Criticism, Censorship, Influence on Newswork:
A Content Analysis of How Film Reviews Published in *Photoplay* Magazine Changed after Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America’s 1934 Censorship

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Sijie Wang
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This thesis titled

Criticism, Censorship, Influence on Newswrok:

A Content Analysis of How Film Reviews Published in Photoplay Magazine Changed

after Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America’s 1934 Censorship

by

SIJIE WANG

has been approved for

the E. W. Scripps School of Journalism

and the Scripps College of Communication by

Hans K. Meyer

Assistant Professor of Journalism

Scott Titworth

Dean, Scripps College of Communication
ABSTRACT

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Criticism, Censorship, Influence on Newswork: A Content Analysis of How Film Reviews Published in Photoplay Magazine Changed after Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America’s 1934 Censorship

Director of Thesis: Hans K. Meyer

This thesis investigates the changes in film reviews published by Photoplay magazine, considered by many as one of the most significant and high-quality fan magazines, after the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA, the predecessor of today’s Motion Picture Association of America, MPAA) started to censor fan magazine content on August 10, 1934. Two constructed years were made from issues published from 1930 to 1939 and the overlapping 10 years of the golden age of Hollywood (1930 to 1949) and the golden age of fan magazines (1920 to 1939). A total of 723 film reviews (every single review in the issues selected) were studied. Although it was not clear based on MPPDA’s censorship pronouncement whether film reviews were included in the censorship, content analysis results, supported also by historical analysis, suggested that film reviews published from 1935 to 1939 covered a significantly larger portion of movies made by big studios, including MGM, Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO), Paramount, 20th Century-Fox and Warner Bros, Universal, Columbia and United Artists, than those published between 1930 and 1934. The results also showed that film reviews
published after MPPDA’s censorship pronouncement were significantly more positive both in general tone and when it came to big studio films. Considering that today studios still try to influence film criticism in multiple ways, this study, within the framework of newswork theory, may provide insights into how reviews may change under influences on the extramedia and media routines level.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the changes in reviews under extramedia-level and routine-level influence (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). *Photoplay* was chosen because of its high quality film reviews and its status as the most famous fan magazine (Slide, 2010). The researcher sought to find if *Photoplay*’s reviews became more positive and covered more big-studio movies after the 1934 censorship of fan magazines by an organization founded by the big studios -- The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). Evidence also suggested similar phenomenon still exists in the modern world and even has extended to the new media field, thus making the findings more meaningful, as discussed in detail in the literature review and discussion sections.

Fan magazines are the “film- and entertainment-related publications” targeting average moviegoers (Slide, 2010, p.11), and had their heyday from the 1920s to the 1930s (Slide, 2010). The fan magazine was a kind of by-product of the studio system (McMurtry, 1977) and had a mutually beneficial relationship with studios, especially the eight big studios [MGM, Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO), Paramount, 20th Century-Fox and Warner Bros, Universal, Columbia and United Artists] who basically dominated the film industry during the golden age of Hollywood, also known as the studio era (Gomery, 2005). Fan magazines relied heavily on the studios for publicity photos and access to stars, while studios tried to make fan magazine writers “function as the voice of the studios’ public relations people” (Sterling, 2009).
The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) was founded in 1922 by major studios to improve the image of the film industry and to avoid any kind of government censorship. Will H. Hays, former manager of Warren G. Harding's campaign for the presidency in 1920 and Postmaster General, was chosen as the chairman. Under his leadership, the Motion Picture Production Code was released in 1930. Also nicknamed the “Hays Code,” it consisted of rules about what content should or should not be allowed on screen and was basically a censorship of films.

As studios were busy trying not to violate the Hays Code, fan magazines’ role “in presenting a negative image of Hollywood” gradually drew attention (Slide, 2010, p. 86), as several photos and article titles by fan magazines were considered inappropriate by the studios. As a result, MPPDA issued a pronouncement regarding the censorship of fan magazine articles on August 10, 1934. The pronouncement required all fan magazine content “which involved studio contract players” to be submitted to the studio publicity personnel “for approval before publication” (Slide, 2010, p. 86-87). However, whether film reviews were included in the censorship remained unclear based on available historical documents and previous studies, which made reviews a good research subjective for this study.

*Photoplay* was chosen because of its special historical status and exceptional quality in film criticism. As the second oldest and the most famous fan magazine (Slide, 2010), *Photoplay* was first published in Chicago in August 1911. It was often considered an
exception among fan magazines, for its initial support for independent studios (Slide, 2010), its often conservative and neutral standpoint (Barbas, 2001), and its comparatively high quality writing, particularly in its film review department, “The Shadow Stage,” which was highly acclaimed by many film critics and scholars (Griffith, 1971; Haberski Jr., 2001; Jacobs, 1939; Koszarski, 1994; Roberts, 2010, etc.).

