

Public Support for Censorship in a Highly Regulated Media Environment: The Influence of Self-Construal and Third-Person Perception Over Time

Benjamin H. Detenber and Sonny Rosenthal

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Abstract

This study represents the first longitudinal examination of third-person effects and uses a rigorous specification of the relative contribution of perceptions of influence on self and others (viz., the diamond method). Using nationally representative samples from Singapore gathered in 2001 ($n = 626$) and 2013 ($n = 1,012$), it examines perceptions of sex and nudity in films, content that the government allows but regulates. As expected, interdependent self-construal and third-person perceptions predicted support for censorship, as did perceived total media influence. The pattern of prediction was quite consistent with a slight increase in support for censorship. The discussion considers implications with respect to both the social landscape and an evolving media landscape.

In representative democracies, public preferences may influence policy action on a wide range of issues. Sometimes, representative discretion is insufficient to inform policies on sensitive or evolving issues, and direct public consultations may be a necessary supplement. Censorship is one such issue. If large segments of the public find certain media content offensive, and worry about effects on society, then its censorship ideally will reflect public opinion. The basis of such public opinion may include beliefs about the harmful effects of certain kinds of content on the self and others (e.g., third-person perception [TPP]) and also more basic beliefs about the role of self in relation to others (e.g., self-construal). Given a global media landscape that is constantly evolving, the public viewpoints and preferences

that may guide media policy may also be prone to change over time. Thus, it may be interesting to gauge not only public support for censorship over time but also how its basis in certain beliefs and perceptions may have a temporal component.

The current exploration derives from the third-person effects (TPE) framework, which has become one of the best-established research traditions in mediated communication studies (Perloff, 1999). According to the TPE, TPP—the belief that others are more susceptible than the self to objectionable media content—motivates public support for censorship (Davison, 1983; Feng & Guo, 2012; Xu & Gonzenbach, 2008). Believing certain types of media may cause harm, especially to vulnerable others, prompts individuals to support various kinds of restrictions.

One explanation of the TPE uses social categorization and social identity theories to describe TPP as an outcome of in-group protection and out-group stereotyping (Scharer, 2002), which comports with the finding that collectivism is inversely related to TPP (Lee & Tamborini, 2005). As well, such social identity may manifest as conformity to group norms, which has been linked with support for censorship (Ho, Detenber, Malik, & Neo, 2012). The current study focuses on the linkage between interdependent self-construal, as a social identity construct, and support for censorship, an effect that may occur in parallel with the TPE. Research has yet to evaluate such an assertion, a gap that the current study aims to fill.

This study is also interested in evaluating the temporal stability of the TPE over time. All of the extant research has relied upon experimental designs or cross-sectional surveys, so the research presented here represents the first trend study reported in the literature. Whether public opinion of censorship shifts over time or remains steady may be of interest to media producers, policymakers, and government regulators, whose work can benefit from knowing what is on the public's mind. On a theoretical level, finding that the TPE has good temporal stability would further validate the framework, suggesting that the relationship between TPP and support for censorship may be unaffected by changes in the social and media landscapes. Alternatively, to the extent that the TPE changes over time, there may be a need to explain why temporality matters and explicitly integrate that dimension into the TPE framework. By incorporating self-construal into our conceptualization of the TPE, we will have an opportunity to explore at least one social dimension of the framework with respect to time.

Third-Person Perception

Although recognition of perceptual discrepancies of media influence goes back quite a way, Davison (1983) is generally credited with having formulated what

we call “the third-person effect.” There are two distinct components, one perceptual and one behavioral. First, according to the hypothesis, people tend to believe that others are more affected by media messages than they are themselves (i.e., TPP). Second, this perception can influence behavior in a number of ways, and this is what is conventionally referred to as the *third-person effect*. Davison’s article has been cited over one thousand times and inspired a research tradition, within which the present study falls.

The perceptual component has been examined extensively and found to be quite robust (Andsager & White, 2007; Paul, Salwen, & Dupagne, 2000; Perloff, 1999; Sun et al., 2008). Across a range of contexts, it has been shown that people tend to perceive the effects of media as greater for others than for themselves. The explanation generally provided is one of self-enhancement (Gunther, 1991). That is, people have motivations to think well of themselves, and in relation to media effects that means being relatively better than others at fending off unwanted influence. There may also be a certain amount of biased optimism occurring, too (Gunther & Mundy, 1993), whereby people think they are less prone to the harm media messages can cause. Another explanation of TPP is that people make cognitive appraisals as a basis of perceived influence on others, cognitions that may include perceived social distance and audience typicality (Sun et al., 2008). A more comprehensive theoretical model has emerged, called the influence of presumed media influence (IPMI; Gunther & Storey, 2003), that accounts for the hostile media effect, TPE, and other perceptual biases linked to media’s putative effects. Recharacterizing the nature of the TPP has helped to integrate it into a broader class of media-related perceptual phenomena but not dampened scholarly interest in it.

