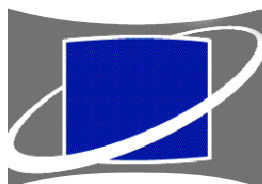


2007 - 2008 Public Opinion Survey on Film Classification System

Survey Executive Summary



Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority
Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Films intended for public exhibition in Hong Kong have to be approved by the Film Censorship Authority (FCA) under the Film Censorship Ordinance (FCO) (Cap. 392). They are either classified under a three-tier classification system or exempted from classification (e.g. educational, cultural, religious and promotional films). With a view to gauging public opinions on the film classification system and film censorship standards, the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (TELA) commissioned MVA Hong Kong Limited (MVA) to conduct the Public Opinion Survey on Film Classification System (2007) (the Survey).

1.2 Objective of the Survey

1.2.1 The Survey aimed at collecting public opinions on the film classification system and the film censorship standards. Specifically, the Survey covered the following issues:

Film classification system

- public awareness and acceptability of the three-tier film classification system;
- public awareness and opinions on the work of the Film Censorship Authority;
- public attitudes towards the advisory categories (Categories I, IIA and IIB) and mandatory age restrictions (Category III) in the existing film classification system;
- public awareness and support for Categories IIA and IIB classifications as appropriate guidelines for the choice of films amongst minors;
- guidance provided by parents and adults to minors on the choice of films and minors' accessibility to Category III films; and
- public awareness of the application of the three-tier film classification system to movies approved by the Film Censorship Authority and published in the forms of videotapes or laserdiscs.

Film censorship standards

- public acceptability of the film censorship standards;
- public attitudes towards the film censorship standards on the depiction of sex, violence, horror, language, offensive behaviour and criminality;
- public opinions on censorship standards on film titles, packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs and advertising materials of Category III films; and
- public awareness of the application of the film classification standards on movies approved by the Film Censorship Authority and published in the forms of videotapes or laserdiscs.

1.3 Methodology

- 1.3.1 The Survey was conducted through structured face-to-face household interviews with a random sample of respondents selected from the Frame of Quarters maintained by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) to be representative of the demographic structures of the Hong Kong population. In total, 1 205 individuals aged 13 to 65 were successfully enumerated between 20 September and 01 November 2007.
- 1.3.2 The response rate of the Survey was 70.6%. Based on the achieved sample size, it is estimated that the key statistics of this Survey are subject to a maximum deviation of ± 2.8 percentage points from the true values at 95% confidence level.
- 1.3.3 Data collected from the Survey were adjusted to align with the sex-age distribution of the population (based on the mid-year data of 2007 from Census and Statistics Department) such that the findings were representative of the opinions of the whole population aged 13 to 65. However, no aforementioned adjustment was made in the analyses of Sections 2.1.15 to 2.1.19 to avoid the misinterpretation due to small sample size.

2 MAJOR FINDINGS

2.1 Knowledge and comments on the three-tier film classification system

Knowledge of the three-tier film classification system

- 2.1.1 The vast majority of the general public (94.5%) were aware of the current three-tier film classification system. Close to three-fifths of them (57.6%) could identify correctly the categories of the system¹. However, there were still 25% of the public who indicated that they were not aware that the Category II in the current film classification system was further sub-divided into Categories IIA and IIB.
- 2.1.2 Around three-fifths of the public (61.7%) considered TELA's promotion of the system as adequate. An overwhelmingly large proportion of the public (89.9%) considered television as an effective medium for promoting the system.

Acceptance of the three-tier film classification system

- 2.1.3 With regard to the acceptance of the system, it was found that around seven in ten people in Hong Kong aged 13 to 65 (70.1%) gave a rating of 4 or above on a five-point scale ("1" being "strongly unacceptable" and "5" being "strongly acceptable") in which the mean rating was 3.78.
- 2.1.4 For those who opined that they did not accept the captioned system, slightly more than half of them (54.8%) perceived that the difference among the classification categories is not clear enough, particularly that between Categories IIA and IIB.

¹ Categories of the three-tier film classification system include Category I which is suitable for all ages, Category IIA which is not suitable for children, Category IIB which is not suitable for young persons and children and Category III which is suitable only for persons aged 18 or above.