This study aimed to find out if film reviews published in “The Shadow Stage” changed significantly in film selection and valence after MPPDA’s 1934 censorship. For content analysis, two constructed years (24 issues), as illustrated in the methods chapter, were made from 120 issues published from 1930 to 1939. This time period was chosen because it overlapped 10 years of the golden age of Hollywood (1930 to 1949) (Gomery, 1986) and the “heyday of fan magazines” (1920 to 1939) (Slide, 2010). The second constructive year started with 1935 rather than 1934, when the censorship was issued, because a magazine’s editorial plan was usually made six months in advance. In addition, 1935 was also the year Photoplay was purchased by MacFadden Publications (Photoplay, Jan 1935) and the first year Ruth Waterbury, another important editor took over for James Quirk, Photoplay’s most influential figure. Historical analysis was also adopted to help understand the language used in the 1930s, as well as to provide more historical evidence as context for this research. Historical material included film reviews, editorials, interviews, and letters from Photoplay, articles from other fan magazines, relevant articles by other publications at that time, and official MPPDA archive documents.
With content analysis results supported by historical research, the findings suggested that not only a higher percentage of big-studio movies were chosen after MPPDA’s censorship, but also the reviews tended to be more positive. Within the framework of newswork theory regarding multiple-level influence on media content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), it can be indicated that reviews, even if not directly censored, might still have changed as extramedia-level and routines-level influences exist. Furthermore, even though the study relied on data obtained from historical material, in light of modern film criticism’s affinity with studios as discussed in detail in the literature and discussion sections, the findings may also provide valuable insights for further research about today’s extramedia influences on media newswork, as evidence has shown that influence on reviewing is still prevalent not only in film criticism, but also other forms of reviewing.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Fan Magazine’s Relationship with Big-Studio Publicity

One major distinction between fan magazines of the golden Hollywood and entertainment publications of today is that fan magazines were openly under certain controls of the studios and served to some extent as their publicity tool from the beginning. During the golden age of the Hollywood studio system, which was from the 1930s to 1940s (Gomery, 2005), the eight big studios dominated the film industry. The Hollywood studio system worked because the eight big studios to a large extent controlled three major functions in film industry: production, distribution, and presentation or exhibition (Gomery, 2005). This system guaranteed the big players who controlled the industry through the 1930s and 1940s enormous profit while serving also as a barrier for those who wanted to enter the industry (Gomery, 1986). Publicity was one of the promotional approaches studios used to improve distribution. This was particularly reflected by the close relationship between fan magazine writers and studios.

For instance, both Motion Picture Story Magazine (later titled Motion Picture Magazine), the earliest fan magazine, and Photoplay, “the most famous fan magazine” (Sterling, 2009, p. 267), were founded to serve certain producers (Slide, 2010). Motion Picture Story Magazine’s cofounder J. Stuart Blackton was himself a prominent studio head who established one of the first film studios in the United States, Vitagraph (Slide, 2010; Dewey, 1998). The publication emphasized films released by Motion Picture Patents group members because Blackton was one of them. Photoplay magazine (founded in Chicago in August 1911 but no records of the specific founders’ names can be found), on the other hand, provided publicity for the releases of the nonmembers of
Motion Picture Patents group because the magazine was created with their support (Slide, 2010).

Fan magazine writers relied on the studios for press releases and access to film stars and film production for interviews and stories (Barbas, 2001). Fan magazines, although not published by the studios, “functioned often as the voice of the studios’ public relations people” (Sterling, 2009, p. 267). Many fan magazine writers, including some critics, even worked as studio publicists themselves. For instance, Norbert Lusk (1883-1949), a writer for Picture-Play, a fan magazine first started in April 1915, “combined fan magazine writing with publicity work” for several famous Hollywood producers including Samuel Goldwyn in the silent era (Slide, 2010, p. 82). Lusk, who worked as publicity director for Samuel Goldwyn Films until he resigned in 1919, according to Variety (“Coast Picture News,” 1919), started writing for Picture-Play in 1918 (Slide, 2010). He became Picture-Play’s film critic and editor in 1922 and served in this position through 1938. He claimed that he had reviewed 2,360 films (Slide, 2010). Although Photoplay started with the support of independent movie makers, the magazine got more involved with big studios in the 1920s. Photoplay’s Katherine Albert, a former director of publicity for MGM, wrote “an extraordinary number of pieces” on the studios’ actors (Slide, 2010, p. 77). In addition, some fan magazine writers even had intimate relationships with stars while writing about them without any apparent effort to avoid a conflict of interest. One example was Photoplay’s Herbert Howe, who was in a homosexual relationship with MGM’s major figure Ramon Novarro starting in 1925 and wrote extensively about him over many years (Slide, 2010).
Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America’s 1934 Censorship of Fan Magazines

The major studios formed the MPPDA in 1922 to improve the image of the film industry and to avoid federal or any other kind of government censorship. The foundation of the MPPDA, also nicknamed the “Hays Office,” occurred in the wake of a series of scandals such as a chain of post-World War I movies that “tested the limits of post war morals” (Gomery, 2005, p. 66), media’s wide and sensational coverage of then super star Mary Pickford’s divorce, (Gomery, 2005) and comedian Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle’s alleged rape and murder of starlet Virginia Rappe. This led to severe attacks from churches and conservative publications (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2005, p. 300). The censorship of motion pictures was green lighted in 1915 by the Supreme Court which “permitted and promoted prior-restraint censorship of films” by stating that the movie was “not a form of speech protected under the First Amendment” (Hwang, 2014).

