

OTT Media and Content Regulation: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

Asma Md. Isa^{1*}, Wan Amizah Wan Mahmud², Wan Idros Wan Sulaiman³, Muhammad Adnan Pitchan⁴ and Shariffah Mamat⁵

Centre for Communication and Digital Society (MENTION), Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, The National University of Malaysia, 43000, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

¹myasmaisa@gmail.com, ²wan_amizah@ukm.edu.my, ³wiws@ukm.edu.my, ⁴adnan86@ukm.edu.my, ⁵shariffah@iyres.gov.my

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Abstract

The emergence of over-the-top (OTT) media is increasingly impacting audiences in Malaysia. We undertook a systematic review and meta-analysis to examine the relationship between censorship and explicit inappropriate content aired through OTT media platforms, such as obscenity, harmful adult content, X-rated content, porno, sex, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) elements. The method of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) was adopted, whilst Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases were the main platforms to source for articles. Finally, a few recommendations have been put forward at the end of this paper for the reference of future research.

Keywords; *systematic review, meta-analysis, OTT media, content regulation*

1. INTRODUCTION

The convergence of linear broadcasting, telecommunication, the Internet, and smart device technologies has now become among the Malaysian government's official policies. In the past, communication networks in Malaysia were designed to carry different types of information separately. In 2002, through the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA 1998), the government stripped away the regulation that had previously protected broadcasters, Internet service providers, telecommunication service providers, cellular service providers, and value-added service providers from competing with one another. The CMA 1998 was introduced to push the industry to operate in the newly converged sector and to have them break down the boundaries they were accustomed to. With the new regulations and laws

in place, policymakers strongly believe that it can spark healthy competition among service providers. Consequently, they would be able to improve their quality of service and lower the prices in all telecommunications and media industries [1]. The impact would mainly be felt by the end users where they will be able to have more choices, enjoy better service experiences, and be protected from monopolies

However, the promise of new services has brought about an ambiguity between industry sectors. Malaysia's broadcasting industry has witnessed a significant growth of existing players (Radio Television Malaysia, all free-to-air under the umbrella of Media Prima Group, Astro, and UniFi TV) and new entrants providing services in new media markets. The convergence between telecommunications and broadcasting may require

the authorities to review the existing rules and regulation associated with content delivered over the Internet, especially the Censorship Act 2002, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Content Code (Content Code) [2], and the guideline for Malaysian Content Definition released by the Ministry of Information, Communications, and Culture. This review is necessary to be conducted because Malaysia is moving into the Digital Age where technology is now part of human lives, and over-the-top (OTT) media global players, such as Netflix, Amazon Video, Viu, and YouTube Premium carry immense responsibilities.

On 30 March 2019, Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg published an op-ed in the Washington Post and on his Facebook page urging the US government and regulators to play more active roles in updating Internet rules in order to protect the society. Subsequently, a new outline was proposed which focused on four areas, namely harmful content, election integrity, privacy, and data portability [3]. Zuckerberg's remarks were viewed as being positive input because first, it placed the onus of resolving these issues, especially harmful content, on regulators and second, the new regulation will ultimately insulate the larger platforms.

Similar with the United States, Malaysia and several Asian countries are also affected by the formidable impact of content being broadcast via the Internet, whereas the respective governments have yet to establish a regulatory framework for content that can be accessible via OTT platforms [2]. This paper has only considered similar studies conducted in Asian countries, given that Asia is home to approximately two-thirds of the world's population, and Asian countries generally share similar cultural and social values [4]. This study can provide crucial information regarding the extent of the focus on content regulation of peer reviewed literature. This information should be able to assist other researchers in providing better findings to shed light on the relationship between

content regulation and OTT media, being a topic that still requires the attention of academics and practitioners. The content regulation hypothesis for OTT media posits that uncensored content could lead to risky behaviors, thereby offsetting public interests afforded by the existing rules and regulation. This argument has been used to introduce OTT media legislation in certain jurisdictions or to support jurisdictions where such legislation currently does not exist as a mediating factor for audiences in Malaysia to achieve media gratification. Thus, the current systematic review has been developed based on the following research question: How will censorship on OTT media content affect audience's perception to achieve media gratification? The principal focus of this study is on regulatory practices, rules, and regulation imposed by regulators in Asian countries on OTT media.

