

## **Regulating Content in Broadcasting, Media and the Internet: A Case Study on Public Understanding of their Role on Self-Regulation**

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### **Abstract**

*Self regulation has become increasingly important in Malaysia because the government is no longer feasible to play a watchdog role. The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission Act 1998 (CMA) is put charge of overseeing the new regulatory framework to accommodate the convergence of telecommunications, broadcasting and on-line activities. Replacing the Broadcasting Act, CMA which encourages industry and public self-regulation establishes an industry forum as a dynamic tool for the industry to formulate and implement voluntary codes of rules. Thirteen years past and self-regulation is seen a preferred alternative to government regulation on the control of content. However, no affirmative information or description of self-regulation seemed forthcoming especially for the public to understand it. Questions arise on how do the public play a role in the self-regulation processes especially in regulating TV programmes and the media content as a way to control their children on what to see and what not to see. Why is there a need for the self-regulation on TV programmes and the media? How to self-regulate? This study therefore attempts to seek the public's understanding of self-regulation particularly in regulating content whether in broadcasting areas or in other media or the Internet, if there is, as self-regulation is an internal or transactional process that enables individuals to guide their goal-directed activities overtime and across changing circumstances. The findings of the study indicate that there is a need to identify adequately the role played by the content code particularly on the public responsibility of self-regulation because it is responsible as a set of industry guidelines in dealing on the usage and dissemination of content for public consumption.*

**Keywords:** Regulating Content, Broadcasting, Media, the Internet, Public, Self Regulation

### **Introduction**

Tambini (2008) wrote that media self-regulation is the setting of rules for the media and oversight of compliance with those rules by media organizations or by users. He concurred that self-regulation should be distinguished from state or statutory regulation (i.e., regulation by law or by a statutory regulatory authority). Means of self-regulation include dispute resolution procedures, rating boards, codes of conduct, and at the level of the user, technical measures such as filtering, encryption, and pin numbers that regulate children's and others' behaviour. Based on this Tambini (ibid) also said that the self-regulation is often seen as more attractive than state regulation because it has legitimacy with the industry, is more flexible in responding to change, and can offer an alternative to state and political interference with media content. On the other hand, self-regulation is often criticized for the same reasons: because it is overly flexible and too close to the industry to offer genuine protection of the public interest. The sanctions of self-regulation are generally seen as weaker than those available to statutory bodies or through legal process.

In Malaysia, the Malaysia Communications and Multimedia Commission Act 1998 (MCMC) is in charged with overseeing the new regulatory framework to accommodate the convergence of telecommunications, broadcasting and on-line activities. From the beginning it was created, the key role was to regulate the communications and multimedia industry based on the powers provided under the MCMC and Communication and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA). The basic principles underlying the CMA are transparency, technology neutrality, flexibility and transparency.

Based on this fact, to CMA, self-regulation promotes a healthy competition and liberation of the communications and multimedia industry in line with the country's aim to make Malaysia a communication and multimedia hub. It defines an advocacy that the industry self-regulation as one of the ways to meet the objective. CMA encourages industry self-regulation and establishes an industry forum as a dynamic tool for the industry to formulate and implement voluntary codes of rules. This industry code of self-regulation is prepared at the industry's own initiative or by request of the MCMC. It looks like self-regulation has become increasingly important because no longer is it feasible for government to play a watchdog role. It must turn over the role of monitoring and enforcement to self regulation.

The accomplishment of self-regulation in this country was through a few categories of industry forums and codes where each category have their specific purposes and functions as well as procedures that encourage voluntary compliances amongst industry players. For example the Communication and Multimedia Content Forum (CMCF) of Malaysia which was established in February 2001 is formatted in line with the requirements of the CMA. Its role is to govern content and to address content related issues disseminated by electronic medium by industry self-regulation in line with a Content Code. The Content Code was formulated by the Content Forum which was consisted of two categories of members, that is:

- i. Ordinary Membership which is open to businesses, industries, and trade organizations, besides firms, companies and corporate bodies that are established, incorporated or registered under the laws of Malaysia and qualifying as advertisers, audio text service providers, broadcasters, civic group, content creators and distributors as well as Internet access service providers.
- ii. Associate members which consist of any individuals, firms, societies or bodies established, incorporated or registered under the laws of Malaysia interested in content provided by the communications and multimedia industry.

