Original Article

Going global and local control: Reflections on research directions on media policy in East Asia

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Abstract

This article provides a brief look at the impact of digital technology on countries in Asia in relation to the media industry. It then examines the implications of digital technology and the policing of media within the countries of Singapore and China, which have sought to connect to the global economy via its investment in digital technology yet still attempt to maintain some form of control of access to certain digital content on its citizenry. The article concludes with potential directions in which researchers can contribute to the ongoing debate about the impact of the 'global' on media and its impact on nation states.

Keywords

China, digital technology, I. mass (media) communication, M. new media: (Internet mediated), mass media effects, Singapore

Recent years have seen an increased proliferation of digital technology in many, if not all, aspects of our daily lives. The impact of digital technology is perhaps best understood through the growth of the Internet. Recent statistics have shown that many countries in Asia have a high Internet penetration rate where access to the World Wide Web is possible due to low barriers of entry in terms of cost and equipment. Societies in Asia are seen as 'technologically-savvy' where they have created their own localised media platforms, such as Renren or Sina Weibo in China or Cyworld or Me2day in Korea, alongside similar platforms in Japan, Singapore and other countries in Asia (Schneider & Goto-Jones, 2014, p. 4). As a result, digital technology has allowed for users to 'coordinate their actions', share 'user-generated entertainment content' or participate in 'political events' (Schneider & Goto-Jones, 2014, p. 4). Digital technology is often seen in a positive light.

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It allows for the growth of individual creativity, enables dissemination of information, and helps in the production and distribution of various forms of content over multiple media platforms. These changes have transformed media companies in various ways due to the possibilities these have opened up. However, the international nature of digital technology, its ability to increasing blur and even erase national borders are becoming of increasing concern to certain nation states in East Asia, where certain media products and websites are disallowed. For these countries, where the state has played a large role in facilitating routes of access to various forms of media, what are the challenges that a state faces when its citizenry adopts and even embraces digital technology?

This is a question that is relevant to many countries in Asia where the governing institutions of many of these nations can be characterised as authoritarian and interventionist in many aspects of the lives of their citizens. This can be seen in the state-led economic policies that have transformed many of these countries, such as Singapore, South Korea and China, from the 1980s onwards. This intervention is also seen across its media policies where, for example, in Singapore and China certain websites are inaccessible. However, it is not unknown for people to resort to using Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to access banned websites. An editorial in the Singapore broadsheet, *The Straits Times* in 2013, highlighted how widely used and accessible acquiring VPNs were in Singapore (see Tan, 2013). In China where showing dissent against the government is strongly discouraged via various means, citizens have used digital technology via mobile phones 'to mobilise a wide range of contentious activities, including mass strikes and protests in China' (Liu, 2014, p. 16). Countries also recognise that a technology-enabled society is also instrumental for conducting business if they wish to remain plugged in within the world economy and be considered a developed and forward looking country. There is thus a paradox that is occurring within these countries, where there is a need to invest in new technologies that allow them to access the global economy while maintain a form of social control over the various media that its citizens are able to access.

This article will thus first examine the impact of digital technology on countries in Asia. These impacts are largely drawn from a research report commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2015 to determine the challenges and opportunities for the diversity of expressions in China, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam. This will provide a snapshot of the current impact digital technology is having on these regions across a spectrum of countries at various levels of economic development. The following section will highlight the potential opportunities and challenges that have been brought about by digital technology and also highlight the state of media policy development, drawing on examples from Singapore, China and Korea in relation to these changes. In the following section, this article will look at the implications of digital technology and the policing of media within these countries drawing attention to the ways in which information from abroad is controlled and disseminated within these nations, in particular China and Singapore, where these measures are made explicit. The final section of this article will look at what needs to be considered with regard to media policy development if nations still seek to continue to limit access to their citizenry and potential directions, in which researchers can contribute to the ongoing debate about the impact of the 'global' on media and its impact on nation states.