The MPPDA’s achievement was remarkable. After 1922, “no more states established censorship boards, and the MPPDA successfully halted all bills for federal regulation” (Gomery, 2005, p. 67). To fight against any form of government censorship, the MPPDA released its own self-censorship in 1930, the Motion Picture Production Code, also known as the “Hays Code.” The Hays Code consisted of rules about what content should or should not be allowed on screen. However, the code was not strictly enforced until four years later in 1934, when “informal methods” were no longer effective to counter
federal censorship (Gomery, 2005, p. 175). Historically, 1930 to 1934 was known as the pre-code period (Petersen, 2013).

With the enforcement of the code, member producers (the eight big studios) were “obliged to submit all scripts and films to the Production Code Administration (PCA) for approval,” which was set up by Hays in 1934 (Gomery, 2005, p. 175). Infractions of the Hays Code could “result in $25,000 fines,” which was nothing compared to the fact that “MPPDA disapproval guaranteed -- in all but a few cases -- box-office failure” (Gomery, 2005, p. 175).

Meanwhile, fan magazines’ role in exposing the negative part of Hollywood eventually gained attention from the Hays office (Slide, 2010, p. 86). A number of fan magazine articles were considered disturbing and outrageous by studios, such as several Photoplay articles and cartoons published between 1931 and 1933 that “lampooned Marlene Dietrich’s image as a doting mother,” (Petersen, 2013, p. 50) and Modern Screen’s “How Long Will Hollywood Protect Harlow” in the August 1934 issue, which “immediately disturbed the film fraternity” by mentioning the suicide of Jean Harlow’s husband, Paul Bern (Slide, 2010, p. 87).

On Aug. 10, 1934, MPPDA’s Studio Publicity Executive Committee members took a “sweeping and far-reaching move” in a meeting with Hays Office’s censorship head Joseph I. Breen (“Film Studios Censor Fan Story Writers,” 1934). They unanimously
issued (Slide, 2010, p. 86) the following pronouncement regarding the censorship of fan magazine articles:

Whereas the undersigned members of this Committee seek to curb the inaccuracies, misrepresentations and exaggeration of facts by certain fan magazine writers, which tend to create false impressions in the mind of the public in regard to motion-picture personalities, and which result in much unfavorable public reaction, the Committee herewith adopts the following resolutions, effective immediately:

That, in the future, all fan magazine interviews, stories or symposiums which involve studio contract players, whenever or wherever obtained by fan magazine representatives or free-lance writers, shall be submitted to the studio publicity director, or his properly designated representative, for approval before publication;

That each writer shall first obtain approval of the studio publicity director or his representative, of any idea upon which an interview is to be based before such an interview is granted;

That, insofar as practicable, a third party, representing the studio, shall be present during all interviews between players and writers;

That any writer violating these definite rulings of the studios shall be denied admission to the studio thereafter, and all further cooperation (Slide, 2010, pp. 86-87).

On Aug. 13, as The Hollywood Reporter reported, the editors of five leading fan magazines agreed to work under the rules of the censorship pronouncement, even though “there was little else they could do” (Slide, 2010, p. 88). On Aug. 15, editors from more than 10 major fan magazines, including Photoplay and Modern Screen, had a meeting with the publicity heads of the big studios and signed a pledge to “purge their publications of false and salacious material” (Slide, 2010, p. 88). Only 30 fan magazine writers were considered approved compared to 300 before (Slide, 2010).

The edict also required fan magazine writers to obtain identification cards, which were also known as “Hays Cards,” from the MPPDA. The researcher found no evidence
regarding how long Hays Cards were in use, but fan magazine writers relied on the cards to get access to studio contractors at least until the 1950s, when the cards were replaced by “a listing of accredited writers” (Slide, 2010, p. 88).

In a feature story, “Guessing Right for Stardom,” published in the September 1935 issue of Photoplay, the author, Muriel Babcock, talked about interviewing stars under supervision of the studio publicity personnel.

Every time I interview a Hollywood star, at some point before the conversation is over, the star either lowers the voice confidentially lest some executive hear or else lifts it to the skies to make sure they will and says, “You know, I shouldn’t be doing this sort of thing (a specific role). I had an awful fight with the studio over it” (Babcock, 1935, p. 24).

