in content, especially those for the young.
- Apply the same standard for coarse language in local and foreign content, taking into consideration the impact.

5.9 CHINESE DIALECTS

5.9.1 As a national policy to support the Speak Mandarin Campaign, films and broadcast media are currently not allowed to use dialects other than in exceptional circumstances. For example, local and foreign films are only allowed limited dialect use if the storyline calls for it. Full dialect use is only allowed on Cable TV, Arts Central on FTA TV, videos and some radio news bulletins to cater to older dialect-speaking Singaporeans.

5.9.2 Connected to this review, film and broadcast industry players and focus group participants have called for some relaxation on dialect use in films and TV programmes. They have argued that the relaxation would have minimal impact on young Chinese Singaporeans who now already speak fluent Mandarin. The Promote Mandarin Council also sees English as a bigger obstacle to the learning of Mandarin than dialects. MDA's Programme Advisory Committee and its Chinese Programme Advisory Committee, in their 2003 Annual Reports, also recommended that dialect use be allowed gradually on FTA TV on condition that the relaxation does not go against the objective of the Speak Mandarin Campaign. However, there has not been any recent research study on the possible impact of the use of dialect in films and TV programmes on the level of Mandarin proficiency.

5.9.3 The current policy of allowing films with occasional dialects in cinemas and full dialect use on Cable TV, Arts Central on FTA TV, videos and some radio news has catered to the need of the dialect speaking Chinese. This policy should continue. With the understanding that it should not undermine the efforts of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, this CRC recommends the extension of this policy by allowing films with full dialect content limited screening at cinemas, with a single film print per title, for this group of Chinese.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Continue to allow films with limited use of dialects, and full dialect use on Cable TV, Arts Central on FTA TV, videos, and some radio news. But, extend this further by allowing limited screening of full Chinese dialect films at cinemas on a single film print per title basis.

PART III:
6.0 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Greater involvement by the community not only contributes to more sensitive guidelines and sensitive interpretation of them, but also enables the public to be better informed and take on greater responsibility. This section explores further ways and means to involve the community.



PART III: 6.0 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

6.1 FORMS OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

6.1.1 Community involvement takes many forms. This section touches on advisory and appeal committees, timely reviews and public education.

6.2 ADVISORY COMMITTEE

6.2.1 Currently, advisory committees have been set up for films, publications, broadcast media and arts entertainment. They are consulted whenever decisions need to be made on controversial content or in assessing content standards of a particular medium like TV programmes on a yearly basis. The committee members, comprising people from a cross section of society, are appointed by MITA.

6.2.2 This consultative process should be maintained with greater involvement from the community. To dispel the nagging discomfort that the MITA-appointed committee members tend to be pro-government, a third of the members should be nominated by the public, subject to approval by MITA. In the same spirit, all members should preferably sit on the committees as individuals in their personal capacities, rather than as official representatives of any organisation or interest group.

6.2.3 Apart from the MITA-appointed advisory committees, MDA should explore other ways to strengthen the current community consultation process such as the creation of suitable dialogue platforms for industry players, parents and students, and consumer groups like the Consumer Association of Singapore (CASE).

6.3 APPEAL COMMITTEE

6.3.1 The current framework allows industry players to appeal against any content decision made by MDA through various appeal committees appointed by MITA. Only the Films Appeal Committee is currently given a final say in appeal cases under the Films Act. The other appeal committees perform an advisory role. At present, only arts entertainment has no appeal committee, although one with an advisory role was recommended by the CRC 1992.

6.3.2 There have been calls, largely from the arts community, for greater community involvement in the appeal process through the creation of an appeal committee for arts entertainment and to give final say to other appeal committees in appeal cases. In their view, the community is mature enough to play a more independent role in the consultation process.

6.3.3 This CRC encourages greater community involvement in the appeal process. In order that every content medium has its own appeal committee, an appeal committee for arts entertainment should be set up by MITA to advise the Minister. Further, as in the case of advisory committees, a third of all appeal committee members should be nominated by the public, subject to Minister's approval.

6.3.4 For the time being, the status quo of retaining the final say with the Minister should be maintained, except for the Films Appeal Committee, largely because the majority of the public still expect the government to play a leading role in censorship. This CRC however recommends that, in the longer term, the appeal committees should be given greater arbitrating power on appeal cases.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue with the current consultation process with greater participation from the community. Allow a third of members in advisory and appeal committees to be nominated by the public, subject to the Minister's approval on the final member list.
- Establish an appeal committee for arts entertainment to advise the Minister.
- In the longer term, appeal committees should be given greater arbitrating power on appeal cases.
- MDA should explore more platforms to involve industry players, community and consumer groups, like CASE, in the consultation process.

6.4 TIMELY REVIEWS

6.4.1 Over the years, regulators have reviewed and modified censorship guidelines, with inputs from the advisory and appeal committees, industry players and the public. While such a graduated approach is much needed, it is still useful to convene a major comprehensive review of censorship, like this CRC, at shorter intervals, for an overhaul of policies and guidelines, in response to the changing environment. In addition, MDA should evaluate specific censorship issues like the community's tolerance level towards violence and sex, as and when the need arises.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Continue to convene major comprehensive reviews of censorship policies and guidelines like the CRC at shorter intervals. MDA should also evaluate specific censorship issues as and when the need arises.