Chalmers and Altman defined systematic reviews as one of approach to minimize biases and random errors, which are properly documented in the material and method selection phase [5]. The important points here are material and method selections that differentiate between a systematic review and a traditional narrative review. A systematic review is completely open and explicit on how the author presents the review. It presents a comprehensive and diversified analysis of the full range of literature on a specific topic, typically in a prominently broader area of research, with more notable objectives to respond to an engaged research question [6].

Considering the number of existing systematic studies related to content regulation and censorship studies, only a small number of studies were found within the context of OTT platform, particularly for Asian communities. As such, the researchers have chosen the systematic review based on the following reasons: (i) to minimize bias, which would enable the researchers to conduct this study transparently, while determining the inclusion or exclusion of articles; (ii) to be quicker in finding research results; (iii) to assess the validity,

applicability, and implications of the obtained results; and (iv) to guide the researchers to report the results explicitly and concisely.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This segment elaborates five main sub-segments namely resources, selection process, identification, screening and eligibility using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). This paper also detailed out the resources, inclusion and exclusion criteria, systematic review process, data abstraction and analysis used in this study.

2.1. PRISMA

This study applied the standards and procedures introduced by PRISMA. In general, PRISMA provides a standard for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses for publication. PRISMA is a suitable method to examine the wide-ranging database of scientific literature at a specific time frame, which allows an accurate search of terms to be conducted [6] in a study. Thus, this study has employed PRISMA to assess the quality of data and the thoroughness of this review.

2.2. Resources

To answer the research question, this paper has established a systematic review of peer-to-peer reviewed literature dated 22 August 2019. In accordance with the study protocol, this paper used Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) to establish peer-reviewed literature in relation to the new media content regulation, particularly OTT media. These databases were chosen because they are vigorous and have more than 200 fields of studies including government policies, and rules and regulations. To further enhance this study, the researchers conducted our own search process using other databases to increase the feasibility of obtaining relevant articles [7]. Thus, manual searches of

regulators' website databases in Asia were conducted, such as the that of the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) [8] and the Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA) [9], for rules and regulation related to the OTT media content services in Hong Kong and Singapore, respectively.

2.3. The Process for Selecting the Articles

To answer the research question, a systematic review of peer-to-peer reviewed literature was performed on 22 August 2018. In accordance with the study protocol, the same steps and method carried out by [5] were performed, inclusive of problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, data analysis, and data presentation.

2.3.1. Identification

The systematic literature review process to select relevant articles for this study comprised of three major phases. The first phase was the identification of keywords relevant to the topic based on previous studies. In the second phase, this study used the Structured Query Language (SQL) to communicate with the database to perform relevant tasks, including querying and searching for relevant information related to the keywords. Finally, manual searches were conducted to determine the appropriate data from these databases, subsequently retrieving the articles from Scopus and WoS. The search string resulted in 73 articles that are accessible from both databases, comprising 53 articles from Scopus and 28 articles from WoS. Then, two additional articles were extracted from OFCA and IMDA to be reviewed in the current study, altogether making it a total of 75 articles. Table 1 provides the detailed search string of this study.

Table 1: The search string

Database Search String	
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("content

	regulation*" OR "new media regulation*" OR "content censorship* polic*" OR "content regulation* public interest*" OR "new media regulation* public interest*" OR "government content polic*" OR "Internet Content" OR "Censorship Netflix*") AND ("adult content*" OR "LBGT*" OR "Transgender*" OR "porno*" OR "sex*" OR "obscene*" OR "x-rated*" OR "Lesbian*" OR "Homo sex*"))
WoS	(TS=(("content regulation*" OR "new media regulation*" OR "content censorship* polic*" OR "content regulation* public interest*" OR "new media regulation* public interest*" OR "government content polic*" OR "Internet Content" OR "Censorship Netflix*") AND ("adult content*" OR "LBGT*" OR "Transgender*" OR "porno*" OR "sex*" OR "obscene*" OR "x-rated*" OR "Lesbian*" OR "Homo sex*")))

2.3.2. Screening

The main objective of the screening stage was to identify and review the searched data for determining relevance to the study and to rule out duplicate articles. The search and removal of these types of articles were performed manually and independently by the researchers during this stage. The researchers used the inclusion and exclusion criteria to screen the titles and abstracts of the searched articles and to determine whether the data were relevant to the current research question. Once the titles and abstracts have been screened, the full text of each article was retrieved and screened again to definitively decide whether the articles fit the eligibility criteria of the current study. The retrieved articles consisted of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, public

consultation papers, and expert opinion papers published between 2000 and 2019, and articles in the field of social science written in English.