According to Barbas (2001), the range of this censorship included all articles. But it remains unclear whether film reviews were also required to be submitted before publication. This uncertainty is one of the reasons that Photoplay’s film reviews were worth looking into particularly considering for most of the 1930s, people who wrote for “The Shadow Stage” (Photoplay’s film reviewing department) were the same writers who also participated in other content, such as writing editorial features (Slide, 2010).

It is worth noting that even after the enforcement of the censorship, fan magazines did not totally stop reporting on something that would disturb the studios. In response, the MPPDA would claim to take action. For instance, Modern Screen in its Aug. 1937 issue, published a photo series of actress Joan Blondell “in various stages of undress” (McGrail, 1937), as stated in a letter on June 29 (as shown below) to Modern Screen’s then editor, Regina Cannon by John McGrail, a person working for the censorship board of MPPDA. In the letter, McGrail wrote:

We regard these pictures as being in bad taste...I am informed that these pictures were taken by Mr. Frank Muto, your photographer, with the understanding that
they would be submitted to the publicity department before publication. No effort was made to comply with the studio regulations which require submission of the pictures for approval before release (McGrail, 1937).

He also wrote that MPPDA would “take steps to prevent the recurrence of such an incident” and if similar pictures show up again, “it will be impossible for us to continue to cooperate with either your writers or photographers” (McGrail, 1937). This letter was obtained from MPPDA’s digital document database that was available at the time of this research at the website of Flinders University.

*Photoplay* Magazine and Its Criticism Department, “The Shadow Stage”

*Photoplay* magazine was first published in August 1911, six months after the oldest fan magazine *Motion Picture Story Magazine* was founded. At first it mainly published fictionalized stories of motion pictures like other fan magazines, but the stories were mostly adapted from movies made by independent companies, also known as the nonmembers of the Motion Picture Patents group (Slide, 2010, p. 48).

The first six issues no longer exist. The earliest issue available is February 1912. Staff names started to appear in the magazine from the April 1912 issue on. *Photoplay*’s staff changed regularly, with not just different names, but also the same names under different titles from issue to issue. It was not until 1915 that James R. Quirk, *Photoplay*’s long-time editor and film critic had his name on the contents page. Quirk’s name first appeared as the magazine’s editor in January 1920. From then on *Photoplay* became “the fan magazine with which most film buffs and scholars are familiar,” and the golden age of *Photoplay* started (Slide, 2010, p. 51). Under the editorial policies of Quirk, *Photoplay*
was regarded by film industry insiders as a fan magazine that “encouraged and praised genuine artistry in films” (Jacobs, 1939, p. 202).

Among fan magazines, *Photoplay* was often considered an exception for its high quality, especially in its film reviewing. The magazine often took a more conservative and neutral standpoint while many other fan magazines “peddled rumor, gossip, and Hollywood trivia for a dime” (Barbas, 2001, p. 90). From the beginning, Quirk used film criticism “as an educational tool for the industry and the general readership” (Roberts, 2010, p. 28), which is consistent with what the film criticism department, “The Shadow Stage” claimed in its captions from the 1920s to 1930s, such as “Select Your Pictures and You Won’t Have to Complain About the Bad Ones” and “The National Guide to Motion Pictures Saves Your Picture Time and Money.”

At first, Quirk hired Julian Johnson (who later earned writer credits for dozens of silent movie titles including the first Academy Award Best Picture winner, *Wings*) as *Photoplay*’s first film critic for the newly launched review department, “The Shadow Stage” (Slide, 2010). “The Shadow Stage” was considered the “first important film review department to be offered anywhere” (Griffith, 1971, p. xvi). The reviews written by Johnson and his successor Burns Mantle, a well-known and respected theater critic, helped fan magazine reviewing reach “its zenith” in the silent era (Roberts, 2010, p. 32). *Photoplay*’s reviews written by Johnson, Mantle, and later Quirk who hosted “The Shadow Stage” during most of the 1920s, helped to quicken “the effort toward artistic quality in motion pictures” (Jacobs, 1939, p. 202).

Quirk himself also contributed a lot of reviews, especially in the 1920s though often without a byline (Slide, 2010). He was known for harsh criticism in his reviews in 1920s.
One of his most famous reviews was of F.W. Murnau’s *Sunrise* published in “The Shadow Stage” in Dec. 1927. *Sunrise* was universally considered a silent classic, but Quirk considered it, “The sort of picture that fools high-brows into hollering ‘Art!’” with “Swell trick photography and fancy effects, but, boiled down, no story interest and only stilted, mannered acting” (Quirk, 1927, p. 52). This often-cited review (e.g. Allen & Gomery, 1993; Butler, 1990) was seen as evidence of the “high regard” he held towards the film industry and film criticism (Koszarski, 1994). Besides in reviews, Quirk also tried to “exemplify a new movie criticism” in his editorials, addressing the “democratic nature of movies.” He claimed the simple and direct new art form of movies is “an art of the people, for the people” (Haberski Jr., 2001, p. 23; Quirk, 1918, p. 19).