The management of the CMCF rests with the Chairman and 18 council members elected from the six 'ordinary' member categories of advertising, broadcasters, civic groups, content creators and distributors as well as Internet access service providers and civic group. And as for the Content Code, it is a set of industry guidelines on the usage and dissemination of content for public consumption. It includes model procedures for dealing with offensive and indecent content, the restrictions on the provision of unsuitable content and methods of classifying content. It has the following sections such as the general principles, the broadcasting code, the advertising code, specific audio text hosting services code and specific online code. The chairman and council members of CMCF are responsible for the development of the code (source: Multimedia Communication Commission, 2011).

### **Problem Statement**

Malaysia has embarked on a bold step towards a policy and regulatory framework based on the concept of convergence. This has called for drastic changes in the institutional set-up and regulations affecting the communication and multimedia industry. In 1998, MCMC and CMA had changed the definition of the three previous distinct industries (Telecommunication, broadcasting and online) into the communications and multimedia industry. One of the reason behind this was the contention on the part of the government to differentiate these three industries will do more harm than good due to the fact that technological advances no longer makes it viable to draw the line differentiating them.

Thus the introduction of the converging industries had transform the way people live and work in Malaysia. The growth of new media channels had changed the current media landscape. The exponential growth of blogs and pod casts had seen the new media forms "reach and even wider audience than traditional media". Broadcast rules do not apply to them due to their interactive nature.

In 2004, at the official launching of the Content Code and CMCF Website, the former minister of the Ministry of Energy, Water and Communication Dato Seri Dr. Lim Keng Yaik said the formation of the content code is to ensure a uniform and coordinated content regulation amongst public and private stations. The national policy objectives speak of a civil society and national identity. These words together with the concept of industry self-regulation imply a certain degree of self discipline, cultural and ethical norms.

A point to be noted is that, self-regulation was born of many discussions, arguments and debates about regulating the media and social media.

In these discussions, it was clear that people were using key terms such as “Internet”, “regulation”, and most of all “self-regulation”, in a variety of different ways. Many of them are confused and inconsistent in giving views, what more on the understanding of self-regulation itself. For example, the recurrent tune was that “the Internet should not be regulated by the government, but should be self regulated instead”. As everyone is talking about self-regulation as the obviously preferable alternative to government regulation, as far as was evident from these discussions, all seemed to understand that “self-regulation” equalled lack of government regulation? Nevertheless, no affirmative information or description of self-regulation seemed forthcoming. There is a gap of understanding on the concept of self-regulation especially among the non-professional groups of society. Therefore this study seeks to identify the understanding of the concept of self-regulation among the public and to test the concept of self regulation.

### **Literature Review**

Article 19 of the Global Campaign of Free Expression International Federation of Journalists (IJF) in South East Europe (2005) elaborates that self-regulation in any profession or sector entails the development and enforcement of rules by those whose conduct is to be governed, with the ultimate aim of improving the service offered to consumers, claimants or – in the case of the media – the public at large. It requires standards to be set and agreed on by the individuals and institutions to which they will apply and the development of procedures and mechanisms for enforcing them.

It also concurred that fundamental to self-regulation is the principle of voluntary compliance. Law courts play no role in adjudicating or enforcing the standards set and those who commit to them do so not under threat of legal sanction, but for positive reasons, such as the desire to further the development and credibility of their profession. Self-regulation relies first and foremost on a common understanding by members of the values and ethics at the heart of their professional conduct. Essential considerations in the conceptualisation and development of a system of self-regulation are: who is being held accountable, by whom, for what purpose, how and with which outcome in mind? In Malaysia, not much research has been done on the self-regulating aspect. Even if it was done, the research is skewed more in the legislative areas. Current studies are focusing on issues that arise from the performance of legal system or even certain aspects in legislative provisions in the country. Most of the Malaysian researches are focusing on case-study, law systems and its allocation and certain laws implementation. Studies related to cyber law in this country were less carried out due to the field has not yet established and developed. Local researchers have to focus these issues at the international level because most of the information and studies on cyber laws were done by Western researchers. Nevertheless, these researches that exist in Malaysia still can contribute to cyber laws or legislative provisions in the country.