Digital technology and East Asia today

In the 2015 report, *Challenges and Opportunities for the diversity of cultural expression in the digital era in East Asia*,[1] digital technology is viewed as a key component of digitalisation which

has allowed for three key traits to be observed when it comes to the production of cultural products (of which media products are a part of). These are de-materialisation, connectivity and convergence (see H. K. Lee & Lim, 2015). What is key about these three aspects is the 'intangible' nature of these traits. While these three aspects have made the production, creation and distribution of media projects easier through potentially lower costs and wider public access, allowing for 'easier, cheaper and immediate online connections' as well as 'facilitating consumer creativity', there are other issues that also need to be considered in relation to these aspects (H. K. Lee & Lim, 2015, pp. 3, 4). What was clear in the countries surveyed was an acknowledgement from interviewees[2] that government policy in addressing the challenges that arise from digital technology is fragmented and often approaches policy making with goals that differ from the aims of creatives and producers within the media sector.

First, the 'intangibility' of digitalisation means that it is not clear with whom or where these products 'reside', in terms of copyright and in terms of national or geographical boundaries. In addition, the ability of any person with the right technology to edit, modify and change published media content further complicates this issue. The growth in fan-translated anime programmes from Japan or drama from Korea on YouTube demonstrates how producers, platforms and consumers have allowed for the distribution of what used to be, due to the language, geographically based media products. In his article, *The Power of the Nation-state amid Neo-liberal Reform: Shifting Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave'*, media scholar, Dal-Yong Jin, argues that it was 'the rapid growth of social media' with its 'techniques and practices' as well as the 'uses and affordances they provides' due to the growth of digital technology in Korea that allowed for the growth of Korean pop culture in Asia and beyond (Jin, 2014, pp. 78–79). The issue of intangibility is also linked to idea of copyright whereby 'new user practices such as streaming' or 'sampling sharing, or mashing-up contents' by fans have 'undermined the ability of corporations to extract values from the rights to use and sell creative and cultural material' (Mangematin, Sapsed, & Schüßer, 2014, p. 9). This then leads to another issue, which is the lack of clarity of who owns the copyright of cultural products when it comes to digitalising them. This occurred when The Necessary Stage (TNS), a local Singapore theatre company, sought help from the government to digitise its content. TNS learnt that working with state agencies in this process would have 'resulted in a transfer of their intellectual property rights' (H. K. Lee & Lim, 2015, p. 17). In addition to this, there is a need to address the idea that once a media product is archived that it would remain static or unchanged when this is no longer possible with the proliferation of software and the expectations of consumers to be able to change any object online; the ability of users to modify content 'blur the boundaries and roles between different actors and break up the existing partition of value creation and appropriation' (Mangematin et al., 2014, p. 10). Therefore, there needs to be a recognition that copyright needs to acknowledge the changing nature of digital consumption and the roles and purposes of online platforms.

This is linked to the second issue: with whom responsibility lies with when something goes wrong: the creators, the platform or the consumers? The music industry had to address the issue of maintaining its legitimacy when new practices such as file sharing arose in the 1990s. Music companies and the band, Metallica, sued their fans in an attempt to maintain 'existing institutional arrangements' and prevent the 'development of competing institutional work projects' (see James & Tolliday 2009; Mangematin et al., 2014, p. 12). In the current digital age, more than copyright is now at stake where the growth of information and some might argue 'disinformation' has led to social media platforms, such as Facebook, attempting to exercise some form of control of what kind or type of information or groups are allowed to maintain a presence on its site through its set