- 2.1.5 Notwithstanding the high awareness and acceptance of the three-tier film classification system, only 29.6% of the public claimed that they would pay attention to the classification category in film selection. The most important reason for those who would not pay attention to the film classifications was that they were adults (aged 18 or above), thus it was not necessary for them to consider the film classification category (70.2%).
- 2.1.6 In case of the selection of a Category II film, about three-fifths of the public (55.6%) conveyed that they would not pay attention to the sub-categories of IIA and IIB and the main underlying reasons for this attitude were:
- not much difference in the classification standards between Categories IIA and IIB films (37.7%);
 - do not understand the classification standards of Categories IIA and IIB films (27.8%); and
 - do not know that Category II is subdivided into Categories IIA and IIB (24.6%).
- 2.1.7 Despite the fact that the public might not pay attention to the classification category in film selection, 65.1% of them considered the sub-division of Category II films into Categories IIA and IIB were “quite helpful / very helpful” to parents in selecting films for their children. The mean rating given by the public on this issue was 3.61 on a five-point scale (“1” being “not helpful at all” and “5” being “very helpful”).
- Views of parents with children aged under 18 towards the three-tier film classification system*
- 2.1.8 The majority of the public (87.1%) considered it appropriate for those aged 18 or above only to watch Category III films. Those who did not agree to the existing age restriction for Category III films (11.2%) were asked to state the minimum age they considered appropriate. About three-fifths of them (62.5%) indicated that 20-21 years old would be an appropriate age restriction for Category III films; and about one-fifth of them (21.6%) indicated that 16 years old would already be appropriate.
- 2.1.9 For those people with younger children (those aged below 14), most of them (81.8%) claimed that they would select films for their children. However, slightly less than half of them (48.5%) would consider whether the film belonged to Categories IIA or IIB in their selection.
- 2.1.10 Nevertheless, the proportion of those people who claimed to consider the film classification for their children aged 15-17 dropped significantly to 52.1%. The proportion of those people who indicated that they would consider whether the Category II film belonged to Category IIA or IIB was comparatively lower (41.4%).
- 2.1.11 When those people with children under the age of 18 were asked the actions they had taken to prevent their children from watching Category III films, 43.0% of them indicated that they did not allow them to watch such films and 23.3% of them told their children that the law did not allow persons aged below 18 to watch the films. Close to two-fifths of them (39.8%) claimed that they had not taken any action in this regard.

Young persons and the three-tier film classification system

- 2.1.12 The vast majority of the young persons (those aged 13-17) (131 persons or 94.2%) claimed that they had not watched Category III films or discs in the last 12 months. For those (8 persons) who had watched such films, the reasons for watching were mainly:
- thinking that contents of these films would not have any bad influence on young persons (2 persons or 33.3%);
 - thinking that contents of these films could broaden young persons' view and enrich their knowledge (2 persons or 33.3%); and
 - out of curiosity (2 persons or 33.3%).
- 2.1.13 Based on a very small sample (n=8), seven young persons had watched one to two Category III film(s) in the last 12 months, while one of them had watched three to five.
- 2.1.14 As for the place of watching Category III films or discs, five of the young persons watched the films at the homes of their friends / classmates / relatives, while four of them watched at their homes.
- 2.1.15 According to these young persons, five persons sourced the Category III films or discs from their family members / friends / classmates / relatives. Among those young persons who obtained Category III films or discs from their family members / friends / classmates / relatives, five persons indicated that the providers were aged below 18.
- 2.1.16 When the young persons who claimed to have watched Category III films or discs were asked whether their parents or parents of their friends / classmates / relatives were aware of their behaviour, five of them claimed such awareness.

2.2 Awareness of Television Entertainment Licensing Authority

- 2.2.1 High awareness of the public towards the functions & responsibilities of TELA was revealed from the survey results. Specifically, the public were aware of the following:
- examination and classification of films (89.7%);
 - examination of the advertising materials of Category III films (72.6%);
 - examination of the packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs of Category III films (68.0%); and
 - inspection of cinemas (35.3%).
- 2.2.2 Some people were found to misunderstand that TELA was also responsible for preventing unauthorised reproduction of films (24.1%) and arranging the release dates of films (17.3%).
- 2.2.3 98.1% of the public had not visited the website of TELA and therefore the great majority of them (93.1%) were unaware of the information on film classification provided in the website. Among those people who had visited the website of TELA, slightly more than three-fifths of them (62.8%) considered it "quite helpful / very helpful" in film selection.

2.2.4 The public were also invited to express their opinions towards the appropriateness of TELA in carrying out film censorship and classification. Almost nine out of ten of them (89.3%) considered it appropriate. As for those who took the opposite stance, most of them (78.4%) considered organisations from the general public would be the most appropriate for taking up the responsibility of film censorship and classification.