Copyright Law in Malaysia: The Response to Technical Development by Lake Tee Khaw (1997) in her doctorate research examines copyright issues related to Copyright Act 1987 and implication of this act in country legislative provisions. Khaw stated that shortages exist in this act due of the regulations do not include electronic trade, intellectual ownership and virtual trading system. Khaw argues that an effective and established mechanism should be drafted to solve copyright problems and intellectual ownership in this country.

Meanwhile, Cyber law: Policies and challenges by Abu Bakar Munir (1998) study present cyber regulations, those implemented by several countries such as America, Europe and Asia. He asserted that the countries are focusing on dynamic policy approach in order to fill the concept of world globalization information technology. This is to ensure that those policies practice by these countries are not lag from the latest technological changes. He has formulated that there is a trend existed among the countries in creating the information technology environment. He concluded the implementation of policies and development of information technology which was enacted by these countries must be shared by every country in this world.

Blogging and Democratization in Malaysia: A New Civil Society in the Making by Jun-E Tan and Zawawi Ibrahim (2008) asserted that the blogging phenomenon has been credited with playing an important part in the historic results of the 2008 General Election. It has also been lauded with the democratization of Malaysian public life in general. Here they put together hard data coupled with interesting interviews with the main players to bring the discussion of blogs out of the realm of punditry and the anecdotal into a more studied empirical sociological sphere. It is a significant work which paves the way for similar efforts at studying the impact of new technologies on democracy in Malaysia.

Meanwhile, in a research entitled “Localizing the Internet Beyond Communities and Networks”, Postill (2008, p. 413 – 431) focus on the increasing number of Internet users worldwide that continue to grow and the Internet is becoming ‘more local’. This article addresses the epistemological challenge posed by this global process of Internet localization by examining some of the conceptual tools at the disposal of Internet researchers. It argues that progress has been hampered by an overdependence on the problematic notions of community and network whose paradigmatic status has yet to be questioned by Internet scholars. The study seeks to broaden the conceptual space of Internet localization studies through a ground-up conceptualization exercise that draws inspiration from the field theories of both Pierre Bourdieu and the Manchester School of Anthropology and is based on recent fieldwork in suburban Malaysia.

In his earlier research in 2006, entitled “Grounding the Internet: An Ethnography of Cyber Activism and Local Governance in a Kuala Lumpur suburb” a critical review of the burgeoning literature on ICT localization, how local residents, activists and authorities around the world are appropriating digital technologies to pursue their goals. The study presents geographical and historical setting: the twin townships of Subang Jaya and USJ during the 1999-2006 periods. This research also provide an account of methodology used, including fieldwork rational and process, main online and offline research sites. It describes the genesis and early structuring of the field of residential affairs in Subang Jaya – USJ. This is an emergent “field of practices” (Schatzki 2001) in Postill (ibid.) which local activists, council staff, politicians, journalists and other social agents compete and cooperate often through the Internet over issues of concern to local resident. The study aims to explore the tensions and conflicts that arise from the ample opportunities afforded by digital technologies. The analysis tracks the field trajectories and activities of three influential agents which include a local politician, a blogger and a crime watch colony hub in Malaysia.

### **Research Objectives**

- i. To understand the concept of self-regulation introduced by MCMC
- ii. To identify the understanding of the concept of self-regulation among the public especially the non-professional group;
- iii. To examine ways for public to get involved in the self-regulation exercise especially in self regulating the media, broadcasting and Internet content.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions have been developed to achieve and answer the objectives of the research:

1. Why is the self-regulation on media content introduced by MCMC?
2. Is the public aware of the self-regulation introduced by MCMC?
3. How to go about identifying the understanding of self-regulation among the public especially the non-professional group?
4. How to get the public involved with the self-regulation on media?

### **Methodology**

It is decided that a qualitative approach is deemed appropriate for this study. Justification for taking the approach is because the study attempts to understand the meaning of self-regulation amongst the public, in this case, the non-professional group. This category of respondents’ role is important in helping out in the implementation of the self regulation exercise especially towards in ensuring the growth and the development of content applications and services that represents Malaysia culture and national identity.