of community standards. This has not prevented a lawsuit being filed, which alleges that the social media platform 'allowed the Palestinian militant Hamas Group to use the platform to plot attacks' that killed four people and wounded one person (Ackerman, 2016). The idea of 'fake news' as propagated by various websites has led Assistant Professor Melissa Zimdars to create a list of news sites that propagate false, misleading information masquerading as news. As of writing, Facebook has advertised for a 'Head of News Partnership' in an attempt to address concerns that 'fake news stories' on its platform might have led to 'influencing voters' in the 2016 American elections (Jackson, 2016). The recognition that the 'right to be forgotten' is a human right by the European Court of Justice highlights the need to think about what kind of control can be exercised over what information of individuals can or should be made public over what are international platforms (see 'Google Spain SL v. Agencia Espanola de Proteccion de Datos', 2014). Within Singapore, the government has enacted the Media Convergence Act, which shifts the responsibilities to the owner/s of the website, be it an individual or a corporate company through a monetary bond. Detractors, however, have stated that these laws encourage self-censorship and stifle genuine debate. For China, websites or social media platforms and channels are banned outright but these measures seem limited in effectiveness as seen in the way in which information about the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong was able to be disseminated in China (See Hung & Ip, 2012; F. L. F. Lee & Chan, 2015).

Third, while digital technology enables the growth of independent producers and creatives, many of its distribution platforms are through two to three international commercial companies, such as YouTube, Google and Facebook. What needs to be addressed here is the current position nation states have in relation to multinational global media companies and what roles both the government and these companies play when it comes to the distribution and dissemination of information, which some countries may or may not wish to make accessible to their own citizens? Within China, the Chinese government has been 'explicit in campaigning against the "spiritual pollution" brought by imported cultures' and often see the media 'as a powerful propaganda tool and a means of maintaining social control' (Jin & Otmazgin, 2014, p. 45). Further to this, public service terrestrial broadcasting companies are held to producing local content often subsidised or supported via a TV licence, and how competitive are these companies when viewed in relation to platforms, such as YouTube or Youku Tudou, Sohu and Aigiyi, where there is not only free but also original content? This is occurring across East Asia in Vietnam with Zing TV Soha TV, South Korea's Naver TV cast and Thailand's Guchill TV. Terrestrial broadcasting companies are also working within a current situation, whereby media companies from America, primarily, are forming 'strategic alliances with Asia-based transnational communication corporations', where these companies are investing 'billions of dollars' into creating 'distribution systems for delivering entertainment to households around the world, including in Asia' (Jin & Otmazgin, 2014, p. 48). For popular online platforms that operate 'commercially and without public responsibilities' such as a quota on news or educational or children programmes where their content is 'market-driven … investing primarily on popular content' what are their responsibilities, or should these companies be concerned at all with this issue (H. K. Lee & Lim, 2015, p. 11)?

What is clear from the interviews conducted is that government policies addressing these areas are not clear or non-existent. Much of the focus of investing in digital technology seems to be 'dominated by economic viewpoints', while stakeholders in public broadcasting among other cultural sectors see digital technology from the 'perspective of public accessibility, education and dissemination' (H. K. Lee & Lim, 2015, p. 4). There is therefore a disconnect of the role digital technology should play. What was clear from the report is that there was a 'current lack of a coherent policy framework for digitalisation' (Lee & Lim, 2016, p. 4). What essentially is occurring is

that while there are a great many opportunities associated with the growth of digital technology when it comes to media products in terms of creation, production and distribution, the general consensus from policymakers, art and cultural practitioners, and organisations from the countries surveyed feels that governments in these states are not reacting quickly enough to these issues or are approaching these issues without a clear understanding of the extant matters involved.