The researchers also reviewed articles related to the research question of this current study, such as journals and other written data of assessment found in Scopus and WoS databases. To ensure that the current study was in line with the research question, the researchers had only focused on articles on specific subject areas, such as government policy, censorship, LGBTQ, X-rated content, obscene content, pornography, and transgender, lesbian, and homosexual content. The screening process resulted in the removal of 23 duplicated articles, as illustrated in Figure 1. Subsequently, 37 articles were also excluded for falling within the exclusion criteria, namely a book, a book chapter, conference proceeding papers, non-English articles, and articles published in non-Asian countries. Details of the inclusion and exclusion principle for this paper are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: The inclusion and exclusion principles.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Literature type	Research articles, expert opinion papers, public consultation papers	Article review, book, book chapter, conference proceeding
Language	English	Non-English
Period range	2000 to 2019	< 2000
Region and countries	Asian countries only	Non-Asian countries
Subject area	Social sciences, government policy, censorship,	Other than social sciences, government policy, censorship,

	LGBTQ, transgender, porno, sex, obscene, X-rated, lesbian, homosexual	LGBTQ, transgender, porno, sex, obscene, X-rated, lesbian, homosexual
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2.3.3. Eligibility

A total of 15 articles were identified using the appropriate principle set by the researchers in this third stage. In this stage, the keywords, titles, abstracts, the main content, findings, and recommendations by the previous researchers were thoroughly examined to ensure that these articles were fit to be included to achieve the objective of this study. As a result, a total 5 articles were excluded due to various reasons such as not being based on empirical data; being focused on algorithm and technical measurement on censorship mechanism and only covering technical aspects. Eventually, a total of 10 residual articles were qualified to be assessed.

2.4. Results

A search of peer-to-peer reviewed literature has resulted in 10 articles being included in this current review, as summarized in Table 3.

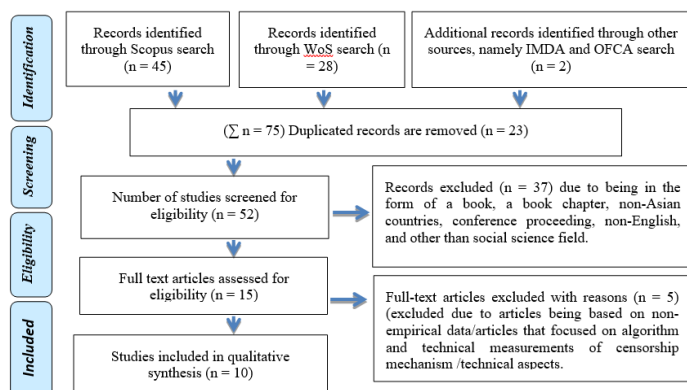


Fig. 1. PRISMA Flowchart for the systematic review of the content aired via Internet and media regulation

All relevant data were extracted from the source databases. Subsequently, the researchers’

comments, reviews and make the interpretations on the literature were included for a full-text review. Relevant public consultation papers and expert opinions were also included in the summary. Among these articles, 37 were excluded due to being a book (n = 1), a book chapter (n = 1), from non-Asian countries (n = 25), conference proceedings (n = 4), non-English (n = 1), and other than social science (n = 5). An additional five articles relevant to this study were also excluded, namely four studies which were focused on technical aspects, such as mathematical approaches (including algorithm) to develop a filtering model, and one study that merely focused on cybercrime.