Rationale of undergoing a qualitative research for the study is because it will yield non numeric information and a rich understanding of the issue generated by examining a phenomenon that is not easily translated into numbers (Berg, 2007; Lofland et. al, 2006; Guion and Flowers, 2002). This is based on the feature of the qualitative research that offers a more systematic way of investigation to achieve the objectives as well as to answer the research questions in the study. Qualitative methods also provide the techniques and tools to dig deep and to go beyond the surface, thus offering data closer to reality.

In carrying out the study, the data is derived from research using:

- i. In-depth interview
- ii. Focus group

### **In-depth interview**

The in-depth interview which is the first methodology applied, affords the researcher the chance to dig for information. As noted, there is a need to develop what Brenner (1985, p. 148) in Hocking, Stacks and McDermott (2003, p.209) calls an “intimate familiarity” with the people involved which allows the researcher to understand the respondents’ point of view. This style of approach will give a clearer picture, feedbacks, ideas and subjective perspectives regarding respondents’ profession, expectations and challenges. The questions will be kept general, open and relatively unfocused so as not to force the data. All interviews will be taped, each lasting between one and half hours. Data for the mentioned methodology will be collected from selected informants in the media industry for this study in the Klang Valley. They are purposely selected in order to capture a nuanced understanding on self regulation.

### **Focus Group**

The focus group interview is the second phase of methodology applied for this study. It is a technique use to interview a group of people in an informal setting to gauge the understanding of audiences’ attitudes and behaviour (Neuman 2006; Baxter and Babbie 2003; Wimmer and Dominick 2006). Richard Kruger (1988) in Rohayu (2010) outline this instrument of measurement as a socially oriented research method that capture real-life data in a social environment; it has flexibility; has high face validity,; has speedy results and is low in cost.

This methodology is applicable for this research because it is the least method that is suitable to apply especially when dealing with research involving sensitive, highly personal and cultural issues which are unsuitable to discuss particularly among strangers (Merriam 2009). Neuman (2004) added to Merriam assertion due to the fact that this research relates to topics suitable for a focus group discussion which include public’s attitude, citing examples such as race relationships, personal behaviour, new product or a political candidate. For this study, a total of 30 people are selected and broken down into three smaller groups of 10 each group to gain an insight from the respondents on questions that will be prepared for them.

Questions for the focus group are as follows:

Research entitled:

Regulating Content in Broadcasting, Media and the Internet: A Case Study on Public Understanding of their Role on Self-Regulation

By: Dr. Siti Zabedah Mohd Shariff  
Rohayu Kosmin

Dear Focus Group Respondents:

This research is about self regulating ourselves on the content what we see on television programmes and the other media content including the Internet. Self regulation has become increasingly important because the government is no longer feasible to play a watchdog role when the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission Act 1998 (CMA) is put charge of overseeing the new regulatory framework to accommodate the convergence of telecommunications, broadcasting and on-line activities. CMA encourages industry self-regulation and establishes an industry forum as a dynamic tool for the industry to formulate and implement voluntary codes of rules. Thus, self-regulation is now obviously a preferable alternative to government regulation.

This means self-regulation serve as an alternative control to the traditional government regulation.

Question 1:

Do you know that the government, since 1999, is no more responsible on the media and broadcasting content that we see every day? If your answer is yes, explain what you know about it.

Question 2:

Do you agree with this exercise introduced? What is your reaction on this?

Question 3:

Have you ever heard about the Communication and Multimedia Commission (CMC)? What do you know about it?

Question 4:

Based on question 1, your responsibility now is to regulate yourself on the content you and your family see especially on television, and other media content in the Internet. Give your comment on this.

Question 5:

What do you understand by the term – self regulation? Or is this the first time you hear such term?

Question 6:

Do you think that it is necessary or is there a need for you and your family members to regulate the media content you and your family saw on television and the Internet?

Question 7:

Is self-regulation an important task/action today in moulding up the young generation behaviour?

Question 8:

In order to make this self regulation a reality in a family, can you suggest several steps that should be taken by parents in handling this matter?

Question 9:

Do you think that this self regulation will work?

Question 10:

Do you agree to this statement that the self regulation offers a genuine protection on public interest?

### **Data Analysis Method**

For data analysis purposes, the interviews will be transcribed. The data will then be categorized according to various factors and / or useful pointers based on the initial interview questions. For instance on the awareness on the self-regulation perspectives and are the respondents agree to the exercise. The way the texts are transcribed is referred to the ‘transcription conventions of conversation analyses adapted by Bailey (1997), developed by Atkinson and Heritage (1984) and produced by Jefferson (1979) as a guide.