6.5 PUBLIC EDUCATION

6.5.1 Public education has been increasingly co-opted as an additional tool by western countries to complement the censorship efforts. There is a similar call here from the public, media and arts groups in order to prepare our society for the day when advances in technology make access control practically impossible.

6.5.2 Unlike western countries, the current level of public education efforts by MDA, the news media and civic groups has quite a way to go. At present, PAGi, set up by MDA to educate parents to guard their children against unsuitable Internet content, and the Learning Journeys Programme jointly organised by MDA and the Ministry of Education to educate students on media in Singapore, are some of the better known education programmes. The culture of parental guidance in censorship is not yet well developed. Similarly, the industry players are hardly involved in educating their consumers, especially about sensitive content.

6.5.3 MDA and industry players should play greater roles in the following educational efforts:

Educating consumers on the content

6.5.4 MDA and industry players should educate consumers of sensitive content to help them make informed choices. In this connection, MDA should have a website on censorship guidelines on films, videos, publications, arts entertainment and broadcast media, and timely censorship decisions. The website could link to relevant established local and international websites. MDA should also set up a central hotline to deal with all censorship queries. Similarly, the industry players could provide background information about a film, publication, TV programme, etc as public education through their websites or the news media.

Promoting a culture of community and parental guidance

6.5.5 MDA should create a media education multi-agency council to help promote community and parental guidance in censorship, as a long-term education strategy. The council should include industry players, parents, educationists, media experts and other relevant people. MDA should study this recommendation further and seek the necessary funding from the government and industry players to realise the objective.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

MDA should:

- Work with industry players to explore ways to educate consumers on sensitive content to help them make informed choices.
- Expand its public education programmes to include setting up a website and a central hotline for censorship issues.
- Create a multi-agency council to inculcate community and parental guidance in censorship as a long-term public education strategy.

PART III:
7.0 INDUSTRY RESPONSIBILITY

In censorship, industry players perform as crucial a role as the government.
A responsible and civic-minded industry makes a meaningful partnership
with the regulators. This section outlines how this objective can be achieved.



PART III: 7.0 INDUSTRY RESPONSIBILITY

7.1 INDUSTRY PLAYERS AS KEY PARTNERS

7.1.1 Industry players can help nurture a more enlightened and efficient censorship environment through consumer advice and joint regulation, including responsibility for film classification. To achieve this, the regulators need to work towards a set of more transparent policies and guidelines.

7.2 CONSUMER ADVICE

7.2.1 Consumer advice refers to the advisory label provided by content providers to notify consumers about the principal elements that have contributed to the rating given to a particular content, or about the sensitive content in it, such as “strong violence” and “strong coarse language”. It is usually used on the product packaging and advertising materials for films, videos and video games and in some instances publications, arts entertainment and sound recordings. It is more widely practised in countries with a strong culture of parental guidance and civic consciousness.

7.2.2 At present, the use of consumer advice is neither mandatory nor common in Singapore. Some imported video games and sound recordings contain such advice. Local arts entertainment and TV programmes also use it for sensitive content. This CRC recommends that industry players use consumer advice to facilitate informed choices and to raise awareness and understanding of ratings and content sensitivities among parents and consumers. This sentiment is similarly reflected in the Censorship Survey 2002, with 75% of respondents calling for greater use of consumer advice.

7.2.3 This CRC recommends that:

- a. For a start, consumer advice be made mandatory for films and videos. As the two mediums are currently rated by MDA, standard wordings could be provided by MDA for use as consumer advice, as part of the rating requirement.
- b. Industry players should continue to provide consumer advice for broadcast media and arts entertainment. For other mediums like publications and sound recordings, industry players should do so when the need arises. With classification, industry players should also step up the use of consumer advice for video games. MDA should enforce compliance.
- c. Consumer advice should be provided for content with scenes or themes that may disturb some, such as violence, gore, horror, sexual content, nudity, coarse language, drug consumption, homosexuality and discussion on sensitive subjects like race and religion.

- d. The display of consumer advice should be prominent on product packaging or advertising materials or at points of sale. Industry players should also consider using on-line consumer advice for some of the mediums. For example, in the US, the Parental Media Guide¹⁰ provided by the entertainment industry gives information on movies to aid parents.
- e. Industry players should not exploit consumer advice as a marketing tool by using sensational advisory labels. They should work with MDA to draw up a set of suitable advisory labels, such as replacing the wordings with a set of abbreviated symbols.