Implications of digital technology and the media industry in Singapore and China

It is thus interesting to examine then the paradox between promoting digital technology as a way to signal a country's openness to be a part of the global economy and its desire to maintain some form of control to what its citizens are able to access. The countries of Singapore and China are chosen to further elaborate on this paradox due to the phenomenal growth of their economies which has been predicated on state-led policies that have sought to make them global centres in their own right in terms of finance in the case of Singapore or manufacturing in the case of China. To be seen as a global city, however, requires being able to maintain 'networks' which can be economic links to other parts of the world, allowing these cities to become key nodes in the global economy, thus enabling them to become international centres of finance, commerce and trade (see Hall, 1966, 2001; Sassen, 1991). The literature on global cities also highlights how cities are not so much distinguished by their geographical size but by the 'range and extent of economic power' (Clark, 1996, p. 137). Much of these networks now are achieved through digital technology, and recent years have seen large investments by both the Singapore and Chinese government on technology to achieve these aims (especially for smaller cities in China attempting to compete with Shanghai and Beijing). Technology can lead to attracting a high number of knowledge-intensive businesses, such as educational institutions, and also mass media industries (see Gottman, 1989; Knight, 1989). Therefore, both countries have sought to promote information technology while maintaining the strong state control it has over its key media channels, the control of and the type of information that has been circulated internally and externally of these countries have been problematic for both governments.[3]

China has 'strong motivations for promoting its research and development over the Internet in order to accelerate the nation's modernization' (Mou, Wu, & Atkin, 2016, p. 841); Singapore too has realised that 'the internet would be a key tool for transforming Singapore into an internationally competitive information hub, a strategy they identified as the basis for economic growth in the 21st century' (Doran, 2014, p. 3). At the same time, both these countries are also wary of the potential political and social disruptions that can occur with an unregulated Internet. Hence, for the Chinese government their response has been to use technology to filter or delete information that is deemed 'harmful or illegal' (Hu, 2010 in Mou et al., 2016, p. 841). For the Singaporean government, the dilemma has been how to 'balance their commitment to competitive capitalism against the desire to maintain their grip on extensive political controls' (Doran, 2014, p. 8).

Yet the ways both governments are attempting to regulate and control information are diametrically different.

Direct control versus self-censorship

In China, the state is 'fully aware that the online medium affords alternative access to information and public dialogue' (Stockman & Luo, 2015, p. 5). Stockman and Luo (2015) argue that the lack of certainty about the 'true extent of many political, economic, and social problems' due to

underreporting by officials in China have led to an 'information-scarce environment', which has resulted in Chinese citizens attaching 'greater importance' to news reported on the webs than via official government channels (p. 8). Regulation of the Internet in China takes the form of direct control via various measures such as what is colloquially known as The Great Firewall of China, where the government 'selectively block websites operators and Internet users' through Internet policing, suppression of dissident use and discipline of cyber cafes, and 'employment of web commentators to shape and/alter public debate' (Li, 2013, p. 25; Stockman & Luo, 2015, p. 9). A key point of difference between the blocking of websites in China and Singapore is that in China 'any user-generated-content websites without a pro-government gatekeeper are generally censored' (Mou et al., 2016, p. 841). Hence, websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are accessible in Singapore but not in China.

In Singapore, only websites that are deemed a threat to national unity and social values are blocked, in particular 'pornography and material which might incite ethnic or religious conflict' (Doran, 2014, p. 4). This might indicate that the Singapore government employs a lighter touch to Internet regulation than China. However, the Singapore government employs a variety of means that create a system whereby 'auto-regulation and self-censorship undoubtedly have significant intimidatory effects on internet uses' (Doran, 2014, p. 14). The first is the use of an automatic Class License Scheme for 'internet content producers (ICPs) and service providers (ISPs)', whereby these licences are revoked if people report that the ICPs and ISPs have 'broken the content rules and investigation proves their misconduct' (Hong, Lin, & Ang, 2015, p. 120). Individual websites which are deemed to fulfil certain conditions, such as posting political material or religious issues, need to register with the Infocommunication Media Development Authority (IMDA, 2016) and comply with rules such as 'remove prohibited content' if directed by IMDA as well as putting up a S$50,000 performance bond (US$34,600) (En & Matthews, 2015). This has led to commentators stating that this scheme coupled with Singapore's laws on defamation create an atmosphere of self-censorship (see Doran, 2014; Rodan, 2003).

What do these forms of regulation mean then for the development of the media industries in both countries?