These methods offer several advantages based on the following grounds:

- Looks directly at communication in order to gets at the central aspect of social interaction between researcher and audiences of the site;
- Provides valuable historical / cultural insights over time through analysis of texts; and
- Provides insight into complex models of human thoughts and language use.

In this method, the role of intermediaries as facilitators is crucial, particularly when eliciting responses. Holstein & Grubrium (2002) asserted that such interviews encourage one to know not only the *how* but to *why* of the interview process.

### **Conceptualization**

Regulating Content- The concept of regulating content for this study, is in line with the conceptualization of content regulation, as asserted by Hasmah Zainuddin (2010) especially for television which is an important part of cultural policy in many countries. Content regulation can ensure that local programs, as expressions of a country’s unique cultural identity, have a place on television and are accessible to the community. Content regulation can also foster the development of domestic production industries which create local programs. Local content regulations for television typically restrict how much and at what times foreign programming can be shown by broadcasters, by prescribing a certain percentage of local programming within the total amount of broadcast time. For example, South Korea introduced local content requirements and cinema screen quotas for locally produced films, or limited the number of foreign films that can be imported wit policies and regulations concerning imported films.

Broadcasting- It is the practice of creating audio and video program content and distributing it to the mass audiences of radio, television and Internet media.

To broadcast is to send entertainment and information via one-way electronic media to the general public. Broadcasts usually are intended for recreation, enlightenment, education, experimentation or emergency messaging. Broadcasters are the professionals working in the various electronic mass media. It is also the distribution of audio and video content to a dispersed audience via radio, television, or other, often digital transmission media. Receiving parties may include the general public or a relatively large subset of thereof.

The original term *broadcast* referred to the literal *sowing of seeds* on farms by scattering them over a wide field. It was first adopted by early radio engineers from the Midwestern United States to refer to the analogous dissemination of radio signals. Broadcasting forms a very large segment of the mass media. Broadcasting to a very narrow range of audience is called narrowcasting (from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broadcasting>).

Media – It plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions on a variety of important issues, both through the information that is dispensed through them, and through the interpretations they place upon this information. They also play a large role in shaping modern culture, by selecting and portraying a particular set of beliefs, values, and traditions (an entire way of life), as reality. That is, by portraying a certain interpretation of reality, they shape reality to be more in line with that interpretation. Thus mass media refers collectively to all media technologies, including the Internet, television, newspapers, and radio, which are used for mass communications, and to the organizations which control these technologies (from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/mass media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/mass%20media)).

The Internet - It is a global system of interconnected computer networks that use the standard Internet Protocol Suite (TCP/IP) to serve billions of users worldwide. It is a *network of networks* that consists of millions of private, public, academic, business, and government networks, of local to global scope, that are linked by a broad array of electronic, wireless and optical networking technologies. The Internet carries a vast range of information resources and services, such as the inter-linked hypertext documents of the World Wide Web (WWW) and the infrastructure to support mail. Most traditional communications media including telephone, music, film, and television are reshaped or redefined by the Internet, giving birth to new services such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and IPTV. Newspaper, book and other print publishing are adapting to Web site technology, or are reshaped into blogging and web feeds. The Internet has enabled or accelerated new forms of human interactions through instant messaging, Internet forums, and social networking. Online shopping has boomed both for major retail outlets and small artisans and traders. Business-to-business and financial services on the Internet affect supply chains across entire industries (from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet>).

Public – According to Professor Massimo Pigliucci (2005), public means the whole idea of a social contract is that the group (a nation, a society) is more than the sum of its individual components (pace the libertarians), because there are interactions among individuals, mechanisms put in place to try to lift everybody to a higher standard of living, education, and security. But Americans have bought into the idea that public is synonymous with evil, or at least grossly inefficient (forgetting the waste of corporate welfare and the scandals regularly plaguing the private sector). They have been convinced that "looking out for numero uno" is the best strategy for everybody, which somehow magically solves society's problems through the invisible hand of the marketplace (neglecting the important detail that this may work for economic issues, and even that to a limited extent, but that the latter are most certainly not the same as improved quality of life and social justice). For this study, public means the community or people in general.