In the Feb. 1925 issue, Quirk explained how the reviewing in “The Shadow Stage” worked in his editorial, “Speaking of Pictures” as follows:

> Six writers see pictures for the *Photoplay* Magazine Shadow Stage department. Where we are in doubt, all six sometimes see the same picture. First we try to establish the entertainment value of the picture, judged from the viewpoint of the average devotee of the motion picture. We try to tell you something of the story and of its suitability for the whole family, and who the players are. Where we find an unworthy picture heavily exploited, we tell you that it does not live up to its advertising. (Quirk, 1925, p. 27)

After Quirk died on Aug. 1, 1932, his former mistress Kathryn Dougherty became the editor for a couple of years (Slide, 2010). But his real successor who kept *Photoplay*’s quality was Ruth Waterbury, Quirk’s pupil, who assumed her duty as *Photoplay*’s reviewer and editor in Aug. 1935 and served through the end of the 1930s. According to Slide (2010), *Photoplay* barely changed in the 1930s after Quirk’s death, and stories were “pretty much of the same quality.” Waterbury’s editorial management “kept alive” the tradition made by Quirk and maintained the quality in “articles, reviews,
and editorials” (Slide, 2010, p. 66). Meanwhile, the number of writers for “The Shadow Stage” was down from six to only Waterbury herself and one other Photoplay writer (Slide, 2010).

Given the fact that it remained unclear based on available evidence whether “The Shadow Stage” was also censored by MPPDA along with other content including articles and photos, this researcher believed it worth looking into whether Photoplay’s reviews changed after the censorship, particularly considering that the quality of Photoplay’s film criticism, as mentioned above, was widely considered high-quality, which was also considered consistent through the 1930s.

The Possible Influence of the MPPDA’s Censorship on Fan Magazines on Extramedia Level and Media Routines: from the Perspective of Hierarchy-of-Influences Model

This paper examined the changes that occurred in the film criticism section of Photoplay magazine after the MPPDA enforced its censorship of fan magazine articles. It took the perspective of the “hierarchy-of-influences” model that described different levels of internal and external influence on newswork and media content.

The model of hierarchy of influences on media content consists of five levels as illustrated by Figure 1 below (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 223):
According to this model, the MPPDA’s action to intervene in fan magazines’ coverage of filmmakers as an interest group fits the scenario where some groups “seek to influence media content by providing ‘guidelines’ for covering topics of interest” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 184). Besides studio PR departments’ influence as extramedia factors on media content, they may also affect newswork on the media routines level (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 127). In the case of Photoplay magazine’s film critics, writers had to get “Hays Cards” as the only way to get access to their sources in studios. The routines in the newsroom changed after the pronouncement because writers could no longer approach their sources freely through personal and professional connections (Slide, 2010).

Furthermore, as studios’ press releases served as a main source for fan magazine writers in the first place (Barbas, 2001), the pronouncement strengthened the
source-reporter relationship by enabling studios’ publicity departments to get themselves further involved in fan magazines’ content creation process. The source-reporter relationship here falls into the scope of Shoemaker & Reese’s category of links between organizational and extramedia influences: the more a source knows about and adapts to the media outlet’s routines, the more likely it will get favorable coverage (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

In addition, 1935, the first year of the second time period this study examined, was also the first editorial year when *Photoplay* had a new editor after Quirk died, as well as the first year the magazine was published by MacFadden Publishing, which also published many other fan magazines including *Movie Mirror* (which merged with *Photoplay* in 1941) and later *The Motion Picture Magazine* (Slide, 2010). Although it was suggested that these shifts didn’t have an obvious influence on the magazine’s content (Slide, 2010), their potential impact on the editorial level cannot be completely ruled out.

External and Internal Factors Influencing Newswork and Related Studies

Considering the possible effects of the MPPDA’s extramedia influence on *Photoplay*’s newswork routines, as well as the unclear influence from internal factors, such as *Photoplay*’s changing ownership and editorial management, literature studying both internal and external factors that might influence media was examined.

Despite public relations’ important role in both “journalistic circles” and “business and politics,” one has to “look hard in studies of newswork to find the public relations industry as a special subject for analysis” and there was a scholarly trend to “making PR
sound sociologically non-problematic” (Turrow, 1989, p. 207). Macnamara (1993) analyzed the influence of the public relations field on the mass media to create a better understanding of the external influences on the media. Because this study was conducted before Shoemaker & Reese’s hierarchy-of-influences model, it adopted some frameworks from the perspective of agenda-setting, monopoly ownership theory and modern PR theories. Even though media bias was frequently attributed to “media ownership,” “journalist training and backgrounds,” “ideological factors,” and “advertising,” researchers did not “adequately describe the range of influences on mass communication today” (Macnamara, 1993, p. 4). He also pointed out that public relations was one of the major practices that wielded influence on media content. Through a survey of 417 Australian journalists and editors conducted in 1992, Macnamara found that 70% of the participants admitted using PR material, 50% extracted quotes from press releases, and 20% “sometimes or often used PR material ‘in full.’” Moreover, Macnamara also identified four circumstances where PR’s influence on media content was most prevalent:

1). When reporters have to rely on official sources;

2). When “proprietary information” such as a financial reports or data from a company or organization is required, and this kind of information is in many cases only available from PR releases;

3). When media are small and have limited resources;

4). When a close relationship exists between journalists and PR professionals, or “ex-journalists work in PR” (Macnamara, 1993, p. 103)
In *Photoplay’s* case, the fourth was particularly applicable, since for example, former director of publicity for MGM, Katherine Albert became a writer for *Photoplay* and wrote many articles about MGM’s contractors, as mentioned earlier. In addition, all fan magazines had to rely on the studios to get access to the stars also fit the second situation.

Kabeta’s (2005) study focusing on the journalist-source relationship was conducted under the social organization of newswork framework, introduced by Michael Schudson (2005), and Lev Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory which “is premised around the idea that the agenda and content of journalism production, is in part a product of non-journalistic social factors” (Kabeta, 2005). Through qualitative semi-structured interviews and observation methods, Kabeta concluded that the exchange model better described the nature of the journalist-source relationship compared to the adversarial model, and “journalists in liberal democratic systems can only … be effective if they closely associated with the power bastions they seek” (Kabeta, 2005, pp. 141-142). In addition, Larsson’s study (2002), which used the interview method and reached similar conclusions as Kabeta, suggested that “a large degree of interplay” exist between journalists and their sources of local politicians and officials.

Compared to the limited literature related to extramedia influences on media content, many studies have looked into the influence from ownership and on routines level forces on media content (Travis, 1989; Gilens, 2000; Shoemaker, 2001; Corte, 2009; Rossman, 2011, working paper; Vigna and Kennedy, 2011, working paper; Dobrescu, 2012, working paper). Different studies about influences on the organizational level reached opposite conclusions. The majority of those studies suggest that ownership and
consolidation may have an influence on media content. Gilens & Hertzman’s case study (2000) found that substantial differences in how newspapers report depend on “the financial interests of their media owners” (Gilens & Hertzma, 2000, p. 383). This is in line with the findings of Vigna & Kennedy’s study (2011, working paper) on media concentration and movie reviews. By coding and analyzing reviews gained from MetaCritic and Rottentomatoes, Vigna & Kennedy (2011) found that outlets owned by News Corp., the owner of 20th Century Fox, such as the Wall Street Journal, showed a small statistically significant bias in reviewing scores for movies released by the studio, and while Time didn’t show the same bias towards films released by Warner Bros, also owned by Time Warner, “weaker Warner Bros movies are less likely to be reviewed” (Vigna & Kennedy, 2011, p. 20).

On the contrary, Rossman (2011) came to the opposite conclusions based on content analysis and t-tests of movie reviews published by outlets owned by News Corporation and Time Warner from 1996 to 1998, which were compared to reviews written by critics from other companies. Rossman suggested that “ownership does not shift the valence of coverage to favor corporate interests” (Rossman, 2011, p. 13).

Other research on internal media levels also include studies about media routines. Both Shoemaker’s study (2001) using content analysis and Corte’s study (2009) using a survey were conducted from the perspective of Shoemaker & Reese’s hierarchy-of-influences model. Both suggested that routine forces play a bigger role than individual factors in gatekeeping within a news organization, be it a professional or student publication. In addition, Dobrescu’s study focusing on book reviews (2012, working paper) found that if a book’s author also works for the same outlet as the book
reviewer, the book is 25% more likely to be reviewed and the ratings of this kind of books are about 5% higher.

Film Criticism’s Role in Films’ Commercial Performance and Audience’s Choice and Related Studies

Most studies in this category were conducted by people studying business and marketing. Their findings suggested that film critics have significant influence on movies’ box office (Eliashberg & Shugan, 1997; Basuroy et al, 2003; Reinstein & Snyder, 2005; Brown et al, 2011; Chen et al, 2012; Jeon & Jiao, 2012). Others focused on the influence from movie stars (Ravid, 1999). One thing to note is that some of the above mentioned studies aimed at providing strategic advice for studios and PR people on the basis of their findings. For example, Basuroy (2003) stated that the study’s findings “offer insight into how film studios can strategically manage the review process to enhance box office revenue” (Basuroy, 2003, p. 103). The study suggested that negative reviews hurt more than positive reviews help, so that studios “should spend more to control damage than to promote positive reviews,” and if the movie is not that good, “studios could forgo critical screenings for fear of negative attention” (Basuroy, 2003, p. 116).