Recently, researchers have examined TPP in non-Western contexts to see how well the phenomenon generalizes across diverse audiences and the extent to which cultural factors play a role. Asia, in particular, has seen a number of studies conducted over the years. For example, Wei, Lo, and Lu (2010) documented Taiwanese college students’ TPP of news stories covering tainted food products. Comparing Koreans in Korea, Koreans in the United States, and Korean Americans, Park et al. (2014) found that participants believed the Korean public was more influenced than themselves to form negative opinions of Korean Americans by media coverage of the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting. In one of the earliest investigations in Asia, Gunther and Ang (1996) demonstrated a clear perceptual gap among Singaporeans when it came to perceived harmful influence of television content. The upshot of these and other studies is that TPP operates in many socio-cultural contexts, but there are some important theoretical differences with the West. For example, the role that cultural orientations play in shaping people’s perceptions of media influence has started to be delineated by communication scholars.

Cultural Orientations and Third-Person Perception

The importance of culture in psychology and communication has sometimes been overstated, but its influence in many contexts is undeniable, and its role in numerous socio-cognitive processes is becoming better understood (Chiu & Hong, 2006; Nisbett, 2003). In terms of TPP, how people see themselves in relation to their social sphere and cultural environment seems to be an important factor that is related to differential views of media impact. There are a number of ways of assessing cultural orientation, some more problematic than others, but a common assessment relates to individualism and collectivism. According to Waterman (1984), individualism can be characterized by people's sense of personal identity and the degree to which they seek and experience self-actualization, have mainly an internal locus of control, and have moral reasoning that is post-conventional but principled. Individualists perceive themselves as having traits that are distinct and independent of social context (Cousins, 1989).

In contrast, collectivism typically has a number of components, including a propensity for sharing, acceptance of the views of others, recognition that one's actions have an impact on others, and a feeling of interconnectedness with others (Hui & Triandis, 1986). This interconnectedness also shapes collectivists' sense of identity, and they tend to define themselves in terms of their relationships with others (Cousins, 1989). The significance of differences in value orientations as they relate to the self and the collective was recognized long ago (Parsons, 1951) and has been the subject of much theoretical development during the past several decades.

Variation in collectivism and individualism constitutes one of the most salient differences among societies, especially between East Asian and Western countries (Hofstede, 1984). As societal-level concepts, individualism and collectivism are difficult to measure (Fiske, 2002), so many researchers opt for examining individual-level concepts that are culturally linked, like the self-construals of independence and interdependence developed by Markus and Kitayama (1991). Without advancing a deterministic view of culture, one can safely say that patterns have emerged that indicate people in collectivistic societies tend to recognize that the decisions they may make can have positive or negative consequences for important others and thus see themselves as more obligated to those around them (i.e., have an interdependent self-construal). They also have a tendency to see themselves as more similar to others in their reference groups. In contrast, people from more individualistic societies tend to see themselves as free to do as they like and feel less obligated to others (i.e., they have an independent self-construal). They are also more likely to regard themselves as unique and distinct from various reference groups (Singelis, 1994).

While there are differences in self-construals across societies, there is also a great deal of variation within them. A number of studies have taken advantage of this condition to examine culturally linked individual differences within a single society, and found meaningful differences when it comes to communication processes (Willnat, Lee, & Detenber, 2002). Initially, self-construals were regarded as rather stable and dispositional in nature, but evidence has accumulated that they can be influenced by situational factors and even primed (Gardner, Gabriel & Lee, 1999; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). These findings support “a situated model of culture in which cross-national differences are not static but dynamically consistent due to the chronic and moment-to-moment salience of individualism and collectivism” (Oyserman & Lee, 2008, p. 311). Although the validity of the conceptualization of these two self-construals has been called into question (Matsumoto, 1999), as have their operationalizations (Levine et al., 2003), interdependence and independence are still widely used in social research, and a body of literature examining self-construal in relation to communication processes, including TPP, is emerging.

The first communication study to examine the link between TPP and cultural orientation was conducted by Cho and Han (2004). Comparing convenience samples of Korean and U.S. college students, they found that TPPs and first-person perceptions (FPPs; the perception that the self is more influenced than others, which tends to occur given desirable media content) were generally larger for the American students than the Korean students. However, it is worth noting that the researchers only assessed the difference in cultural orientation at the group level by comparing group means for individual scores on Hui’s (1988) INDCOL scale of individualism-collectivism. While the Koreans were significantly higher on collectivism than the Americans, the researchers did not link TPP directly to cultural orientation. However, Lee and Tamborini (2005) did make the connection. They also used Hui’s (1988) bipolar scale, and examined TPP and support for censorship of Internet pornography. As predicted, higher collectivism was associated with less TPP (note, the link between collectivism and support for censorship was not assessed in their model). The theoretical explanation offered was that those with a more collectivist orientation are less likely to see themselves as different from others, and thus less prone to biased optimism and TPP. Lee and Tamborini (2005) noted that others had theorized such a relationship, but their study provided the first empirical evidence for it. Following the same logic, but using Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) self-construal scales, Zhong (2009) examined how cultural orientation relates to TPP of online game play. Interdependence was negatively associated with TPP, as expected, but the results for independence were mixed, and the effects sizes were small. So, although the empirical support for the relationship between self-construals and

TPP is somewhat thin, the theoretical connection appears plausible, at least for collectivism and interdependence.