Self-Regulation – Self-regulation is the process of continuously monitoring progress toward a goal, checking outcomes, and redirecting unsuccessful efforts (Berk, 2003). According to Zimmerman (2001) to be self-regulated, one need to be aware of their own thought process, and be motivated to actively participate in their own learning process. For that matter, Harris, Reid, and Graham (in press), describe four cornerstones of self-regulation: self-monitoring, self-instruction, goal setting, and self-reinforcement.

Therefore, self-regulation acts as an internal or transactional process that enables an individual to guide their goal-directed activities over time and across changing circumstances (contexts). Regulation implies modulation of thought, affect, behaviour, or attention via deliberate or automated use of specific mechanisms and supportive meta-skills. The processes of self-regulation are initiated when routinized activity is impeded or when goal-directedness is otherwise made salient (the appearance of a challenge, the failure of habitual action patterns etc) Self regulation also appears to be the stable element attempting to guide behaviour along a specific path to a directed aim or goal. However, apart from procedural, epistemic and conceptual divergence in various models of self regulation, basic volitional factors, such as goal setting, self monitoring, activation and use of goals, discrepancy detection and implementation, self evaluation, self cons equation, self efficacy, meta skills, boundary conditions and self regulation failure. For this study, all the conceptualization above is relevant and is taken into account.

## ***Findings***

From the in-depth interviews conducted at the MCMC level, findings indicated that the Commission is now finding ways to simplify the meaning of self-regulation amongst the public by having advertisements on television on self-regulation. In order to ensure a uniform and coordinated content regulation amongst the public and private stations, a committee on content monitoring of Public and Private Television and Radio stations was also set up. The committee includes the Ministry of Information and Culture, Ministry of Home Affairs, Film Censorship Board, the Islamic Body - JAKIM, the National Film Board - FINAS, and others. According to the source, the measurement of success of the self-regulatory process would be revealed based from the number of times the regulatory body, the Commission, intervenes.

Findings also indicate that the Content Code will ensure compliances through a regular process of monitoring. Although the Content Code sets the standard, it will be the Content Forum that will take the steps to ensure the growth and development of content applications and services and that represents Malaysia's culture and national identity. For this purpose too, the members of the Content Forum must always ensure that there is a widespread availability of content that reflect Malaysia's cultural diversity. One interesting finding is that the Content Forum has to promote systems to help make informed decisions about what the public and their children hear and see. The content forum also has the duty to promote media literacy. The focus group methodology reveals a mixed perspective of answers on self regulation and on the understanding of the role of the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) amongst respondents who are representatives of the public. Respondents disclosed some confusion on the idea of what is exactly the function of the Malaysian Communication Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and its relation to self regulation matters.

The first focus group reveal their awareness of the Malaysian Communication Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and relate the body to the monitoring agenda besides controlling the telecommunication, media and broadcasting industry. Some added that it is a body that monitors any misconduct and misbehaviour with regards to broadcasting and media matters. Nevertheless, there are voices within the group that said that they are uncertain of the MCMC enforcement duty to the industry because even though rules and regulations are in order, nothing is evident on the execution part. Overall, respondents of the group only roughly understand the basic understanding of MCMC's function which to them is an avenue for the public to make complaints with regards to broadcasting and media issues.

On self-regulation, they urge the MCMC to equip them with more information and tips so that they can differentiate the wrong and the right things to do. They also urge the body to have more advertisements for early awareness and exposure on the suitable viewing content besides updating oneself on the current technology to keep abreast on the suitable content for viewing. To them, this is important because as parents, they have many commitments in raising a family and a slip of their mind on such important matters is a losing end for each family. Members of the group agreed that self-regulation is a set of self-disciplinary and filtering alarm and is a serious matter as now the government is not responsible on the content they see but they are ignorant about it. Response from the second focus group reveals a different scenario all together. Out of the 10 respondents only three admitted that they know little about MCMC but do not show interest to know in what capacity is its role in the self-regulation perspective. The other seven responded that they do not know what MCMC is all about due to the lack of information on it. They admitted that lack of reading and not interested with the role played by the organization is a factor that resulted to such ignorance.