2.3 Comments on the classification standards of the three-tier film classification system

Overall public opinions towards the current film classification standards

2.3.1 The public were asked to rate their acceptance of the current film classification standards on a five-point scale ("1" being "strongly unacceptable" and "5" being "very acceptable"). 29.8% gave a rating of 3 while 63.8% gave a rating of 4 or 5. The mean rating given by the public in this regard was 3.67.

2.3.2 Overall speaking, about three-fifths of the public (60.1%) conveyed that the current film classification standards were "just right", while 21.7% thought that they were "a bit lenient" and 10.0% thought that they were "a bit strict". Those who had polar views (i.e. "very strict" and "very lenient") were found to be 1.7% and 1.5% respectively. The overall rating given by the public in this regard was 2.88 on a five-point scale ("1" being "very lenient" and "5" being "very strict").

Public opinions towards the current censorship standards

2.3.3 Under the current film classification system, the overall public perception of the censorship standards could be reflected by the ratings (based on a five-point scale with "1" being "very lenient" and "5" being "very strict").

2.3.4 Overall speaking, the mean ratings (2.84-2.88) given by the public towards the scenes or depictions of "torture and violence", "horror and shock", "sex" and "nudity" in Category I films were very close to "3" on a five-point scale.

2.3.5 For Category IIA films, scenes or depictions related to "sex" (2.77) and "nudity" (2.78) were revealed to receive a relatively lower rating than "torture and violence" (2.83), "objectionable language (including Cantonese, English and Putonghua)" (2.84) and "horror and shock" (2.85).

2.3.6 The mean ratings of Category IIB films were found to have a slightly larger deviation from the rating of "3" (i.e. "just right") than the other film categories in terms of "sex" (2.73), "nudity" (2.73), "torture and violence" (2.77) and "objectionable language (including Cantonese, English and Putonghua)" (2.77). "Horror and shock" was the only scene type in Category IIB films with a rating of 2.80.

2.3.7 The mean ratings of Category III films were within the range of 2.79 and 2.83. This showed that the public had the impression that the censorship standards for Category III films were close to "just right".

Public acceptance of the current film titles, packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs and advertising materials of Category III films

- 2.3.8 With regard to the public acceptance of the titles of the current films, 35.5% gave a rating of 3 while 55.6% gave a rating of 4 or 5, and the mean rating was at 3.56 on a five-point scale ("1" being "strongly unacceptable" and "5" being "very acceptable"). The situation for public acceptance of the packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs of Category III films was similar. 31.6% gave a rating of 3 while 56.7% gave a rating of 4 or 5, with the mean rating at 3.59. In the case of the advertising materials of Category III films, the situation had no major difference again in which 33.7% gave a rating of 3 while 57.6% gave a rating of 4 or 5, with the mean rating at 3.60.

Reasons for not accepting titles, packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs and advertising materials of Category III films

- 2.3.9 Among those people who did not accept the titles of the current films, the major reasons were that they considered the titles of some films too coarse (65.5%) and did not match with the film content (50.2%). On the other hand, those who did not accept the advertising materials of Category III films opined that the materials were too sexual (84.4%) and violent (50.0%). As for those who did not accept the packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs of such film type, their main reason was that the materials were too sexual (66.7%).

Acceptance of the public towards specific film titles

- 2.3.10 Apart from giving opinions to the current film titles, packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs and advertising materials of Category III films, the public were also requested to express their acceptance towards specific film titles. The proportions of people who claimed that they found the film titles to be unacceptable ranged from 10.5% to 30.2% for horror and violence films. As for the films with sexual contents, the proportions of those people who found the titles to be unacceptable were much higher (44.8%-84.1%).
- 2.3.11 Three out of ten film titles were rejected by TELA. Such decision of TELA coincided with the evaluation standard of the public, as the proportions of those people who considered the rejected film titles as unacceptable for open display were the highest among the ten film titles under evaluation.

Acceptance of the public towards specific posters and advertising materials of Category III films

- 2.3.12 Again, the Survey also gauged public acceptance of specific posters and advertising materials of Category III films. Results were found to be quite consistent with those film titles in the way that the proportion of people claiming the unacceptability of film posters and advertising materials of Category III films with sexual contents (75.3%-88.1%) was significantly larger than those of the other film types (8.6%-32.6%).

- 2.3.13 Three out of seven film posters and advertising materials were rejected by TELA. Such decision of TELA coincided with the evaluation standard of the public, as the proportions of those people who considered the rejected film posters and advertising materials as unacceptable for open display were the highest among the seven film titles under evaluation.