TABLE 10: CONSUMER ADVICE BY MEDIUMS AND CONTENT

| Medium | Provider | Examples of Sensitive Content |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Films ▪ Videos | MDA to issue standard wordings for consumer advice, as part of the rating requirement. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Violence, gore, horror ▪ Sexual content and nudity ▪ Coarse language |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broadcast media ▪ Arts entertainment ▪ Publications ▪ Sound recordings ▪ Video games | Industry players to provide consumer advice. MDA to work with them on a set of suitable advisory labels and enforce compliance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drug consumption ▪ Homosexuality ▪ Race and religion |

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Industry players to make greater use of consumer advice for sensitive content such as violence, gore, horror, sexual content and nudity, coarse language, drug consumption, homosexuality, race and religion, to promote parental guidance and informed choice.
- While MDA should provide standard wordings for use in mandatory consumer advice for films and videos as part of the rating requirement, industry players should continue to provide consumer advice for broadcast media and arts entertainment. For other mediums like publications and sound recordings, consumer advice should be provided when the need arises. For video games, consumer advice should be provided when ESRB classification is introduced.
- MDA should:
 - Work with industry players for a set of suitable advisory labels to prevent exploitation of consumer advice for marketing purposes.
 - Enforce compliance to ensure that industry players issue suitable consumer advice for sensitive content.
- Industry players are encouraged to explore the use of online consumer advice, in addition to traditional methods of displaying consumer advice on product packaging, advertising materials and points of sale.

¹⁰ The site is sponsored by the Entertainment Software Rating Board, Motion Picture Association of America, National Association of Broadcasters, National Cable Television Association, and Recording Industry Association of America.

7.3 JOINT REGULATION

- 7.3.1 There have been calls to allow more industry players to regulate content based on the guidelines laid down by MDA. Some western countries are moving towards greater participation of industry players in regulation, firstly, because technological advancements have made censorship by government regulators difficult, and secondly, because it is a more practical way to clear content in a timely manner for the consumers, without compromising content standards. It also promotes greater industry responsibility.
- 7.3.2 Some degree of joint regulation by MDA and industry players has increasingly been used for publications, sound recordings, video games, Internet and the broadcast media. For example, importers regulate over 1.5 million overseas publications yearly based on a set of MDA's guidelines. Similarly, MDA allows the broadcasters and the Internet Service Providers to regulate content through a set of Programme Codes and the Internet Code of Practice respectively.
- 7.3.3 In view of local racial and religious sensitivities, allowing industry players to regulate content without involving the regulators is not advisable. Joint regulation between MDA and industry players is a more sensible alternative. To prepare for the move towards this alternative, industry players should better organise themselves into credible industry groups like the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore.

RECOMMENDATION:

- MDA should encourage industry players to organise themselves as credible industry groups and take on a greater role in regulation, like the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore.

7.4 RESPONSIBILITY FOR FILM CLASSIFICATION

- 7.4.1 A common misunderstanding about film censorship is the issue of how a film is edited. The Board of Film Censors (BFC) under MDA edits a film to meet the rating requested by a film distributor. While it is possible for film distributors to do their own editing, many still prefer to leave it to the BFC due to reasons such as lack of editing equipment and time constraint.
- 7.4.2 However, the refined film and video classifications proposed by this CRC should help reduce the need for editing. To present an accurate picture of the responsibility in film rating and encourage greater industry responsibility, the role of editing should fall on the film distributors and not the BFC. MDA should work with the film industry to make this change at a pace comfortable to the latter.

7.4.3 With this new arrangement, the BFC under MDA should more appropriately be known as the Board of Film Classification.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To promote greater industry responsibility, film distributors, not the Board of Film Censors, to take up the role of editing a film to meet classification guidelines.
- Rename “Board of Film Censors” under MDA as “Board of Film Classification”.

7.5 SPECIFIC AND TRANSPARENT CONTENT GUIDELINES

7.5.1 Industry players have called on MDA to provide greater transparency in censorship matters and more specific content guidelines so as to promote industry joint regulation. This CRC recommends that a set of broadly-framed content guidelines should be provided to allow room for modification for greater diversity and creativity. But MDA should explain its censorship decisions and make them easily available to industry players, as part of its public education effort.

RECOMMENDATION:

- To promote joint regulation with industry players, MDA should provide broadly-framed content guidelines to industry players, explain censorship decisions clearly and make them readily available to industry players.



PART III:

8.0 LICENSING AND ENFORCEMENT

Licensing and enforcement are tools to keep industry players in line with censorship policies and guidelines. This section looks at current measures and proposed changes.



PART III: 8.0 LICENSING AND ENFORCEMENT

8.1 LICENSING

Publications

- 8.1.1 Local publications are licensed under the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) administered by MDA. A permit is required for those published at regular or irregular intervals. There are currently about 4,000 permit holders under the NPPA. Imported publications are monitored through TradeNet¹¹ which requires the importers to regulate content based on a set of guidelines from MDA. The importers seek MDA's advice only when they are unsure. From time to time, MDA conducts random checks on the publications. About 1.5 million imported publications go through TradeNet annually and less than 2% are referred to MDA for advice.

Films and Videos

- 8.1.2 At present, video licences valid up to two years are issued to about 800 importers, makers, distributors and exhibitors of videos under the Films Act administered by MDA. A short-term temporary video licence may be issued for video business activity up to a month. Some 150 annual licences are currently issued to cinemas or venues showing NC16 or R(A) films under the Films Act. No licence is needed to exhibit G and PG films.

Broadcast Media

- 8.1.3 Under the Broadcast Act, MDA licenses individuals, groups, organisations, businesses and corporations for the installation and ownership of broadcasting apparatus as well as provision of broadcasting services in and from Singapore. MDA administers a Class Licence Scheme that automatically licenses Internet service and content providers who are required to abide by the Internet Code of Practice.