On self-regulation, they said that they have done such responsibility far back before the MCMC introduces but it is done in an indirect manner. They acknowledged that basic teachings on religion are the only way to enable family members to differentiate the rights and wrongs. To them, while parents play an important role to impose necessary rules on family members, the government also have to play its role besides the content providers. They suggested that it is important to note that all parties should take responsibility. On the other hand, MCMC need to turn the negative perception on the correct term and meaning of self-regulation because parents, family and other members of the public should participate in the self-regulation context introduced by MCMC. They concurred that the lesser the information about self-regulation they perceived, would deter the understanding of the whole process and thus the objective of pursuing self-regulation would not work. Respondents of the third group showed surprised reaction. They were taken aback when told that the government, since 1999 was no longer responsible on the media and broadcasting content.

To their mind, the government is still looking into content matters, whether on television or on other media. They realised that there is no control over the Internet because of the open sky policy that the government had agreed on. They reacted that content matters should be in the hands of the government because to them the creation of a national culture is considered an essential part of nation building and that the government is the only entity that can ensure this to happen. They disagree that MCMC is to take responsibility on the mandate to foresee the formation of national identity. This is because Malaysia is a third world country and development in controlling the mind of the people especially the new generation is needed. They argue that they were not aware of the existence of MCMC, because before 1999, the control of content in television was obvious and they take it for granted. They agree that the content of the media and others of today do not inject national identity within the context of a Malaysian society. Majority of the informants in this group showed excitement, confusion and anger during the discussion because to them this is the first time they were involved discussing on such a crucial topic. All respondents agreed that self-regulation is an important task today for parents and other parties besides the industry in moulding up the young generation's behaviour. Below are the informants' insights that indicate their support on self-regulation exercise:

- *Yes, the current scenario and development of the younger generation today require more attention from parents because the world now is complicated*
- *Yes, Youngsters believe the Internet more rather than their parents. So, the computer should be place in the living room so that parents can monitor on the content of what they see*
- *Yes, this is particularly important to those who are not equipped with good religion stronghold as they will not be able to restrain themselves from viewing those unsuitable content*
- *Yes, younger generations tend to imitate what they see in the media. Self-regulation coupled with good religious teachings will lessen the impact of the unnecessary content viewing*
- *No ASTRO for my family...Just the ordinary free-to-air TV channels will do and for Internet, the computer, I put it in the living room from now on*
- *Yes, the horror movies on television somewhat instil negative perception on the children which contradict with the religious teachings. So with self-regulation, maybe parents can curb this problem*
- *Yes, early education and awareness of self regulation would provide an ample preparation period for the children and teenagers in facing challenges in the future*
- *Yes, self-regulation as a filter to unsuitable media content to the children*

The focus group discussion revealed positive minds when they gave suggestions on several steps to be taken in order to make self-regulation a reality and to be practiced by parents, family members and the public at large. The first suggestion is that the government need to have a pilot study on the self-regulation perspective that would encourage parents to self-regulate before implementing it in a wider aspect. This is because promotion and awareness will prove on the effectiveness of the exercise. The second suggestion is to make this self-regulation exercise known to parents. A creative straight forward educational advertisement is appropriate to be put on television and other mediums so as to make parents alert on it. To respondents, having a website on MCMC and explanations strictly on its role besides the content forum is not enough. Another suggestion is that parents should watch content with their children of all ages as to indirectly monitor and control the content seen by them. This way would hinder them from having the habit of watching explicit content especially on the Internet. Consistent reminder among family members of what is good and bad on media related matter would help cultivate positive thinking.

Respondents slightly agreed that self-regulation would work but the process will take time for its overall implementation. The exercise to them would be a failure if there is no proper planning and no proper awareness instilled among the public. With a high level of discipline, the implementation would come into realization but respondents agreed that it is depending on the individuals' involved and family values. Another finding from this exercise is that respondents conclude that self-regulation must be understood by every individual of the public, their role and what they can contribute to the concept of self regulation since the government has introduced it to replace the 1988 Broadcast Act. Respondents also are confident that if every individual were to understand what the government doing now besides the role is played by the Multimedia and Communication Commission, self regulation would work in a controllable environment. It should not only be limited to family members but it should be practiced in an extended family as well as the neighbourhood.