Support for Censorship

TPPs have a number of potential behavioral consequences, like altering damage awards in defamation suits (Cohen, Mutz, Price & Gunther, 1988), increasing parental mediation of children's television viewing (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002), and encouraging people to engage in greater communication to offset contrary and potentially harmful political views (Rojas, 2010). Perhaps the most common outcome of TPP (certainly the most commonly studied) is the imposition of restrictions on media content, or support for censorship in one of its many forms. Dozens of studies have examined support for censorship as a consequence of TPP (i.e., a TPE), and although the effect sizes for this behavioral component of the third-person hypothesis are not as large as those for the perceptual component, they are significant (Xu & Gonzenbach, 2008). Using a larger sample of studies and more rigorous methods, a more recent meta-analysis by Feng and Guo (2012) found that the association between TPP and the TPE of support for censorship is clear and robust. As many societies, especially those in the West, place a high value on freedom of expression, it is both disconcerting and compelling to see that at least partial support for restrictions on media may be based on biased perceptions. Perhaps this is the reason why so many communication scholars have undertaken studies examining TPP and support for censorship.

Support for censorship among citizens is a complex phenomenon driven by a number of historical, socio-cultural, and individual factors, and despite clear, manifest differences in restrictions on media between East Asian and Western countries, there has been very little research done on culturally linked self-construals and people's support for censorship. Ho, Detenber, Malik, and Neo (2012) found that among a nationally representative sample of Singaporeans, an Asian orientation (as opposed to a Western orientation) was a significant positive predictor of support for censorship of homosexuality in films. Their analysis also showed that greater conformity to norms and intrinsic religiosity were associated with support for censorship, and they reasoned that among Singapore's bicultural population, those who thought of themselves as more "Asian at heart" were more conservative and willing to protect the status quo with media restrictions. In a study of support for Internet censorship in China, Guo and Feng (2012) found that Confucian family ideology was not associated with intentions to impose restrictions, whereas the submissive personality aspect of right-wing authoritarianism (not a culturally linked self-construal) was. The most direct assessment of the link between cultural orientations and support for censorship was

conducted recently by Hong (2015). Using a scale developed by Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmeimeier (2002), Hong's study found that collectivism significantly predicted support for regulating violent video games (including banning them) among participants from Korea and the United States. However, the study used convenience samples, and the theoretical explanation for the relationship was somewhat underspecified.

Beyond simply saying that collectivism motivates people to be mindful of the interests of others and to try to protect them by restricting potentially harmful media content, we also invoke culturally differentiated orientations toward agency and control as part of our theoretical argument for greater support for censorship. Hernandez and Iyengar (2001) posit that because individualists have a self-orientation, they tend to act in their own interests, strive for autonomy, and prefer to be personally agentic. That is, those with an independent self-construal feel more comfortable regulating their own behavior, rather than having an external entity control them. In contrast, those with an interdependent self-construal prefer collective agency, whereby actions are taken with the interests of others in mind and with the goal of maintaining social harmony (Hernandez & Iyengar, 2001). A conceptualization of personal control as a manifestation of cultural differences parallels the distinction made in relation to agency. Research indicates that collectivists tend to prefer indirect over direct attempts at personal control because they are less likely to provoke interpersonal confrontation (Yamaguchi, 2001). Indirect personal control plays down personal agency to maintain social harmony, but it may not appeal to those who value autonomy (i.e., individualists). When direct or indirect personal control is not possible or appropriate, proxy control may provide an alternative. Proxy control involves action taken by third parties, including institutions, to benefit oneself and weaker others, and it has broad appeal across Asian societies (Yamaguchi, 2001). The predilection for proxy control among collectivists formed the basis for Xu's (2007) prediction that government legislation concerning privacy protection in location-based services on mobile computing devices would be perceived as providing more control for those with an interdependent self-construal compared with those who see themselves as independent. Support for censorship can be regarded as another form of proxy control and, therefore, likely to be associated with self-construals.

The present study aims to test this theoretical prediction and others and help fill a gap in the literature by examining the influence of several demographic characteristics (control variables), individual-level cultural orientations, and perceptions of message influence on support for restrictions on media. Based on the conceptualization outlined above, we believe that those indicating higher levels of interdependence will express greater support for censorship because they feel more connected with others and an obligation to them and

their well-being. Thus, with a preference for collective agency and proxy control, those higher on interdependence will be more likely to want to protect other Singaporeans with greater restrictions on what they perceive as harmful media content.

H1: People with higher levels of interdependence will express greater support for censorship.