Arts Entertainment

- 8.1.4 MDA has taken over the role of licensing arts entertainment under the Public Entertainments and Meetings Act from the Police since July 2002. Under the Act, a licence is needed for arts entertainment. Please refer to Section 4, Part II for more information on arts licensing.

¹¹ Currently MDA uses IE Singapore's TradeNet system to facilitate the import of films, publications and sound recordings.

Simplification of licensing procedures

- 8.1.5 Industry players have been calling for either the abolition or simplification of licensing procedures. The government has also called for a review of all licensing measures to achieve a friendly regulatory environment for businesses. This CRC sees the need to continue with the use of licensing to enforce censorship policies and guidelines. But MDA should simplify the licensing procedures, without compromising censorship policies and guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION:

- MDA should continue using the licensing mechanism to enforce censorship policies and guidelines, with simplified procedures.

8.2 ENFORCEMENT

- 8.2.1 MDA, with assistance from the Police and relevant government agencies, takes enforcement action against industry players when they violate licensing conditions and content guidelines. At present, the enforcement action focuses on distributors, exhibitors or makers of content.
- 8.2.2 Given the number of recommendations by this CRC to allow wider choice for adults, these must be sensitively implemented and enforced by MDA to protect the young and unsolicited viewers. MDA should strengthen its enforcement measures to prevent abuse, for example, in the sale of NC15 and M18 videos, and the screening of M18 films in HDB estates.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue with current policy of focusing enforcement action on distributors, exhibitors and makers of content.
- MDA should exercise adequate enforcement effort to support the implementation of the revised censorship policies and guidelines.



PART IV:
9.0 CONCLUSION



PART IV: 9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 This Review was in itself a learning process. Censorship is not just about classification, or access control; nor is it simply about liberalisation or tightening up. Censorship is multi-dimensional, relating media and artistic expression to the social values of a community.
- 9.2 The challenge to censorship review is to find an optimal point for creative space without unduly upsetting community harmony and social values. This optimal point is defined by juggling a large number of measures: access management, content standards, classification, consumer advice, industry responsibility as well as supervision by the community, parents and individuals. For example, given stronger parental guidance, classification criteria may be less stringent; effective industry joint regulation may result in more self-monitoring with a corresponding reduction in government involvement.
- 9.3 Ultimately the methodology used and degree of tightness of censorship is a reflection of the complexity and the level of involvement of the people in a society. The way to move towards less control is by passing a greater portion of the regulatory authority to responsible persons in the private sector.
- 9.4 Therefore censorship is not about confrontation between regulators and the regulated. It is about collaboration to debate social issues constructively and to help educate members of a society to be more knowledgeable and sophisticated. Internet may not necessarily be the biggest challenge to the effectiveness, or even necessity, of censorship. A more proactive community engagement in artistic and censorship issues may be the most important factor in bringing about a less regulated arts and media scene. One wish from this CRC is to eventually create an environment where more debate and inquiry on social issues, including sensitive issues such as race and religion, can take place. As a society these important issues should be an integral part of our lives.

- 9.5 Given the same set of objectives and principles, in the short term, it is access management, content standards, licensing and enforcement that are important in the management of censorship in Singapore. In the long run, however, it is a tetrapartite partnership among the regulators, the industry players, the community and the artists, that will bring about a different censorship environment in the future.
- 9.6 Censorship is not a static but a dynamic issue. This report represents the state of censorship at this point in time in our society. It will have to change as our society and our people change. Censorship is also an art, and in that sense it is difficult to be precisely right. While this report may not satisfy everyone, this CRC hopes that our approach further strengthens the foundation for progressive modification and fine-tuning.



ANNEXES

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CRC 2003 MEMBERS

| | |
|---|---|
| Mr Liu Thai Ker Chairman | Director, RSP Architects, Planners and Engineers Pte Ltd Chairman, Singapore Tyler Print Institute |
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| Mr Chua Chim Kang | Editor, Commentary Desk, Lianhe Zaobao |
| Mrs Ding-Khoo Seok Lin | Consultant, Organisation Development, Phos Consultancy Member, National Youth Council |
| Professor S Gopinathan | Dean, Foundation Programmes, National Institute of Education |
| Dr Hadijah Rahmat | Associate Professor, Asian Languages & Culture, National Institute of Education |
| Mr S Iswaran | Member of Parliament for West Coast Group Representation Constituency |
| Mr Philip Jeyaretnam SC | Partner, Rodyk & Davidson |
| Dr Angeline Khoo | Associate Professor, Psychological Studies, National Institute of Education |
| Mr Koh Buck Song | Mason Fellow, Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government Member, Films Appeal Committee Writer |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Professor Eddie C Y Kuo | Professor, School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms Ruby Lim-Yang | Co-founder / Director, ACT 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr Mohd Raman Daud | Features Editor, Berita Harian | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr Benson Puah | CEO, The Esplanade Co Ltd | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Dr Chitra Rajaram | Editor, Tamil Murasu | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Dr Suzaina Kadir | Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore Member - The Roundtable | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr Kenneth Tan | Managing Director, Golden Village Multiplex Pte Ltd & Golden Village Pictures | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ms Sumiko Tan | Editor, Life!, The Straits Times | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr Kelvin Tong | Filmmaker, Film Critic, Journalist | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mr Yeo Guat Kwang | Member of Parliament for Aljunied Group Representation Constituency Director, National Trades Union Congress President, Consumer Association of Singapore | <input type="checkbox"/> |

GLOSSARY

Adult content refers to themes (e.g. promiscuity and homosexuality) and scenes (e.g. nudity and sex) that may be unsuitable for the young.