The respondents also agreed that with proper guidance and with a better understanding on how self regulation works, together with a workable workforce among the public, the making of the self-regulatory exercise would be a success. The success and failure of the whole process of self-regulatory would also depend on several factors which include the education level amongst parents. This is because to self-regulate means devoting a strong dedication and understanding on the term from the concerned party. Another factor is that some parents would disagree to such exercise because they are flexible on their children in many ways in terms of moral values, on the idea of mixing around and therefore not sensitive with such issues like on nation building or on sensitivities. They also felt that the self-regulation process needs a mutual understanding between the young and the old generation. Otherwise the effort would be jeopardised in many ways. Regarding self-regulation offers a genuine protection on the public interest, the respondents felt sceptical about it because to them, self-regulation would not work without discipline and intervention from the government. To them, this is a serious matter that everyone should be well briefed about because proper self-regulation can produced positive behavioural outcome. This is in line with the assertion made by Reid (1993) and later by Zimmerman (2001) that is, the ability to self-regulate has been viewed as a desirable quality throughout history because of its positive effects on behaviour and the acquisition of skills. In order for the young generation to be self-regulated, they need to be aware of their own thought process, and be motivated to actively participate in their own learning process.

Ask whether they agreed with the exercise introduced, there a variety of feedbacks. Out of the 30 people (10 in each focus group), sixteen disagree and argued that the exercise was done at the advantage of the government and not the citizens as a whole. Excerpts from transcription of interviews with informants relating to the matter:

- *Ownership defines control; the current scenario of media ownership in Malaysia is very political. Should only limit the non-personal interest*
- *No, the government should still manage and control*
- *No, media content should be controlled by certain group of expert people on subject matter*
- *No, at least the responsibility should be shared with service providers equally. This is to avoid any mishaps from getting out of hand*
- *No, Compared to Australia which has also establish self-regulation, their government is still a major player with regards to enforcement. Different culture is also another factor contributing to the non-favour of government omitting responsibility over media content*
- *No, still need to educate the public before implementing*
- *No, we are still not ready and then here it goes just like that*
- *No, government still should control some of the inappropriate websites*
- *No, Basic rules and regulations are still needed especially for content involving public of the age of 18 and below*
- *No, face book still needs some control by the government*
- *No, Control should still be in place as some of the media content are Western origin and can easily influence the youngsters*
- *Disagree; Malaysia is still having the third mine society so, still need to control by government. Look at the youngsters now...we have a lot of problem...so, need to the government to educate us first what is self-regulation all about, then only introduced it with full responsibility*
- *No, actually I don't know what it is all about....*
- *No, only through this study that you are doing that I know about self-regulation and the role of what...MCMC? Ridiculous, too unclear*
- *What, No, because this is already 13 years of implementation and only now I know about it*
- *No, I don't know and I still think our country still need to monitor what the media is putting on air or published because there will definitely loopholes here and there....*

### **Conclusion**

The content self regulation exercise is loosely coordinated since its establishment in 1999. A clear understanding and explanation on its existence was not implemented in a proper manner. The public was also not aware of the Communication Multimedia Act 1998 that replaces the Broadcasting Act 1988. To their mind, the government is still responsible for content regulation and regulatory. Self regulation in Malaysia was introduced due to the convergence of broadcasting, print and the Internet. In its terms and condition after the convergence exercise was that, all content providers and Internet users must exercise content self-regulation across multiple electronic media to reflect local culture and sensitivities.

It is important that the public should be getting involved with the self-regulation exercise because their contribution is importance towards national identity and nation building. This is in line to one of the aims of the Communication Multimedia Act (CMA) which is to promote national policy objectives for the communication and multimedia industry. The message is that projection of the content self-regulation whether in broadcasting, print, or the Internet is emphasizing on the concept of national identity which Benedict Anderson (1983:15) in Noor Bathi Badarudin (1996: 140) suggests that a national identity exists in the people's imagination as a concept that represents their sense of belonging to a nation, a region or local community. Thus content self-regulation is crucial to be emphasized in order to create an ethical awared society. For this matter non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are suggested to be pro-active by forming public consumer squads to help spread information on how to do content self-regulation among public in their homes so that they could work indirectly with the Communication Multimedia Commission (CMC) in upholding Malaysian values. In this way, it would make content providers realize the importance of upholding Malaysian values when producing content for consumer consumption as Malaysia is a multi-cultural society with different cultural, social and religious views.

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