Conversely, those indicating higher levels of independence will express lower levels of support for censorship. The logic here is that those who see themselves as more independent of others prefer self-regulation to proxy control and will feel less of an obligation to protect others with increased censorship. In other words, individualists might say, “they can look after themselves, as I do.” Thus, we predict the following:

H2: People with higher levels of independence will express less support for censorship.

We also expect that perceptions of media influence will predict support for greater media restrictions, as TPE indicates. Specifically, we anticipate that those who believe sex and nudity in films have more of an influence on others than on themselves (TPP) will favor greater restriction of that type of media content. Conversely, those who believe sex and nudity in films have less of an influence on others than on themselves (a reverse TPP, or FPP) will be less likely to favor restrictions.

H3: People who think sex and nudity in films have more of an influence on others than on themselves (i.e., TPP) will express greater support for censorship.

H4: People who think sex and nudity in films have more of an influence on themselves than on others (i.e., FPP) will express less support for censorship.

Finally, we expect that the combined perception of media influence (self+other) will be associated with more support for media restrictions. The specification of the different types of media influence allows us to ascertain the relative contributions they make to predicting support for censorship, while controlling for them simultaneously. Such a controlled analysis supports the idea that the TPE should occur above and beyond perceived total influence, which is the main reason for using the diamond method (Sun et al., 2008).

H5: The more people think sex and nudity in films have a greater influence on self and others (i.e., total perceived influence), the more they will express support for censorship.

Revision of Censorship

The current study’s context provides an ideal setting to study changes in media regulation over time. Singapore is a small island nation in Southeast

Asia that has a diverse population of more than 5 million people and enjoys a high level of development (e.g., in 2014, it ranked ninth in per capita GDP, ahead of the United States; World Bank, 2015). The country has grown rapidly over the past decade, both in terms of population and technology, and the Internet penetration rate is approaching 90% of households (Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, 2014). Despite its high level of development, Singapore maintains a wide range of policies that restrict media content and distribution in various ways, and it remains among the lowest-ranked developed nations in terms of press freedom (Freedom House, 2015). However, the state of censorship is not static but regularly reviewed and revised. The Media Development Authority of Singapore (MDA) periodically convenes the Censorship Review Committee (CRC), a panel of lay people, community leaders, and specialists and experts to assess the state of media restrictions. Initially established to review censorship standards and practices once each decade, the CRC has met more frequently since 2000 to better address the rapidly changing media landscape.

In general, the trend with film censorship has been to allow more challenging content to be screened, albeit with labels and age restrictions. For example, the film, “The Kids are All Right” (2010), was screened uncut in select theaters even though it contained depictions of both heterosexual and homosexual sex. Although there has been much debate over what should be allowed and what should be restricted, the trend has been toward liberalization (Oon, 2010). A contributing factor has been advances in technology, which have presented a challenge to government regulators. Pornography and other objectionable material are nominally blocked on the Internet, but virtual private networks and other “work-arounds” allow determined individuals to access a wide range of content. Whereas free-to-air television is still heavily regulated, cable television now presents a wider range of content with warnings and age advisories. Thus, the first research question that arises is whether public opinion of censorship has changed during this period.

RQ1: Has support for censorship changed over time?

We are also interested in whether the prediction of support for censorship has changed over time, which the second and third research questions ask. In particular, we want to know whether the degree to which self-construals affect the behavioral component has changed. We also want to see if the influence of various components of TPP on support for censorship has changed over time.

RQ2: Have the effects of independent and interdependent self-construal on support for censorship changed over time?

RQ3: Have the effects of third-person perception, first-person perception, and total influence on support for censorship changed over time?

Method

Two nationally representative telephone surveys were conducted in Singapore for the study. The first was conducted during the last week of August 2001 (“Wave 1”), and the second conducted during the first two weeks of March 2013 (“Wave 2”). Both surveys were conducted using random-digit dialing and within-household randomization to provide probability samples. The site of data collection was a computer-assisted telephone interview facility at a large public university in Singapore. Interviews lasted approximately 15 min for Wave 1 and 20 min for Wave 2. Three language versions of the survey (back-translated for accuracy) were used to accommodate speakers of English, Mandarin, and Malay (the three national languages [of four] with the largest percentage of native speakers).

Participants

Respondents in Wave 1 ($n = 626$) ranged in age from 18 to 78 ($M = 33.51$, $SD = 11.89$, $Median = 32$) years. The gender split was roughly equal, with 51.0% of the sample being female. The majority of the sample was Chinese (73.5%), followed by Malay (11.2%), Indian (8.8%), Other (4.2%), and Eurasian (2.4%). Median educational attainment was “Diploma” (roughly equivalent to an associate’s degree in the United States), and median income was in the range of “S\$2,501 to S\$3,500.” The response rate, according to the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) formula 3, was 43.1%.