Impact of regulation on media industries in China and Singapore

I would argue that the way the Internet is regulated in both China and Singapore has led to two key impacts that both governments are keen to mitigate. The first would be the impact on innovation within the media industries, and the second would be on how to use 'soft power' to nurture an image that both countries are creative or are willing to collaborate to produce new creative projects, such as films.

Innovation

There is a recognition from both governments that regulating the Internet can have a detrimental impact on not only economic growth but also innovation as users in both countries might be unable to contact or develop their ideas within an international context. In Singapore, the Ministry of Law announced a review of VPNs examining its role in relation to copyright, 'business needs and societal developments' (Rajah, 2016). Here, it is possible to see how the Ministry is seeking to find a balance between encouraging business while trying to see how this same technology affects Singaporean society. In China, the government has blocked VPN services that enable users to

access blocked websites (see Associated Press, 2015). Earlier this year, it was reported that this clampdown was further intensified during the meetings of the National People's Congress and China's main political advisory group. Once again, it is interesting to note that this article links the use of digital technology with 'the nation's ability to innovate', arguing that censorship stymies innovation which, in turn, will harm China's economy (Li, 2016). The Chinese government has argued that regulation of the Internet allows for 'content control and technological self-sufficiency' whereby national security is protected and the domestic technology industry will also be nurtured (Yuen, 2015, p. 53). There is a drive from the Chinese government to promote 'its research and development over the Internet in order to accelerate the nation's modernisation' (Mou et al., 2016, p. 841).

The key issue here is how both these aims of controlling Internet users' access and creating a conducive environment for innovation can be balanced. In a survey conducted in 2010 after Google's retreat from China, up to '84% of Chinese scientists admitted that without Google', 'their research would be "somewhat or significantly" hampered', while another '74% believed that "international collaborations" would be affected' (Qiu in Mou et al., 2016, p. 852). In Singapore, the government decided to restrict Internet access to all civil servants from May 2017 (see Tham, 2016) onwards in an attempt to boost cybersecurity in the government services, which seems to be a backward move for a country that introduced country-wide broadband services as well as a *Smart Nation* initiative that seeks to use technology to address future issues the country might face from assistive technology to contactless payments (see Smart Nation Singapore, 2016).

What is key here, however, is that despite the various restrictions placed on the Internet in both countries, there is no denying of the financial investment and infrastructure that both countries have placed on mass media industries, identifying this area where there is potential for large economic growth. However, while it would be possible to see the economic rationale behind these investments, it is highly likely that both governments are aware of the potential gains that a country can obtain using technology via the fact that products from the mass media industries can promote a country's image.

Soft power

The perception of a city is strongly linked to the media products that it creates and distributes around the world. Ideas of the freedom of expression and creativity are strongly associated with America largely due to the success of its film industry globally where its landmarks such as image of the Statue of Liberty or presidential residence, the White House, evoke these ideas. In recent years, Singapore has sought to strengthen the infrastructure for media businesses in Singapore through the construction of 'Mediapolis', a series of buildings where media companies and digital information technology businesses can be based. Mediapolis currently houses the company Infinite Studios offering soundstages and digital media services (see Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA)], 2016). In an interview with a Philippines newspaper, Joachim Ng, the director of industry operations at Media Development Authority (MDA)[4] states that around S$230 million dollars (around US$165 millions) was awarded to MDA for about 7.5 years with a similar amount expected in the next 5 years (Diokno, 2016). China too is attempting to promote its own growing media industries through a series of measures, such as its film quota, which limits the number of foreign feature films screened in China to 34. What this has resulted in is a growth in co-productions with Hollywood companies to bypass these restrictions. The film *Great Wall* starring Matt Damon and produced by Legendary Pictures, a subsidiary of Chinese conglomerate Wanda Group, is an example.