Adult theme refers to issues dealing with homosexuality, strong violence, drugs, etc that may be unsuitable for the young.

ASAS is the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore whose members represent advertisers, advertising agencies, media, government agencies and other supporting organisations. It draws up the Code of Advertising Practice that is used to regulate local advertising activities.

Class Licence Scheme is an arrangement used by the Media Development Authority (MDA) to automatically license service and content providers who are required to abide by a broad set of guidelines laid down by MDA.

Content refers to theme, scene, text, sound, voice, etc in mediums like publications, films, broadcast media, arts entertainment, etc.

Exploitative refers to content that appears to deliberately abuse or debase for the enjoyment of viewers and lacking moral, artistic or other values.

FTA TV refers to Free-to-Air TV channels by the broadcasters, MediaCorp and Mediaworks that can be freely received on any television set in Singapore. Examples include Channel 5 and Channel i.

Joint regulation refers to an arrangement where regulators draw up the content guidelines with industry players, for the latter to observe.

ICPs refer to Internet Content Providers who may be individuals or groups of individuals who provide any content on the World Wide Web through the Internet.

ISPs refer to Internet Service Providers who are organisations which provide Internet access and other services such as downloads, to the public. Examples of Service Providers in Singapore are Pacific Internet, Singnet and Starhub Internet.

Lifestyle magazines refer to magazines whose content focuses on lifestyles, fashion and entertainment, e.g. *Her World*, *Female*, *FHM*, etc.

Medium refers to film, video, broadcast media, Internet, publication, advertisement, arts entertainment, etc.

MITA refers to the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

MDA is the Media Development Authority, a statutory board under the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts. It plays a dual function of developing and promoting the media as well as regulating the industry.

Registered Importers Scheme is an arrangement introduced in 1997 that allows publication importers registered with MDA to regulate content based on a set of MDA's guidelines.

Social capital refers to the level of cohesiveness, trust and harmony of a society.

Unsolicited viewing refers to a situation where a person is able to read, hear or view a content without being given a choice, e.g. an advertising poster at a bus stop.

VOD refers to Video-on-Demand which is a technology or system that makes it possible for consumers to select a movie or programme from an on-screen list and view it at their convenience.



PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 1 In conducting the review, CRC 2003 tried to reach out to as many members of the public and industry as possible for an in-depth understanding of societal thinking and values. It solicited views and ideas via focus group meetings with industry players, civic and educational groups. The Committee also sought the media's help to generate public discussion and feedback on censorship issues.

Focus Groups

- 2 A total of 13 focus groups discussed the issues. These groups represented a cross-section of the broadcast media, films, videos, video games, and publishing industries, the arts community, youth groups, and religious and grassroots organisations. In addition, parents, students, educationists, psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, social workers, youth volunteers and information technology specialists also participated in the discussions.

Survey

- 3 This CRC commissioned a survey to assess the changes in moral values and social trends that might have taken place since the last censorship review in 1992. The Censorship Survey, where 1,000 respondents were interviewed between Nov-Dec 2002, focused on such issues as film classification, public education and public responses to nudity, violence, coarse language, etc.

Other Channels

- 4 About 30 articles on the censorship review appeared in the local media such as The Straits Times, Lianhe Zaobao, Berita Harian, Tamil Murasu and The New Paper. This CRC also took into account the feedback from the various Remaking Singapore sub-committees. It also received three written submissions from the arts community and the Christian community. More than 300 emails were received. Views from the Office of Film and Literature Classification in Sydney and other classification boards in Europe and Asia were also sought.

KEY FEEDBACK FROM FOCUS GROUPS

Background

- 1 The CRC 2003 conducted a series of focus group discussions with various media players, members of the public, civic societies, youth groups, sociologists, psychologists and educationists to seek their views on areas of censorship, parental responsibility, education, classification, etc. Some 300 participants were invited to give their views over 13 sessions.

Key Observations

- 2 There were lively exchanges at the focus group discussions. Issues discussed were those raised by newspaper readers and members at the CRC 2003 meetings. The findings are summarised below.

Perception of Existing Content Regulatory Framework

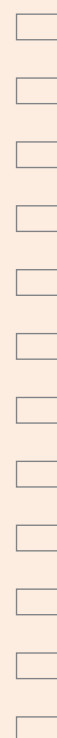
- 3 Industry players in general were more knowledgeable about the existing content regulation systems compared to the general public. Non-industry players were largely unaware, or had only rudimentary knowledge, of censorship issues including the film rating system, and the differentiated approach adopted for the various mediums. But there was a shared perception that censorship was generally strict in Singapore.

Need for Wider and More Informed Choice

- 4 A majority of participants felt that the current regulatory approach could be further relaxed although they were divided as to the extent of such relaxation. Most agreed that, given society's greater maturity and easy access to information, members of the public and industry players could be entrusted to make their own decisions, backed by sound consumer advice and public education.