For Wave 2, there were 1,012 respondents who ranged in age from 21 to 82 ($M = 39.76$, $SD = 14.13$; $Median = 40$) years. The gender split was roughly equal, with 51.7% of the sample being female. The majority of the sample was Chinese (75.5%), followed by Malay (10.3%), Indian (9.4%), Other (3.5%), and Eurasian (1.2%). Median educational attainment was “Diploma,” and median income was in the range of “S\$4,501 to S\$5,500.” The response rate, according to AAPOR formula 3, was 36.7%. The demographic profiles of both waves suggest the samples are representative of Singapore.¹

Measures

We measured independent and interdependent self-construal with items from Gudykunst et al. (1996). Examples of the seven items that measured

¹According to census figures from the Singapore Department of Statistics (2012), the ethnic breakdown in Singapore in 2012 was 74.1% Chinese, 13.4% Malay, 9.2% Indian, and 3.3% Others. The median household income in Singapore, including retired and unemployed residents, was \$6,772; the median age was 38.0 years; and 50.7% of the population was female. In 2000, the ethnic breakdown and gender split were comparable, while median age was 34.0 and median household income was \$4,000.

independence include “I prefer to be self-reliant rather than depend on others” and “I should decide my future on my own.” Examples of the six items that measured interdependence include “It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group” and “My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me.” For Wave 1, the measure of independence had marginal reliability ($\alpha = .67$; $M = 4.29$, $SD = .61$). Interdependence had low reliability ($\alpha = .55$; $M = 3.84$, $SD = .67$). For Wave 2, the measure of independence had acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .71$; $M = 4.25$, $SD = .59$). Interdependence had marginal reliability ($\alpha = .62$; $M = 3.80$, $SD = .62$). The relatively low reliabilities of interdependence in both waves are consistent with prior surveys of nationally representative samples conducted in Singapore (Detenber et al., 2007; Ho, Detenber, Malik, & Neo, 2012) and have the potential to suppress significant relationships. Thus, the low reliabilities work against our research interests, not in favor of them.

We measured perceived influence on self and on others each with three items, which had identical wording except for the referent content. For each referent person (i.e., “you” or “the average Singaporean”), three items referenced different kinds of sexual content: nudity in movies, portrayals of premarital sex in movies, and portrayals of extramarital sex in movies. We computed each self- and other-perception as the average of the three items. Table 1 contains means and standard deviations of the composite indexes, which we computed as average item scores.

We measured perceived influence with responses to “Please tell me how much you think [referent content] affects [referent person].” Response options ranged from 1 = “Strong positive influence” to 5 = “Strong negative influence.” Both the measures of self- and other-perception had good reliability in Wave 1 ($\alpha = .83$, $.87$, respectively), as well as in Wave 2 ($\alpha = .84$, $.88$, respectively).

The criterion variable, support for censorship, was measured by participants’ responses to “Do you think restrictions on [target content] should be [1 = a lot more liberal to 5 = a lot more strict].” “The three-item measure followed that used by Gunther and Ang (1996) and had good reliability in both waves ($\alpha = .80$, $\alpha = .84$, respectively).

Data Cleaning and Analysis

We conducted missing value analysis in SPSS. In both waves, missingness did not exceed 7%, with the exception of income, which had 14.2% missing values in Wave 1 and 24.4% missing values in Wave 2. We made the conservative assumption of data missing not at random (MNAR) and imputed missing values using the expectation-maximization (EM) algorithm in SPSS (Graham, Hofer, & MacKinnon, 1996; Schafer & Graham, 2002).

Table 1
Variances, Covariances, Correlations, and Means for Pooled Sample (N = 1638)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender	0.25	0.63	-0.04	-0.05	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.03	-0.01	0.10	0.00	0.12
2. Age	.09***	186.43	-3.87	0.46	0.96	0.75	1.44	1.05	-0.38	2.49	1.48	2.62
3. Education	-.08**	-.27***	1.13	1.08	0.01	-0.06	-0.05	-0.05	0.01	-0.14	0.80	-0.18
4. Income	-.04	.01	.41***	5.98	0.10	-0.10	-0.01	-0.04	-0.03	-0.21	0.30	-0.35
5. Independence	.03	.12***	.01	.07**	0.36	0.14	0.02	0.01	-0.00	0.02	-0.01	0.01
6. Interdependence	.04	.09***	-.09***	-.06*	.37***	0.41	0.02	0.02	-0.01	0.07	-0.01	0.09
7. TPP (raw diff.)	.08**	.12***	-.06*	-.00	.03	.04	0.78	0.46	-0.32	0.34	-0.02	0.15
8. TPP (diamond)	.09	.13***	-.07**	-.03	.03	.05*	.86***	0.37	-0.09	0.18	-0.02	0.12
9. FPP (diamond)	-.02	-.06*	.01	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.76***	-.31***	0.23	-0.16	-0.00	-0.04
10. Total influence	.14***	.13***	-.10***	-.06*	.03	.08**	.27***	.21***	-.23***	1.96	-0.02	0.58
11. Time	.01	.22***	.16***	.26***	-.03	-.03	-.04	-.06*	-0.01	-0.03	0.24	0.01
12. Support for cens.	.24***	.19***	-.17***	-.15***	.02	.14***	.17***	.19***	-.08**	.42***	.03	0.97
Mean	1.51	37.37	4.9	4.61	4.27	3.82	0.31	0.50	0.18	6.87	0.62	3.45