While these investments are economic in nature, there is also little doubt that the media industry is a way in which to re-brand a nation. Z. John Zhang, a marketing professor, at Wharton Business school states that this move to the media industry is 'to build China's soft power'; besides being 'good business, it is a way to protect China's influence in the world' (The Wharton School, 2016). Singapore too seeks to promote its media industry through initiatives such as the Singapore Media Festival launched in 2014, which brings together the Singapore International Film Festival, Asia TV Forum and Market Screen Singapore and the Asian Television Awards (see IMDA, 2014). The festival thus allows attendees to not only attend screenings but also seek investment opportunities, partnerships and collaborations. This is just one way in which Singapore is attempting to create an image of a city as a platform for not only business in terms of investment but also a showcase for creativity and talent via its film screenings and awards ceremony. There is also a track record of promoting and championing Singaporean filmmakers at international film festivals, and recent years have seen Singapore made films win awards or be selected for screenings at prestigious film festivals, such as Cannes. *Ilo Ilo* a film by Anthony Chen won the Camera d'Or in 2013, and this year Boo Junfeng's film *Apprentice* competed in the Un Certain Regard segment of the festival. However, the government too is wary of films that do not portray Singapore or by its extension, its government, in an unfavourable light. In 2014, the film *To Singapore With Love*, by Singaporean filmmaker, Tan Pin Pin was issued with a Not Allowed All Ratings classification which meant that the film could not be screened in public in Singapore (though private screenings and screenings at tertiary educational institutions were permissible if certain conditions were met). In China, information about the film *Ten Years* from Hong Kong, which presents a future of Hong Kong where it has been completely taken over from China, was restricted in China. The Hong Kong Film ceremony, where *Ten Years* was nominated for the Best Film Award which it eventually won, was not broadcasted in China despite the ceremony being broadcasted in China since 1991 (see Lim, forthcoming).

What these examples from both Singapore and China go to show is how this paradox is being played out within the media industry in both these cities as they seek to grapple with how technology is both a tool in which future media products will be built on and also the various ways in which it seeks to maintain some form of control over how its citizens access these media products either to support its own media industries or to control its international image. Bearing in mind how most of these policies and responses from both governments are often reactive and ad hoc in nature, is it possible then for a way in which researchers in media policy come together to point out policy directions? Is there a way to contribute to addressing the issue of the 'global' and the media within nation states?

Where do we see ourselves?

There are two interlinked areas that I think media policy research is necessary on digital technology within the East Asian context: policy and audiences. First, what was clear from the report on digitalisation in East Asia is that regional collaboration is much easier today due to digital technology but that it was unclear from many media practitioners and professionals whether there are any collaborative and exchange schemes that are specific to digital production, distribution and consumption of culture. There is also a lack of policy collaboration or discussion on the area where the digital and online are increasingly embedded in cultural activities. There is therefore scope for researchers to think about potential formal agreements that look at audio-visual co-production, for

example, and performing and visual artists' regional collaboration. As mentioned earlier, digital technology is often approached from an economic perspective, which differs from the aims of many medial companies and professionals. There is opportunity here to examine existing government bilateral agreements, international agreements and treaties that are currently in place in which digital technology is a component of and determining whether there are ways in which focused media policy development can be included in these agreements.

Policy

In our role as researchers on policy, particularly within an East Asian context, strong political and social parameters still exist as documented earlier with the examples of China and Singapore, how then can current or new policies address the issues of the promotion of these technologies and control of access? As researchers dealing with policy, we need to be aware that public policy 'uses whatever measures are available within the prevailing political and ideological frameworks to achieve the required objectives' (O. Bennett, 2004, p. 243). Therefore, one of our key aims as researchers is for us to be able to present the 'right kinds of information in the right way', so as to be able to investigate and consider how research can work with governments in achieving sound policy (Scullion & Garcia, 2007, p. 120). It might be that to create media policy that is able to address these issues might mean involving not only government policymakers but also public cultural institutions, civil groups and consumer communities. Here, researchers can play a role as a bridge between these various stakeholders to formulate policy that addresses the various issues at play. In their review on evidence-based policy research in healthcare, Oliver, Lorenc, & Innvaer (2014) argue that there is an assumption from both policymakers and researchers that a 'policy-evidence "gap" exists' whereby both groups assume that either side do not understand the realities in which they work within, thus contributing to 'negative stereotypes on both sides' that 'perpetuate the gap they aim to bridge' (p. 6). This is also prevalent within media policy, and there is therefore scope for us to be aware of the potential pitfalls when engaging with policymakers when it comes to working on the fore-mentioned issues.