Need for Content Regulation

- 5 With the exception of the arts groups (who pressed for total self-regulation), all other participants felt that there was a need for some regulation - even if it was symbolic. The industry players preferred classification over vetting or banning. Parents, religious groups and educationists felt that some amount of censorship was unavoidable to protect the young and safeguard values. Of those who advocated stricter censorship, the focus was largely on television content which was seen to have the greatest impact. Some representatives from religious organisations expressed concern that greater liberalisation may have negative impact on race and religion. Even with the extensive reach of the Internet, participants from the National Internet Advisory Committee and IT fields felt that some regulation, supplemented by education, would continue to be relevant.



Lack of Transparent Guidelines

- 6 A common concern among the arts and film industry players was that existing guidelines were not transparent enough. They also felt that censorship decisions were inconsistent. Other participants called for clearer guidelines to promote public understanding for censorship decisions.

Consumer Advice and Public Education

- 7 A majority of focus group participants were for providing more extensive and consistent consumer advice, especially for films, videos and arts entertainment to complement classification, in aiding consumers in their choice of content. In particular, it was felt that content not suitable for the young should be clearly indicated so that parents would not be caught unawares. The industry players, while supportive, noted that providing this information and maintaining the system may add to business costs.
- 8 Participants strongly supported public education to equip parents and the young with skills to be more discerning consumers. However, some participants agreed that reaching out to parents, especially the less-educated ones, would be a difficult task and this would be an area of concern when content was more liberalised.
- 9 The youth participants suggested using celebrities to spread messages on content regulation, conducting seminars and dialogue sessions before opening the boundaries further. However, they cautioned against taking a moral high ground which would turn off the audience.

Film Classification

Age restrictions

- 10 On film classification, a majority suggested reducing the current age restriction for R(A) films from 21 to 18 as society on the whole had become more mature. The move to lower the age restriction to 18 also won support because that would make film ratings consistent with ratings for arts entertainment. While some from the industry wanted NC16 to be an advisory rating, most of the other participants were for enforcing ratings beyond PG. Adult participants felt that exhibitors, including organisers of film festivals, should conduct more rigorous checks to ensure that the under-aged do not gain access.

Film editing

- 11 The film industry felt that films should not be edited but appropriately classified with consumer advice to alert consumers. Where the film was likely to be offensive on racial and religious grounds, it was felt that the regulator should consider banning it altogether, rather than editing it. Some participants, however, agreed that some edits would be necessary but the extent should be made known to the public.

Restriction on location

- 12 On restricting R(A) films to outside HDB estates, while some participants agreed with the approach, most felt that this may not be practicable given Singapore's small geographical size. The industry players in particular asked for a reconsideration of the restrictions on the location of R(A) cinemas. Suggestions were made to allow R(A) films within HDB estates but to impose strict controls over advertisements and publicity materials at the cinemas to prevent unsolicited exposure to the young. Some participants also said that Town Councils should have the final say on whether R(A) cinemas should be allowed in the estates under them. This way, it would be the public's decision and the government would be a step removed from the process.

Restriction on advertisements

- 13 While most participants did not express strong opinions on restrictions on R(A) advertisements, the industry players felt that R(A) film advertisements should be allowed for broadcast and public display so long as they met the PG rating guidelines.

Video Classification

- 14 Most participants were for video classification as it would provide a wider choice for consumers. A few said that if videos were to be classified, stricter standards should be imposed as compared to films due to the easy availability and longer shelf-life of videos. They said that adults should exercise greater responsibility over access to videos, and video shops should enforce stricter control at the point of sale, just like control over the sale of tobacco and alcohol. Some felt that the conservative segment in our society might react against the sale of videos with sensitive content. An idea suggested to make video classification more acceptable was to keep the sale of videos with sensitive content out of HDB estates, similar to R(A) films.

Video Game Classification

- 15 Only a few participants thought that video games were a cause for concern, notably for the potentially harmful effect of violence. Youth participants felt that it was a form of escapism and did not have a great impact. While the game industry players welcomed a classification system, they preferred an advisory system as it would be difficult to enforce the ratings.

TV & Radio Programming

- 16 Broadcasters said that they were mindful of the pervasive influence of TV and radio, and of their nation building objectives, and tended to be more cautious. But, over the years the population had matured and controversial topics, if discreetly and tastefully done, could be broadcast. It was also felt that channels catering to ethnic minorities had a different set of concerns to address and this could not be ignored.

- 17 There was general support for classification on Cable TV premium and international tiers, with more programmes with sensitive content slotted for later hours. Views were divided on whether a full classification, similar to films, could be considered for Free-To-Air TV in view of its easy accessibility.
- 18 Citing the case of the radio newscaster who was fined for colouring the news with her own commentary, some participants felt that broadcasters should produce and enforce their own code of conduct, similar to newspapers, so that the government did not need to intervene.

Arts Entertainment

- 19 Artists and arts groups felt that censorship could be replaced by “self-regulation” similar to what was practised in other countries. While some participants agreed that theatre, as a sophisticated art form, should not be censored, others felt that there was still a need to set guidelines as arts groups tended to experiment with cutting-edge content. Arts entertainment should also carry clearer consumer advice if they featured controversial content. When complaints were received, artists should be allowed to discuss with the complainant without the regulator stepping in.
- 20 Suggestions were also made to exempt certain art forms and venues from licensing. There was a proposal to publish the names of exempted arts groups. Arts groups also called for the setting up of an independent appeal panel staffed by peers, rather than laymen.
- 21 Participants felt that not giving government grants for plays with homosexual content was tantamount to censorship and that there should be greater transparency in assessing requests for grants.