Note. The diagonal contains variances. Covariances are above the diagonal and correlations are below the diagonal. Statistics reflect variables prior to applying any transformations (e.g., mean-centering, standardization).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

We computed TPP using the diamond method (Schmierbach, Boyle, & McLeod, 2008; Sun, Shen, & Pan, 2008). The diamond method calls for three computed variables based on perceived influence on others (“O”) and perceived influence on self (“S”):

Variable 1: For all cases, $O + S$.

Variable 2: For $O > S$, $O - S$, else 0.

Variable 3: For $S > O$, $S - O$, else 0.

Variable 1 is an additive index that indicates total influence, and Variables 2 and 3 are subtractive indexes that indicate TPP and FPP, respectively. A test of the TPE should include all three variables, which shows the influence of TPP controlling for FPP and total influence. This arrangement is more theoretically consistent with the TPE model than are other computational approaches.

In brief, TPP and FPP represent divergent perspectives on perceived media influence. By separating them via the diamond method, subsequent analyses can differentiate these perspectives statistically. Sun et al. (2008) provide detailed rationale for this particular implementation of the diamond method. As well, Schmierbach et al. (2008, pp. 500–501) argue convincingly that a raw difference score fails to account for a baseline of perceived media effects; thus, it will tend to overestimate the perceptual gap when media are perceived to have generally strong effects. The constructed variables were entered into an ordinary least squares regression model that included the data from Wave 1 and Wave 2. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1, and the regression is in Table 2.

Results

Main Effects

We predicted that support for censorship would be positively related to interdependence (H_1) and negatively related to independence (H_2). Results show that support for censorship was positively related to interdependence ($\beta = .11$, $p < .001$) but unrelated to independence ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .21$). These results support H_1 but fail to support H_2 .

Next, we predicted that support for censorship would be positively related to TPP (H_3) and total influence (H_5) and negatively related to FPP (H_4). Results show that support for censorship was positively related to TPP ($\beta = .10$, $p < .001$) and perceived total influence ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$) but unrelated to FPP ($\beta = .04$, $p = .053$). These results support H_3 and H_5 but fail to support H_4 .

Table 2

Regression of Support for Censorship on Demographics, Personality, Perceived Media Influence, Time of Survey, and Time Interactions (N = 1638)

Predictor	B	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	SE	β
Intercept	3.15	2.85	3.46	0.15	
Gender	0.31	0.22	0.40	0.04	.16***
Age	0.07	0.03	0.10	0.02	.09***
Education	-0.05	-0.09	0.00	0.02	-.05*
Income	-0.04	-0.06	-0.02	0.01	-.10***
$\Delta R^2 = .11^{***}$					
Independent self-construal	-0.03	-0.08	0.01	0.02	-.03
Interdependent self-construal	0.10	0.05	0.14	0.02	.10***
Third-person perception	0.10	0.05	0.14	0.02	.10***
First-person perception	0.04	0.00	0.09	0.02	.04
Total influence	0.36	0.31	0.40	0.02	.36***
$\Delta R^2 = .15^{***}$					
Time	0.12	0.03	0.21	0.05	.06*
× Independent self-construal	0.10	0.01	0.20	0.05	.05*
× Interdependent self-construal	-0.05	-0.14	0.04	0.05	-.03
× Third-person perception	0.05	-0.04	0.14	0.05	.02
× First-person perception	-0.02	-0.10	0.07	0.05	-.01
× Total influence	-0.10	-0.19	-0.01	0.05	-.05*
$\Delta R^2 = .01^{**}$					
$R^2 = .27$					

Note. Age is scaled by a factor of 0.10 for better resolution of unstandardized slopes. As interaction terms contain standardized variables, the slopes of the main effects are identical after adding the interaction terms; thus, we report only the final regression model.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Addressing $RQ1$, the effect of time was significant ($\beta = .06, p < .05$), indicating that there was an increase in support for greater restrictions on film content among the general population between 2001 and 2103.

Interactions

Our second and third research questions asked whether the above relationships ($H1-H5$) varied over time. We evaluated this by including respective interaction terms in the regression model. These terms were the product of a mean-centered time variable, which subtracted the sample-weighted mean ($M = 0.62$), and the z -scores of the each of the five focal predictors. The regression model produced two significant interactions. We graphed significant interactions using the pick-a-point method (Jaccard & Turrisi, 2003).