Also included in the collected data were seven studies related to content that can be accessed via the Internet [10], [12]-[15], [17]-[18] and only one review paper [11]. A re-analysis of this paper discovered that the previous study was merely due to the Internet content and the negative impact to the audience, especially youth and women. Although all studies were supportive evidence of the risk of Internet content, there was lack of evidence from the literature research regarding OTT media content and censorship hypothesis. Therefore, this study aimed to address the gap in knowledge by first enlightened on the potential relationship between OTT media and censorship, through systematically reviewing the articles as tabulated in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of studies meeting the selection criteria

Author	Country	Data Collection	Content Regulation	Measure	Summary	Support Hypothesis
Wu, W. and Koo, S.H., 2001	Singapore	Survey (Quantitative)	Censorship	Third person's perception	This study investigated how third-person perceptions affect Singaporean respondents' willingness to endorse censorship of Internet pornography.	Yes
Cheong, W.H., 2002	Macao	Survey (Quantitative)	No	Family functioning, media credibility, perceived value of the Internet,	Demographic factors, such as gender, income level and, Internet use pattern are determinant factors for Internet content adoption	Yes
Brown, J.D., Zhao, X., Wang, M.N., Liu, Q., Lu, A.S., Li, L.J., Ortiz, R.R., Liao, S. and Zhang, G., 2013	China	Qualitative (Content Analysis)	Censorship	Television programs that were aired on 28 channels in China in 2004 was analyzed for romantic and sexual content	The romantic and sexual content have affected young viewers' perceptions of romantic relationships and sexual behavior.	Yes
Büken, B., Erkol, Z., Kandemir,	Turkey	Qualitative (interview)	Yes (for future OTT broadcasting)	Educational courses and awareness	Families in Turkey have inadequate	Yes

Author	Country	Data Collection	Content Regulation	Measure	Summary	Support Hypothesis
F. and Büken, E., 2014			license)	on effective protection against sexual assault, sexual abuse, and social networking	information about their children's internet use and meetings with people they become acquainted with on-line	
Lee, D.Y., Kim, S.H., Woo, S.Y., Yoon, B.K. and Choi, D., 2016	South Korea	Survey (Quantitative)	Parental Control	Homosexual content	Parents play vital roles as gatekeepers to prevent and create the barriers for adult Internet content for their children	Yes
Jaafar, N.R.N., Bahar, N., Ibrahim, N., Ismail, W., Salwina, W. and Baharudin, A., 2017	Malaysia	Qualitative (review paper)	Stakeholders, such as policy makers, educators, and medical experts have agreed that preventive strategies are needed to address predisposed risk factors	Excessive internet use among young women	Gender differences among excessive internet users, especially young women, have implied that internet use behaviors differ between men and women in their preference of Internet content	Yes
Keen, C., France, A.	Australia	Survey (Qualitative)	Internet content	Parental mediation	This study revealed that	Yes

Author	Country	Data Collection	Content Regulation	Measure	Summary	Support Hypothesis
and Kramer, R., 2019		interviews)	regulation and Internet safety		the regulatory role of states in providing content protection is lessened, while neoliberal forms of governance that emphasize the obligation of individuals, including parents and children, have come to dominate the emerging policy landscape.	

3. DISCUSSION

The peer-reviewed literature on the regulation of inappropriate content aired via OTT media platforms using Internet services have been systematically searched for the censorship hypothesis, with respect to content regulation for the purpose of gaining public interest. The reviewed studies assessed the association between audiences, including youth, women, and the general public, and various forms of risky behavior due to inappropriate or harmful content streamed via OTT media platforms.

The researchers have identified that the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA), the coequal with the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), is responsible

for telecommunications and broadcasting policies in Singapore. In Singapore, SBA provides clear guidelines pertaining to online censorship. As part of Asian countries, Singapore is considered to be a conservative nation that opposes sexuality in media incongruent with the third-person effect. Thus, respondents perceived pornographic materials on the Internet as having a countless impact on others than on themselves [13]. The Singaporean government is serious in dealing with the emergence of OTT media players that have disruptive effects on consumer protection and the competitive dynamics across multiple industries [9]. Therefore, all OTT players that transmit such content over the Internet are required to apply for a niche license from IMDA to comply with the

Content Code for OTT, Video-On-Demand, and Niche Services released by IMDA on 20 February 2019.