Local and Imported Magazines

- 22 Representatives of the local magazine industry said that the current practice of stricter censorship for local magazines should be reviewed. They wanted the authorities to be equally strict with foreign magazines. They said that magazines should be allowed to discuss issues frankly in order to stay relevant to their readers.

Advertisements

- 23 Representatives of the advertisement industry were concerned with what they perceived to be inconsistent standards: lingerie advertisements were allowed at MRT stations but not bus shelters, condom advertisements were not allowed on radio but allowed on other mediums. R(A) film advertisements were also not allowed on broadcast media. But other participants expressed strong concern over TV advertisements/trailers with adult scenes being aired at prime time (7.00 pm - 11.00 pm) or during family viewing hours (6.00 am -10.00 pm).

Content Standards

- 24 Participants generally felt that the authorities were stricter about sexual content and nudity than violence, especially for television and PG-rated films. Participants wanted a more contextual approach that took into account overall themes and the relevance of particular scenes. Concerns were raised over the prime time screening of TV programmes with heavy dosage of violence.
- 25 Some participants, especially from religious organisations, were concerned that in allowing homosexual films to be screened, the authorities may inadvertently create the popular misconception that it was endorsing such alternative lifestyles. However, most of the others felt that homosexual films could be shown under the appropriate rating. Participants agreed that there was a distinction between mere depiction and promotion but they were concerned over depictions of physical intimacy.
- 26 Most felt that mediums should be mindful of racial and religious sensitivities. Others, largely from the arts industry, felt that there should be more public discussion of religious differences so as to promote awareness and harmony. Public debate would lead to greater maturity of the citizenry as each group put up its case to the public.

Dialect Policy

- 27 The issue of dialects in films and TV was raised. It was felt that dialects posed no threat to Mandarin as the Speak Mandarin Campaign had been so successful that dialects did not resonate with the young anymore. Participants felt that it was time to cater to the older generation by running dialect programmes. Filmmakers also asked for clearer guidelines on the extent of dialect content allowed.

Technology and Internet

- 28 On the advent of Internet technology and its impact on censorship, participants felt that traditional mediums should still be regulated even if it was just to set certain symbolic standards. While some argued against symbolic censorship such as blocking 100 objectionable websites, others felt that this measure was important because it set the tone for the industry as to what society would not tolerate. Participants also discussed the dangers of Internet Relay Chat-rooms and how this could be addressed.
- 29 Participants, however, agreed that the real challenge was to educate parents and the young on responsible media consumption. Suggestions were made to market the Family Access Network more aggressively and to have the industry develop more family-friendly prototypes which would allow individuals within a family the choice to use them. Participants also asked the regulators to consider positive messaging rather than negative messaging to encourage self-regulation and for chat-room sites to carry prominent warnings on dangers.

- 30 Participants also wanted a clear distinction to be made between public space and private space. They wanted the regulation of public space to be done via guidelines and penalties, leaving the regulation of private space to individuals and parents.

Censorship and Creativity

- 31 There were divided views over whether censorship would stifle creativity. While most agreed that censorship and even self-regulation implied constraints, others (especially parents and religious organisations) felt that one should not be apologetic for setting certain standards. They were also confident that creativity could flourish despite censorship. Some expressed concern that self-regulation would tempt the industry to exploit the system and market unsuitable content to the young.

Feedback

- 32 To encourage the public to take on a more proactive role in examining content in mediums, there was a suggestion to set up a well-publicised central feedback hotline for all complaints. Presently, with several agencies handling different mediums, the public may not be well-informed about the avenues available. Another suggestion was to set up a complaints bureau comprising representatives from a cross-section of society.
- 33 Participants also felt that in the case of complaints, the relevant industry players should be allowed the opportunity to address them rather than have the regulator step in.

Self Regulation

- 34 There was a suggestion to set up an independent classification body, comprising members of the public and industry players. Some industry participants also felt that self-regulation would not necessarily work because of a pervasive fear of being penalised.

KEY VIEWPOINTS FROM FEEDBACK

Arts Community

- Censorship should be replaced by regulation in order for the creative arts scene to flourish.
- Diversity and tolerance - The system should allow for the greatest possible expression of diversity. This requires a climate of reciprocal tolerance. Allowing the expression of ideas does not mean that one agrees with these ideas. Rather it is an acknowledgement that other people have the right to have their views heard.
- Regulation by rating, zoning and belting - No banning except in extreme cases where freedom of expression poses a clear and present danger.
- Avenues of recourse and complaint - Aggrieved party to use the mass media or its own publications or activities as avenue of recourse.

Religious Groups

- Freedom of expression is to be balanced against the interest of the community, and the purpose of censorship laws is to provide that balance.
- Core values such as the dignity of the person, integrity of the family unit, respect for different racial and religious groups, should be upheld and enhanced.
- Creativity should focus on what edifies and not on what degrades.
- Ban on pornography should remain to prevent social ills. Content that promotes homosexuality should not be allowed.
- The lowest common denominator should be adopted for all mediums regardless of the mode with which they are conveyed or sold, in respect of moral values.