Figure 1

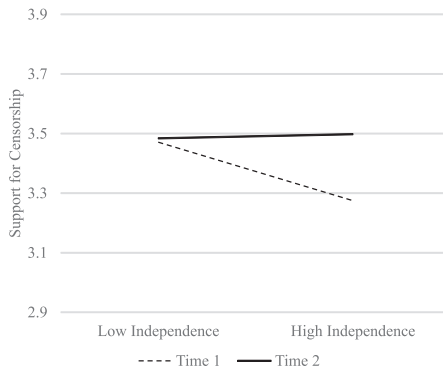
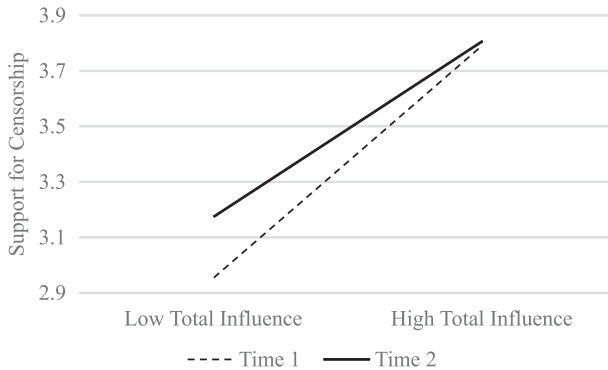
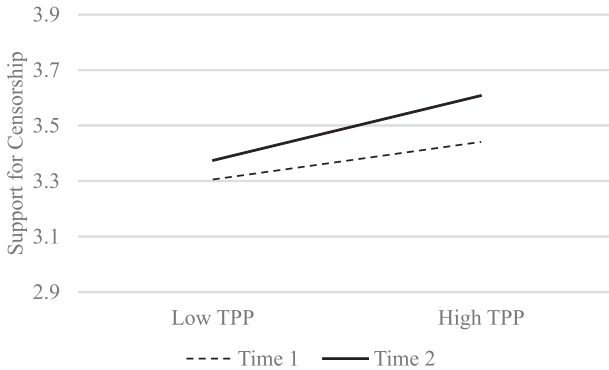
Time × Independence interaction predicting support for censorship

Figure 2

Time × Total influence interaction predicting support for censorship

First, the interaction of time with independence was significant ($\beta = .05$, $p = .024$). The positive sign suggests that the relationship between independence and support for censorship became less negative over time. This effect of time is visible in Figure 1. Second, the interaction of time with total influence was significant ($\beta = -.05$, $p = .022$). The negative sign suggests that the relationship between total influence and support for censorship became less positive over time. This effect of time is visible in Figure 2.

Figure 3

Time × TPP interaction predicting support for censorship

Notably, the interaction of time and TPP was not significant ($\beta = .02$, $p = .32$), which indicates that the TPE was stable over time. That is, the positive effect of TPP on support for censorship was not significantly different between Wave 1 and Wave 2. Figure 3 shows this interaction, where the slopes of the regression lines (support for censorship regressed on TPP) appear roughly parallel. Although visual analysis of the slopes may suggest that the TPE grew stronger over time, we would reject such a conclusion, given the slope's high p -value and the margin of its confidence interval on both sides of zero.

Similarly, the interaction of time and FPP was not significant ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .69$), which further suggests the temporal stability of the TPE. Though, as FPP was not a significant predictor of support for censorship at either time, this latter result is difficult to interpret: we failed to detect a first-person effect, and this null finding did not change over time. Therefore, our discussion will focus on the stability of the TPE.

Discussion

Using data from two nationally representative surveys conducted more than a decade apart, the present study yielded findings that contribute to our understanding of support for censorship and the TPE in a number of ways. First, it appears that self-construals are reasonable predictors of support for censorship, at least in an Asian context. As expected, interdependence was associated with a preference for increased regulation of sex and nudity in films, and independence was associated in Wave 1 with less support for regulation, a relationship that appeared to diminish over time. It could be that, as Feng and Guo (2012) speculate, “people living in Asian societies may, by nature or nurture, be more compliant and supportive of government policies than

their Western counterparts” (p. 47). In other words, the finding may reflect a preference for proxy control, as Yamaguchi (2001) suggested. Or they could be motivated by a genuine desire to protect their fellow citizens, as their interdependent self-construal would suggest. Future research can examine the extent to which deference to authority undergirds support for censorship in collectivistic societies and reflects an Asian cultural orientation.

The relationship between self-construals and support for censorship may be a function of the socio-political context. Given the long history of strong media regulation and censorship in Singapore, it can be argued that support for censorship represents the normative view. Indeed, our data indicate that there is a fairly high level of support in the population (pooled sample: $M = 3.45$, $SD = .99$). Those who score highly on interdependence probably feel some pressure to conform to the normative view. In contrast, people who are more independent feel less pressure to conform and are free to express their opinion that censorship and restrictions on media content should be less strict. Past research in Singapore provides some evidence that those with greater independent self-construals are more likely to voice an unpopular opinion (Willnat, Lee, & Detenber, 2002). To better understand support for censorship, future research might look not only at deference to authority but also motivation to conform to perceived social norms. Doing so would require cross-national comparisons among contexts with varying levels of censorship and acceptance of it.