By the same token, content regulation to protect marginal audiences from inappropriate content has become a widely accepted role for English-speaking countries, such as Australia [12]. Due to technological advancement and globalization, efforts to establish such protections in today's digital media and communications landscape have been highly argumentative and challenging to be realized. The most frequently debated issues are freedom of speech and content censorship in the interest of the public. Nevertheless, Australian authorities have mandated that the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to block access to inappropriate content that are deemed not complying with the content regulation, as a way to address public concerns about inappropriate online content that may be harmful to children.

It is also important to acknowledge that social economic status in Macao represents the control variables, such as education, race, marital status, household income, and age. These variables are the determinant factors for early adoption of new and advance technology as a function of one's innovativeness or willingness to use new products [16]. As such, the researchers of this current study will collect as much demographic data as possible to describe the similarity with audiences of OTT media in Malaysia.

In China, the Chinese government has imposed very high regulation over the media as one of mechanism in promoting positive values and restricting foreign OTT platforms from penetrating China's market. Although most citizens are more concerned about political aspects, the government has also imposed regulation on inappropriate content. TV commercial advertisement and entertainment content for adult, not limited to health supplements related to sex, drugs for sexually transmitted diseases, sex toys, and 'vulgar' advertisements for breast cosmetic

treatment and female underwear, have been banned [15]. This is because the Chinese government strongly believes that inappropriate content may play an important role in influencing current norms and sexual behaviors in China. Hence, this study highly recommends that future research be conducted to study Malaysian audiences' perceptions towards uncensored content via OTT media platforms.

On another note, families in Turkey have inadequate information about their children's Internet use, which could lead to sexual assault. Based on empirical data, it is almost impossible to prevent children from being exposed to inappropriate content and behaviors online. Thus, the researchers proposed that necessary information on harmful Internet content should be collected and there should be educational courses conducted on how to effectively protect from the adverse effects of the same [14]. In a recent development pertaining to the giant streaming video company Netflix in Turkey, Netflix has applied for a license to continue operating under new online broadcasting rules, which have raised fears over possible censorship to be imposed by the Turkish government in the future [19].

In Korea, researchers have urged parents to play pivotal roles as gatekeepers to prevent and create barriers against adult Internet content for their children. This is because their study has discovered that due to adult Internet content, homosexual adolescents in particular have demonstrated huge gap in various aspects of health-risk behaviors and health cognition. These include the use of numerous substances and inappropriate weight loss methods, suicide ideation and attempts, and depressive mood [10]. Therefore, parental control is the best mechanism to protect children from harmful online content.

Meanwhile, the Office of the Communications Authority of Hong Kong (OFCA) has conducted a performance test from May 2016 to January 2017. More than 150 measurements were taken to gauge the performance of the three OTT players that

delivered the content through broadband services namely LeTV, myTV Super and Netflix [8]. The main purpose of conducting this test was to ensure healthy competition in the telecommunications market and to promote network neutrality in Hong Kong. However, this non-peer review was not included in this current summary article.

However, in the Malaysian context, policy makers need to develop better strategies and smarter regulation on excessive Internet use (EIU) among the youth, women, and children. A previous study on EIU has looked at its risk factors and complications, but this study was limited in its offer of preventive and treatment strategies. There is also a need to consider prevention and treatment strategies of EIU, which deserves similar attention as other forms of behavioral addictions [11]. Thus, content censorship may facilitate the effectiveness of preventive actions developed by the government.

Taking into consideration Mark Zuckerberg's views on the need for a new regulation, data protection should also undergo future systematic literature review and meta-analysis. This step would ensure that data privacy will be covered for practical and academic purposes. The researchers have concluded that the previously discussed articles can support the objective and hypothesis of this study, whereby censorship on OTT media content will affect audience's perception to achieve gratification.

4. CONCLUSION

Public views of the world are arguably influenced more by the media than by personal experiences. Malaysians are now embracing the digital world and rely, to a large extent, on modern broadcasted content delivered over the Internet. Supporters of appropriate Internet content elements demand new regulatory rules to battle harmful content, such as obscene adult content, X-rated content, porno, sex, and LGBTQ elements. Based on the abovementioned systematic review and meta-analysis, it is highly recommended that more studies are conducted to further investigate

how censorship on OTT media content will affect audience perceptions to achieve gratification in Malaysia.

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