Audiences

Finally, there is the issue of the audience or the consumers of platforms and products available due to digital technology. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the majority of the world's populations of youths live in Asia (UNFPA, 2014). These youths typically aged under 35 are labelled 'digital natives' (see Prensky, 2001) who are described as being 'born' in the digital age. They are thus familiar with digital technology and its various uses. Yet, Asia also possesses nations where there is a growing ageing population, such as Japan. Two issues thus occur with this scenario. On one hand, how can we ensure that digital technology via various infrastructures and development can be made available to as wide an audience as possible, and, on the other hand, how can we also ensure that groups of people who are unfamiliar with digital technology such as the elderly are able to access this technology? For East Asian countries with substantial numbers of immigrants, such as South Korea, Thailand and Singapore, can access to digital technology help with their integration into the local communities? While a lack of oversight can be positive as it allows for alternative or non-state-sanctioned voice to be heard, gather together and collaborate, much of the media industry is market driven and can result in a limited range of channels and

products for these alternative voices to be heard. As researchers, it is possible to find a balance or a way forward to find or create digital spaces for these marginalised voices?

There also needs to be an acknowledgement from both researchers and governments that the rise of digital technology such as Web 2.0 has created a generation of active consumers of media whereby there are no longer passive consumers accepting information as presented to them but actively interpret and reinterpret the information, as well as respond to cultural products presented to them via various forms of media. The growth of participatory culture of fans as discussed by Henry Jenkins is evidence of an active audience (see L. Bennett, 2014). The active consumption of media products not only go beyond just disseminating what is presented to them but also perhaps offer a chance for these consumers to question and challenge what is presented which may prove disconcerting for governments that seek to present an official version of historical events (see Lim, forthcoming).

Audiences too are aware that digital technology offers them new ways into intervening with platforms and business models. They are no longer subject to what kind of media they are offered but can directly create their own shows or even fund their favourite artists via digital technology. The rise of platforms such as YouTube or Vimeo which are built on user submissions allows for the creation of new business models that bypass current vertically integrated media conglomerates. In addition, crowdfunding via websites such as Kickstarter and Indiegogo has seen many fans financially contribute to media products ranging from films to video games. The launch of Kickstarter in Hong Kong and Singapore in August 2016 is a testament of the strength of people willing to fund projects that they are interested in. It is clear that there are now new media platforms, and the old physical distribution channels are at risk of becoming obsolete and redundant. The 'traditional emphasis of the media business has been the creation, bundling and distribution of information and entertainment' (Rawolle & Hess, 2000, p. 89). With digital technology each aspect of their business has now been disrupted. Individual users are now able to create, put together and distribute their own media content bypassing media conglomerates.

However, the media business has not become a free for all as alongside the growth of individual and independent prosumers, we are also seeing a concentration of online platforms which bring into questions about global hegemony versus local expression and commercialism versus voluntarism. These are issues that need to be looked at if East Asian countries would like to promote work that is regionally specific and speak to the experiences of people living and working in the region. While there are now multiple platforms on which independents can distribute their work, it is also known that they are often difficult to be found among 'numerous layers of content' (H. K. Lee & Lim, 2015, p. 11). Are there any ways in which independent media professionals can be supported in getting their work seen? What ways are there then for researchers to engage with platforms that can inform policy? The current strategy of outright bans on platforms, specific content or websites adopted as discussed above by Singapore and China is not effective, and by not engaging with platforms, there is a real risk of not addressing what type of content and how much content is made available and easily accessible to its citizenry.

