

Report on 2009 Public Opinion Survey on the Review of the COIAO

Executive Summary

This survey finds that people's knowledge of the COIAO is just fair. According to the results gathered from the first three questions of the questionnaire, 18% of the respondents answered two to three questions correctly and they can be classified as "more knowledgeable". Those who only answered one question correctly can be classified as "fairly knowledgeable", comprising 67% of the sample. Those who could not give any correct answer can be classified as "less knowledgeable", comprising 15% of the sample. Whether those questions are too difficult or too easy is, of course, a subjective matter. Nonetheless, dividing the respondents into three groups helps to analyze the reasons of their opinions.

The consensus among the respondents is that Hong Kong society needs legislations to monitor the publication of articles. Over 80% of the respondents agreed that photographs or pictures with descriptions of bestiality, necrophilia, revealing the contact of male and female genitals, with male(s) and female(s) revealing their genitals, those displaying a human's head separated from body, and those displaying a human's internal organs being exposed were not suitable for persons aged below 18 to view. Moreover, about two-thirds consensus is struck that photographs or pictures with female revealing her breast(s), or those with large space in displaying blood coming out from a human body were not suitable for persons aged below 18 to view.

As for articles which should be banned for all ages, only photographs or pictures with description of sexual intercourses related to bestiality and necrophilia got the support of two-third majority. Those revealing the contact of male and female genitals, displaying a human's head separated from body, and those displaying a human's internal organs being exposed got about 45% to 50% support.

This survey shows that most people are aware of the existence of the OAT, but they generally regarded its effectiveness to be “neither good nor bad”. Among the six proposals for improving the adjudication system listed in the questionnaire, people seemed to be very supportive of increasing the number of adjudicators in each hearing, and requiring each hearing to include adjudicators from specified sectors. Both proposals captured almost 80% support. About 60% supported the establishment of a new independent adjudication system, and the replacement of adjudicators by jurors. It would be a difficult task to blend together these rather unrelated and even contradicting suggestions.

As for the regulation of Internet, three-quarters of people urged the government to step up its regulation, mainly to improve the existing regulatory system and to increase the penalty. Survey results also show that around 70% of the respondents had the habit of using the Internet. Although they were rather concerned about the Internet displaying articles which were classified by law as not suitable for persons of age under 18, only about 15% of the sample used computer filtering software.

As for other more general questions, research results show that three-quarters of the people wished the court to increase the penalty for violating the COIAO, and that the government would educate the public through the television. Sixty percent considered the classification standards set by the OAT to be “appropriate”. Most said TELA should handle local newspapers first, followed by magazines and DVDs/VCDs.

In terms of demographic analyses, women were generally more inclined to ask for more regulations and heavier penalties than men, but their awareness of the OAT’s work was relatively lower. In terms of age, those between 31 and 50 were more open to different kinds of articles, and they were more concerned about problems over the Internet. Older respondents tended to ask for heavier penalties from the court, while their knowledge of the OAT was the lowest, but their rating of its effectiveness most negative. As for education attainment, those with lower education attainment tended to ask for more regulations and heavier penalties. Those with higher education attainment were more familiar with the OAT, and rated its effectiveness more negatively, but tended to think the current government regulation of

the Internet was already adequate. In terms of occupation, white collars were more familiar with the OAT, but rated its effectiveness more negatively. Moreover, respondents who were more familiar with the COIAO seemed to have stricter standards in classifying different articles. Those who rated the effectiveness of the OAT more poorly tended to ask for greater changes to the existing adjudication system. The less frequent Internet users tended to ask for more government control on obscene and indecent articles on the Internet.