Today’s “Blurbmeister” Phenomenon and Studios’ Efforts to Intervene in Film Criticism

As online film reviews thrive, a lot of people, including Roger Ebert, claimed that we live in a “new golden age of film criticism” (Ebert, 2010). Yet other critics, for
example Charles Taylor, say that because websites rely on clicks to attract advertisers, “it is easy for even good editors to make their publication a tool of the studio publicists” (Taylor, 2011, p. 82). Back in 1997 (March 24), the Los Angeles Times published a column about Hollywood “blurbmeisters,” which means reviewers who wrote positive reviews in exchange for favors from studios. Some studio publicists often urged critics to “agree to quotes that fit a marketing campaign.” One example, as reported in this column, was that the year before, the trade paper Variety caught MGM “distributing a checklist of quotes to reviewers to mark off” (Bates & Blanco, 1997).

Some critics would fax their favorable reviews or quotes to studio publicists before publishing, and many critics would “agree to use quotes suggested by studio marketing executives” (Bates & Blanco, 1997). Even when critics wrote something negative, studios found a way to interpret statements out of context and quote the review to sound good. For instance, Paul Wunder, a reviewer for WBAI, “trashed” Demi Moore’s “Striptease,” while saying he admired Ving Rhames’s performance. But when he was quoted by the film company, they merely mentioned the positive part saying that he praised that “Ving Rhames as spectacular” (Bates & Blanco, 1997).

Eliashberg and Shugan (1997) suggested that studios could treat critics with wine and meals at previews, let them meet with and interview stars, quote the criticism to encourage critics to write positive reviews, and avoid inviting critics who are uncooperative. Studios even made things up to promote their movies. According to the The New York Times (Zielbauer, 2002), Sony Pictures Entertainment agreed to pay a fine of $326,000 because it fabricated a fake film critic named “David Manning.” Manning worked for a newspaper that really existed, but he didn’t have anything to do with the
numerous reviews. Sony forged them as works written by Mr. Manning, who was also a real person but didn’t give permission to use his name. All this suggests that influence on reviewing from studios still exists.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research was conducted to determine if Photoplay’s film reviews were affected by MPPDA’s 1934 censorship of fan magazines and if more positive reviews were published after the censorship, particularly on big-studio films. Therefore, the following research questions were proposed:

*RQ1: Are there significant changes in the portion of big-studio films reviewed in Photoplay magazine after the year of the MPPDA’s pronouncement (1934)?*  

As mentioned in the literature review, the MPPDA was founded by the major studios. Therefore, it was worth studying if after the 1934 censorship of fan magazines, a higher percentage of big-studio movies (the eight dominant studios during the golden age of Hollywood, 1930 to 1949) were reviewed in “The Shadow Stage.”

*RQ2: Are there significant changes in overall valence of film reviews published in Photoplay magazine after the year of the MPPDA’s pronouncement (1934)?*  

The Photoplay scenario, as explained in the literature review, fits because the PR department can have the most influence on media content. This includes the close relationship between studio publicity and Photoplay writers and editors -- “when a close relationship exists between journalists and PR professionals or ‘ex-journalists work in PR” (Macnamara, 1993). Fan magazine writers relied heavily on studio press releases
(both big studios and independent studios) as well as pre-release screening of films (Slide, 2010). The overall valence of reviews on all films (both big-studio and independent-studio ones) is studied because this can show if there was a significant difference in the general trend, compared with the results regarding big-studio films of the next research question as below.

**RQ3:** *Are there significant changes in overall valence of reviews of big-studio films in Photoplay magazine after the year of the MPPDA’s pronouncement (1934)?*

The above mentioned close relationship between *Photoplay* and the MPPDA, as well as the personal relationships between *Photoplay* writers and big studio publicity people, or even Will Hays, the chairman of the MPPDA himself, made it even more worthwhile studying whether *Photoplay’s* reviews on big-studio films became more positive after the 1934 censorship. According to previous studies mentioned in the literature review, researchers arrived on opposite conclusions from studies about whether film reviews would be more positive when the publication is closely related (such as owned by) the corporation that also controls the film company (Virginia & Kennedy, 2011; Rossman, 2011). Because this study employed Chi-square test which could only involve two categories, the valence of reviews of big-studio movies needed to be tested separately, as further demonstrated in the results section.
CHAPTER 4: METHODS

Content analysis, which allowed a quantitative analysis of the sample, and historical analysis to provide historical background and context were conducted, as explained in detail below.

Content Analysis

As mentioned in the literature review, because of the difficulty in getting a significant conclusion merely based on context reading and analysis of Photoplay’s large number of film reviews (a sample of 723 articles and a population of approximately 4500) – many positive and negative reviews of the same quality could be seen in issues published before and after the censorship – a quantitative method was required. Some previous studies with related subjects or on film reviews also adopted content analysis. (Shoemaker, 2001; Rossman, 2001) Therefore, a content analysis was chosen as the main method for this study to answer the research questions with statistical results.