Acceptance of the public towards specific packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs of Category III films

- 2.3.14 Similarly, the Survey evaluated the public acceptance of the specific packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs of Category III films for open display. It was discovered that packaging with sex or violence content had lower public acceptance for open display (23.0%-47.0%).
- 2.3.15 One out of eight packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs of Category III films was rejected by TELA. The rejected film packaging was also considered by the public to be the most unacceptable for open display (47.0%) among the eight packaging (versus 9.3%-30.3% for the accepted film packaging).

Public acceptance of themes depicted in different film categories

- 2.3.16 The Survey attempted to ascertain the acceptable classification category of the public for films depicting specific themes. The following phenomena were observed:
- Slightly more than half (52.6%) of the public accepted themes with “explicit or gratuitous depiction of sexual violence or sexual acts under coercion” displayed in Category III films;
 - More than half of the public indicated that films with themes containing “depiction of bestiality” (74.7%), “depiction of necrophilia” (70.3%) and “detailed or gratuitous depiction of a child who is under the age of 16 engaging in sexual activity” (52.9%) should be classified as “Not Suitable for Exhibition”; and
 - Almost equal proportions of people considered that both “Category III” or “Not Suitable for Exhibition” would be appropriate for films with contents related to “depiction of exploitative incestuous behaviours” (43.9% for “Category III” vs. 42.7% for “Not Suitable for Exhibition”) and “depiction of abnormal sexual interest (such as sadomasochism, fetish)” (44.1% for “Category III” vs. 45.5% for “Not Suitable for Exhibition”).

3 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The vast majority of the general public (94.5%) were aware of the current three-tier film classification system. In addition, around three-fifths of them (61.7%) considered TELA’s promotion of the system as adequate.
- 3.2 With regard to the acceptance of the system, it was found that around seven in ten people in Hong Kong aged 13 to 65 (70.1%) gave a rating of 4 or above on a five-point scale (“1” being “strongly unacceptable” and “5” being “strongly acceptable”) in which the mean rating was 3.78.

- 3.3 Notwithstanding the high awareness and acceptance of the three-tier film classification system, only 29.6% of the public claimed that they would pay attention to the classification category in film selection. The main reason was that they were adults (aged 18 or above) therefore it was not necessary for them to consider the film classification category (70.2%).
- 3.4 In case of the selection of a Category II film, about three-fifths of the public (55.6%) conveyed that they would not pay attention to the sub-categories of IIA and IIB and the main underlying reasons for this attitude were:
- not much difference in the classification standards between Categories IIA and IIB films (37.7%);
 - do not understand the classification standards of Categories IIA and IIB films (27.8%); and
 - do not know that Category II is subdivided into Categories IIA and IIB (24.6%).
- 3.5 Despite the fact that the public might not pay attention to the classification category in film selection, 65.1% of them considered the sub-division of Category II films into Categories IIA and IIB were “quite helpful / very helpful” for parents in selecting films for their children.
- 3.6 The vast majority of the young persons (those aged 13-17) (94.2%) claimed that they had not watched Category III films or discs in the last 12 months. Among the minority of the young persons (eight in total) who had watched such films, 86.4% of them had watched one to two Category III film(s) in the last 12 months. As for the place of watching Category III films or discs, 65.8% of them watched the films at the homes of their friends / classmates / relatives.
- 3.7 A very large proportion of the public were aware that “examination and classification of films” (89.7%) were the main responsibilities of TELA and almost nine out of ten of them (89.3%) considered it the appropriate organisation for carrying out film censorship and classification.
- 3.8 Overall speaking, about three-fifths of the public (60.1%) conveyed that the current film classification standards were “just right”. With regard to the public acceptance of the titles of the current films, the mean rating was 3.56 on a five-point scale (“1” being “strongly unacceptable” and “5” being “very acceptable”), while those of the packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs or advertising materials of Category III films were slightly higher at 3.59 and 3.60 respectively.
- 3.9 The proportion of people claiming the unacceptability of film posters and advertising materials of Category III films with sexual contents (75.3%-88.1%) was significantly larger than those of the other film types (8.6%-32.6%). Similarly, the Survey discovered that the packaging of videotapes / laserdiscs of Category III films with sex or violence contents had lower public acceptance for open display (23.0%-47.0%).
- 3.10 Slightly more than half of the public (52.6%) accepted themes with “explicit or gratuitous depiction of sexual violence or sexual acts under coercion” to be displayed in Category III films. However, more than half of the public indicated that films with themes containing “depiction of bestiality” (74.7%), “depiction of necrophilia” (70.3%)

and “detailed or gratuitous depiction of a child who is under the age of 16 engaging in sexual activity” (52.9%) should be classified as “Not Suitable for Exhibition”.