It is obvious that researchers would have to work within various social and political boundaries present within Asia. However, the desires from governments, at least within the two examples of Singapore and China, show that there is strong government support for their respective media industries to go global and for their media products to project a positive image of their countries. This aspiration has perhaps been fulfilled in South Korea and Japan but for countries seeking to attain this goal, the role of researchers in addressing these four fore-mentioned areas can only help

with this goal. There is a real prospect that further regional collaboration might prove the way forward for countries in East Asia to go global.

Conclusion

It would perhaps to fitting to end this article also with a reflection on our role as researchers within digital technology and the media. The recent past has seen a growth in evidence-based research in justifying the support for culture and the media (see Scullion & Garcia, 2007). Although the government in the form of politicians, civil servants and public agencies 'need good-quality and quantitative research data and analysis', there is often not enough money to fund 'good quality research programmes' (Scullion & Garcia, 2007, p. 120). How then can we design or conduct research that can contribute effectively to policy making?

In addition, as consumers and users of this very technology that we are researching, is it possible to reconcile our position as a subjective consumer and objective researcher? This is an idea that has been highlighted by social scientists such as Bourdieu who highlights the idea of a 'reflexive sociology'. He states that when a researcher seeks to know his or her object of study, he or she is at the same time a product of the very society of the object, which results 'in a way such that the problems that he raises about it and the concepts he uses have every chance of being the product of this object itself' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 235). We therefore need to be conscious about how we design and think about how to conduct research in this area. This idea is linked to the next issue. As we are researching the 'intangible', where are the 'people' we wish to look at and how do we ensure that we are speaking to as representative a group as possible? Where are our 'objects' of study located? Finally, how do we ensure that we do not get left behind in what we want to look at due to the fast-changing nature of technology that impacts platforms and business models. At the same time, formulation of policy takes time, so how do we reconcile the rapid change in digital technology with policy making. A way forward would be via collaborations both regional and international, the area of 'cultural policy research is … defined by a shared commitment to investigating the conditions of which culture is produced, reproduced and experience' (O. Bennett, 2004, p. 246). For a topic that incorporates digital technology, the media industries as well as users and audiences, it would serve researchers well to remember that the work that has to be undertaken is 'complex and multifaceted … requiring a broad range of intellectual practices, none of which holds a monopoly' (O. Bennett, 2004, p. 246).

This article has provided a look at the current state of digital technology in countries in East Asia and the opportunities and challenges that have occurred within the media industry through the growth of digital technology. It then focused on the media strategies of Singapore and China to highlight the paradox of how both these countries are attempting to harness digital technology for economic growth, yet trying to limit how citizens access media products via curbing certain aspects of these technologies. I then highlighted areas in which further engagement by researchers can prove productive in addressing the various issues surrounding digital technology which can help develop the media industries in various East Asian countries that might, in turn, help with the desire to go 'global'.

There is no doubt that digital technology is changing the way in which media products are created, produced, distributed and consumed. The impacts of these changes have been felt in many, if not all, the countries that were looked at in this article. What this article seeks to do is highlight that while there are still many ways of intervening and addressing these changes via policy or other

means, there is also a need for researchers to address the context in which they are not only conducting their research but also the way in which our research is also impacted upon our own consumption of the very issues that we are looking at.

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Notes

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2. Policymakers, artists and arts managers from media companies, higher education institutions, government agencies, arts organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and independent arts practitioners in the five countries were interviewed.
3. Singapore and China are known for having highly interventionist state policies with regard to their media industries. For example, in news media, two companies in Singapore own the majority of the newspapers, television and state industries ('Singapore Profile – Media', 2013). In China, the largest media company, Chinese Central TV, is state run and 'all of China's 2600-plus radio stations are state-owned' ('China Profile – Media', 2016).
4. The Media Development Authority (MDA) has now merged with the Infocomm Development Authority and is now known as the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA). This occurred on 1 October 2016.

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