This study further contributed to the literature by testing TPE using the diamond method specification that Sun et al. (2008) recommend. This approach extends the recommendations of Schmierbach et al. (2008) by explicitly separating TPP and FPP. Both variants of the diamond method control for total perceived influence, and thus show the effects of TPP and FPP independent of perceived “powerful media effects” (Sun et al., 2008, p. 262). The current study found that total perceived influence was the strongest predictor of support for censorship by a wide margin. This intuitive finding suggests that the belief that sexual content in films negatively affects the self *and* others strongly motivates support for censorship. Despite lacking evidence for causality, such an ordering is logical. After controlling for this relatively strong effect, we found that TPP remains a significant predictor of support for censorship. That is, Singaporeans’ support for censorship is related not only to their beliefs of powerful media effects but also to their belief that the “average Singaporean” is more influenced than they are. Thus, this analysis provides a more robust and theoretically consistent test of TPE than do analyses of raw-difference scores or other less constrained models.

The results of the study suggest a high degree of stability over time, which underscores the robustness of TPE. Despite changes in social conditions (e.g., greater longevity, higher education, and higher income), the effects of self-

construal and perceptions of media influence on support for greater restrictions of film content shifted only slightly, if at all. Support for censorship itself increased modestly, but significantly. The two significant interactions suggest that over time, (1) a negative relationship between independent self-construal and support for censorship diminished to practically zero, and (2) a positive relationship between perceived total influence and support for censorship became weaker. Regarding the former interaction, changes in media regulation that afford greater individual control are more consistent with an independent self-construal (Hernandez & Iyengar, 2001; Xu, 2007). So, although independence is theoretically opposed to censorship, it may be that independence is neutral to the kind of censorship that acknowledges, at least to some extent, the agency of media audiences. In fact, that was precisely how the CRC described its most recent review of censorship policy.

“In the new media environment, with ever-increasing content streaming through the largely unregulated Internet, existing gate-keeping methods of media regulation will become less effective. Responsibility must shift further over time towards a tripartite collaboration of government, industry and community, with the populace empowered with relevant skills and tools to enhance their ability to make more informed media choices, for themselves and for their children.” (Censorship Review Committee, 2010)

Thus, we feel this explanation makes sense in the current context and also may help explain the interaction of time and perceived total influence. To the extent that the Singapore CRC adjusts media regulation in relation to changes in public sentiment, then any loosening of censorship reflects—at least to a degree—greater public tolerance of historically offensive media content. Although a growth in tolerance would be related to diminished concerns about media influence, public opinion of censorship should remain steady. Thus, over time, the relationship between perceived total influence and support for censorship would decrease, as the data reflect.

The increase in support for censorship from 2001 to 2013 is surprising at first glance, as there is growing public support for more freedom of expression in Singapore. Such public opinion intuitively runs counter to support for censorship. However, understanding how censorship policies and the media environment have changed over the past decade offers a solution to this paradox. In terms of film content, rather than initiating policy change from the top down, the CRC undertakes its review from the ground up, consulting with an array of constituencies over the course of a year. The CRC then makes policy change recommendations based on what it sees as contemporary community standards in the face of the current media environment. Although the relaxing of content restrictions has not moved at the pace some would wish, for others it has been just about right, and for still others it has probably been too swift. Thus, the slight uptick in support for censorship over time reflects public

opinion about a dynamic system. From a policy perspective (and with no intention of being apologists for censorship), it would seem that the process the government has established tracks contemporary societal values on portrayals of sex and nudity fairly well, and the media restrictions are largely consonant with public views on the matter.

Although the study offers a first look at TPE over time, the comparison of independent cross-sections of the population is less than ideal for understanding how individuals' views of media influence and support for censorship evolve. Ideally, a panel study could be conducted to better track these relationships and perhaps address how the IPMI changes over time. Future studies should also take steps to address the situated nature of cultural influences and the fact that cultural orientations can be primed. There is room for improvement, too, in the measurement of key concepts, especially self-construals.

In conclusion, the present study provides empirical evidence for a relationship between culturally linked self-construals and support for censorship, something not previously established. It also gives some indication of the robustness of TPE through the specification of media influences using the diamond method, and by using comparable data over time. In a socio-political context known for being restrictive of objectionable media fare, it is interesting to see how people in Singapore respond to steps taken to relax media content regulation. The Singaporean Government has increasingly sought to put content control in the hands of media audiences, recognizing adults' capacity to self-regulate (and parents' capacity to regulate media use for their children), yet the public is still concerned over potential harm to others that media may cause, and hence somewhat reluctant to see too rapid liberalization.

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Biographical Notes

Benjamin H. Detenber is an Associate Professor in the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. His research focuses on public opinion and political communication, and media psychology.

Sonny Rosenthal is an Assistant Professor in the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. His research focuses on science and environmental communication, media psychology, and research methodology.