Public

- Censorship is necessary to maintain values in society and to protect the young.
- Parents should assume the responsibility of guiding their young in what they watch, read or hear.
- The government should play an advisory role, including providing consumer advice, to allow Singaporeans to make their own choices. Singaporeans are mature enough to decide what is best for them, and censorship should be kept to the bare minimum. They should only be applied when our core values are threatened.
- Content on violence, sex, nudity and coarse language, targeted at young persons, should be tightened up. The young, being impressionable, may be easily influenced by the content that they are exposed to.
- Liberty of the arts does not mean compromising values. Being creative does not mean opening the floodgates to everything. The current environment allows sufficient space and exposure for artists to express themselves.
- Video classification should be introduced so that films that have been given a higher rating (which otherwise would have to be edited to the PG standard) could be made available in the DVD format.
- A classification system could be introduced for TV programmes to help viewers decide on suitable viewing. Programmes with adult themes or scenes could be made available at a later timeslot to prevent children from watching.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Aim of Survey

- Ascertain public opinion and expectations on the general level of censorship of the different mediums;
- Solicit feedback on current censorship policies and guidelines; and
- Ascertain changes in the social values and trends in Singapore over the last 10 years and their implications on censorship policies.

Issues Surveyed

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| ■ Social values and societal trends | ■ Advertisements |
| ■ Opinions on censorship | ■ Consumer advice |
| ■ Film classification | ■ Relevance of censorship in Internet age |
| ■ Video and video game classification | ■ Content pertaining to violence, sex and nudity, coarse language, drugs, race and religion |
| ■ Publications | ■ Role of citizens in censorship |
| ■ Arts entertainment | |

Methodology

- AC Nielsen was assigned by this CRC to conduct the censorship survey from November to December 2002.
- Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 1,000 respondents aged 15 years and above representing a cross-section of the population.

Survey Findings

The key survey findings are summarised below:

General Opinions

- Respondents generally supported less censorship for adults (53%) and, in particular, more censorship for young people (74%).
- Slightly more than half of the respondents supported the existence of controlled places where disallowed content can be watched or bought.
- 71% of respondents felt that parents and not the government are responsible for what their children see or hear.
- 67% of respondents thought that censorship for local and foreign mediums should be the same; 48% thought that less censorship would create an environment for more creativity.
- 84% of respondents would not take action even if they were unhappy with content.

Films

- 77% of respondents found the current number of categories for film classification just right.
- 78-80% of respondents found the different contents of PG & NC16 films just right, but less people (71-75%) found the contents for R(A) films just right, especially for sex & nudity where 16% thought it too strict for R(A) films.
- 65% of respondents still preferred R(A) films to have age restriction at 21 years.
- 86-87% of respondents felt that the age of patrons for NC16 and R(A) films should still be checked.
- 41% of respondents thought that R(A) films should not be cut, while 27% thought the same for NC16 films.

Video Games

- 42% of respondents found violent games like *Counterstrike* unacceptable. However, acceptance increased as age of respondents decreased.
- 43% of respondents preferred film classification for games, while 35% preferred no classification. Half of the respondents wanted control by both law and advisory labels.

Videos

- 59% of respondents preferred film classification for video/VCD/DVD, while 24% preferred no classification. About half of respondents wanted control by both law and advisory labels.

Publications

- 45% of respondents preferred classification for publications, while 34% preferred no classification. 40% of respondents wanted control by both law and advisory labels, while 29% wanted control by advisory labels only.
- 54% of respondents preferred lifestyle magazines like *FHM* to have an age restriction of 21 years, while 30% preferred it at 18 years.
- 57% of respondents were against having *Playboy*, even if wrapped in brown paper covers.

Consumer Advice

- An average of 75% of respondents supported the use of advisory labels across all mediums.
- 69% of respondents thought that the government should decide on the advisory labels to use.

Advertisements

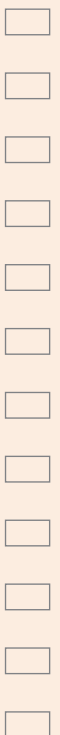
- Respondents found full frontal nudity, bad language and half-frontal nudity most unacceptable in TV & billboard advertisements, particularly the latter.
- 69% of respondents found advertisements today acceptable; 69% disagreed that there can be more nudity in advertisements today.

Television

- 49% of respondents were unaware of the watershed time for television programming. 33% preferred it at 10.00 pm, while 31% preferred it at 11.00 pm.
- 61% of respondents found it acceptable to air adult-oriented movies at night on local channels.
- For Cable TV, the majority of respondents (58%) found it acceptable to have R(A) films on Cable TV premier tiers; 53% found it acceptable to have them on pay-per-view channels.

Arts Entertainment

- For plays and performances, 41% of respondents preferred no classification, 32% preferred the use of film classification and 11% preferred no change to the current classification system.
- Regarding the enforcement of age restriction for plays and performances, 35% of respondents preferred enforcement by both law and advisory labels, 26% preferred by law only and 20% preferred by organisers.





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