

### Effect of Idiocentrism and Allocentrism on Attitude towards Media Censorship

Media censorship restricts an individual's free and full access to information<sup>1</sup>. While media censorship protects individuals from harmful content, it is also associated with a boomerang effect where people are *more* likely to seek censored content<sup>1</sup>. Early research found that warning labels increase audiences' interest in violent television programs, especially when the warning was from an authoritative source<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, restricting people's access to rock music fuels listeners' desire to listen to the censored material<sup>3</sup>. Ng et al.<sup>1</sup> explains the boomerang effect based on the *psychological reactance theory*. The psychological reactance theory proposes that when people perceive a threat to freedom, they reach a motivational state (i.e. psychological reactance) directed toward restoring freedom<sup>1,4</sup>. Psychological reactance is associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in forbidden behaviour and greater anger toward the source of threat<sup>1</sup>. Ng et al. argue that people perceive media censorship as a threat to individual autonomy and thus lead to psychological reactance<sup>1</sup>. Hence, people's response to media censorship may go against the original intention of censorship policies. The proposed research further investigates the public's attitudinal response toward media censorship. Specifically, I am interested in how idiocentrism and allocentrism influence people's attitude toward media censorship. The research objective is to facilitate the development of a safe and healthy media environment while eliciting negative attitudes among the public to a lesser extent than current censorship policies.

People from different cultures approach threats to freedom differently<sup>1,5</sup>. Graupmann<sup>5</sup> found that individuals from a collectivist culture experience less psychological reactance than individuals from an individualistic culture. This pattern is associated with differences in self-construals<sup>5</sup>. Individuals with an independent self-construal emphasize autonomy and personal thoughts and actions<sup>6</sup> and thus perceive threats to personal freedom as a threat to the sense of self<sup>1,5</sup>. While independent self-construal is prevalent among Western individualistic societies (ex. Canada, U.S.), cross-cultural studies suggest it is less predominant in non-Western, collectivist cultures (ex. China, South Korea)<sup>1</sup>. In a study about assertive advertising, researchers found that American participants perceive assertive messages as a threat to freedom and are less receptive to such messages; South Korean participants, however, find assertive and

non-assertive messages equally persuasive<sup>7</sup>. These findings suggest that people's psychological responses and attitudes toward media censorship may also differ across cultures if they perceive censorship as a threat to freedom.

However, previous researches on psychological reactance operationalize culture as two nations<sup>7</sup> or cultural groups<sup>1</sup> and neglects within-group variability in individualistic and collectivist values. The proposed studies fills in this gap by focusing on the extent to which an individual internalizes individualism and collectivism (i.e. idiocentrism and allocentrism, respectively) and their association with an individual's attitude toward media censorship. Based on previous findings, I hypothesize that people who internalize individualistic values show a more negative attitude toward media censorship than people who internalize more collectivist values. The proposed studies will offer a better understanding of how people with different cultural values approach media censorship.

**Study 1.** Study 1 is a correlational study exploring the association between culture and attitude toward media censorship and the role of perceived threats to freedom. An ideal group of participants would be a community sample consisting of people from various cultural backgrounds. Individualistic and collectivistic cultural values are operationalized as independent and interdependent self-construals. This study builds on previous research results and will allow us to learn more about how individuals with different self-construals approach media censorship. Self-construal is measured by having participants complete 20 sentences that start with "I am" <sup>8</sup>. Participants will be asked to complete the General Censorship subscale of the Attitude Toward Censorship Questionnaire, rated on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores indicating a more positive attitude toward censorship<sup>1,9</sup>. An example item would be "All individuals should have the right to express their ideas, no matter how popular or controversial they might be" (reverse-scale)<sup>9</sup>. Perception of threat to freedom is measured by participants' responses to statements adapted from Dillard and Shen<sup>11</sup> (on a 1-5 Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree). A sample statement would be "media censorship threatened my freedom to choose"<sup>11</sup>. Previous research suggests that East Asian participants, who are more likely to have interdependent selves, show less negative attitudes toward media censorship than European

Canadian participants<sup>1</sup>. Indirect evidence also indicates that people from individualistic cultures are less persuaded by assertive messages<sup>7</sup> and are more likely to conform when they are given the freedom to choose<sup>10</sup>. Hence, I expect participants with independent selves to show a more negative attitude toward media censorship. I also expect perceived threat to freedom to mediate the relationship.

**Study 2.** Because of the correlational design of Study 1, we cannot conclude the causal relationship between cultural values and attitudes toward media censorship. Hence, Study 2 builds on the results from Study 1 and investigates whether idiocentrism and allocentrism *cause* a difference in individuals' attitudes toward media censorship by using an experimental design. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of the two experimental groups and will be asked to read a short paragraph. The paragraphs shown to the two groups are the same except that one of the paragraphs uses "I" as the pronoun and the other uses "we". Gardner et al. showed that "I" primes independence and "we" primes interdependence, which in turn leads to a shift in individualistic or collectivist values and affects subsequent social judgement<sup>12</sup>. Participants in both groups will then be asked to read an article on the government's decision to impose strict censorship on media content. The article is the same for both groups. Finally, as in Study 1, participants will complete the Attitude Toward Censorship Questionnaire. Based on previous research, I expect participants under the "I" condition to show a more negative attitude toward media censorship than participants under the "we" condition.

**Study 3.** Study 3 adds to Study 2 by manipulating the perceived threat to freedom using the "But you are free to ..." (BYAF) technique. The BYAF technique is a compliance-without-pressure paradigm<sup>10</sup>. Including "but you are free to ..." (ex. "But you are free to accept or refuse") in a request generates a sense of freedom, increases the likelihood of acceptance and decreases psychological reactance<sup>10</sup>. In Study 3, participants will be randomly assigned to one of the two experimental groups and will be primed with either independent or interdependent self-construals using the same methods as in Study 2. Within each group, participants will be randomly assigned to either the BYAF group or the control group. Like in Study 2, all participants will be asked to read an article on the government's decision to impose media censorship policies. The articles are the same across all experimental groups. In addition to reading the

article, participants under the BYAF conditions will be told that they are free to vote for or against the decision; while participants under the control conditions will not be told so. Finally, all participants will be asked to complete the Attitude Toward Censorship Questionnaire. Previous results suggest that the BYAF technique has significant effect only in individualistic countries but not in collectivist countries<sup>10</sup>. Hence, I expect that among participants who are primed with *independent* self-construals, those under the BYAF condition will show less negative attitude toward media censorship compared to those under the control condition. However, I expect participants primed with the *interdependent* self-construal to show similar attitudes toward media censorship across the BYAF and control conditions.

The proposed studies have several strengths that fill in gaps in existing literatures. First, while existing research on the topic typically operationalize culture as nations and neglects within-culture variability, the proposed studies focus on idiocentrism and allocentrism and hence giving us a better understanding of how individualistic and collectivistic cultural values influence *individual* attitudes toward media censorship. Also, Study 3 incorporates the BYAF technique that allow us to manipulate the perceived level of threat to freedom. By doing so, we can have a better understanding of the role of freedom threat in the relationship between culture and attitudes toward media censorship. Results from the proposed studies can help to assess the effect of current media censorship policies. Further, the results may also facilitate the development of more reasonable and effective policies that protects the public from unwanted content while ensuring an appropriate level of freedom.

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