The unit of analysis was the individual review, which was usually from 40 to 200 words long. To represent the ten years from 1930 to 1939, two constructed years were made based on the study about sampling of constructed weeks by Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993). The sample reviews were extracted from two constructed years of 24 Photoplay issues selected from a total of 120 issues of Photoplay published from 1930 to 1939. One constructed year was selected from 1930 to 1934. Consecutive months were selected in the form of two months from each year, for example, the January issue and February issue from 1930 were picked, and then the March and April issues from 1931, etc, except that from the 1934 issues three consecutive months were picked. The other constructed year was composed of issues selected in the same way from 1935 to 1939, and three
consecutive months were picked from the 1939 issues. All reviews published in the selected issues were coded, the number of which was 723.

One reason behind this decision, as mentioned in the literature review, was that the 10 years from 1930 to 1939 overlapped with the golden age of Hollywood from 1930 to 1949 (Gomery, 2005) and the heyday of the fan magazine, from 1920 to 1939 (Slide, 2005). Besides, 1935 was the first editorial year after the 1934 censorship as well as the first year a new and influential editor, Ruth Waterbury assumed her duties. Furthermore, it was also the first year that *Photoplay* started to be published by a new company, MacFadden Publications.

The reason that three issues from 1934 were chosen instead of two like every most other years, was it was the last year of the first time period (1930 to 1934) under study and the year when the censorship began. Considering that editorial plans were generally made six months in advance, 1934 was included in the first time period, as the year closest to the enforcement of censorship, the researcher decided to include one more issue of 1934, to balance with the selection for the second constructed year, for which three issues from 1939 were also chosen. The reason was that 1939 was the farthest year from the censorship, and it may have demonstrated the influence of the censorship over the years.

The PDF version of the magazine issues were mostly obtained from a website called archive.org, which provided various historical materials and partially from a CD a British collector sold on eBay.com, which contained some of the *Photoplay* issues.
published from the 1910s to 1940s. As archive.org kept updating its data archive, the researcher was able to gain more and more *Photoplay* issues as time went by.

The coding sheet included six categories:

1. **Year.** The coder would write down the year when the issue was published.

2. **Month.** The coder would write down the month when the review was published.

3. **Studio.** The coder would code the review’s studio, as usually listed on the review right below the film’s title, into one of the following sub-categories: 1) Big studio. This would be one of the eight big dominant studios at that time: MGM, Radio-Keith-Orpheum, better known as RKO, Paramount, 20th Century-Fox, Warner Bros, Universal, Columbia and United Artists. 2) Independent studio. Any other studio would fall into this sub-category. During coding, the studio of one review published in the November 1939 issue was not listed and was considered a missing value.

4. **Focus.** The coder would code the emphasis of the review into one of the following sub-categories: 1) Acting. The review mainly (more than half of the review) focused on the acting. A mere listing of cast members without any opinions didn’t count. 2) Content. The review mainly focused on the plot, story, writing or theme. 3) More than one or anything else. The review mainly focused on anything else such as cinematography or score, or it focused on two or more things.

5. **Valence for acting.** The coder was required to code the review’s valence, or tone on acting into four categories: 1) Positive. The review mainly praised the acting. 2)
Negative. The review mainly criticized the acting, i.e., if the review criticized the main actor/actress with several sentences and mentioned the good acting of some other performers briefly. 3) Mix. The reviewer spent approximately equal words to criticize and praise the acting. 4) Cannot decide. The review didn’t show an opinion on the acting or the valence was hard to decide. This was considered a missing value.

6. Overall Valence Scale. While coding, the coder was required to code the overall tone of each review into the following six sub-categories: 1) Very positive. The review was obviously in favor of the film and the praise was very strong. 2) Slightly positive. The review was inclined to favor the film despite some criticism or the praise was less strong. 3) Mix or neutral. The reviewer spent roughly equal words to both obviously criticize and praise the film and no apparent inclination could be found, or the review didn’t show any opinions. 4) Slightly negative. The review was inclined to criticize the film despite some praise or the criticism was less strong. 5) Very negative. The review obviously disapproved of the film and the criticism was very strong. 6) Cannot decide. The review doesn’t show any opinion or the valence was hard to decide. This was coded as a missing value. However, when it came to analysis, the data was recoded into three sub-categories as planned before the start of the whole study. The three sub-categories for data analysis were 1) Positive. Both “very positive” and “slightly positive” were recoded into this sub-category. 3) Mix or neutral. This sub-category still included the same data. 5) Negative. Both “very negative” and “slightly negative” were recoded into
this sub-category. The reason was to increase the significance and the possibility that the valence coded was closer to what the actual valence was in each review.

Two trained coders each coded half of a sample of 723 film with a ten-percent overlap. As the table shows, red-marked issues were coded by coder 1 and the green-marked issues were coded by coder 2, whereas purple-marked ones belonged to the overlap -- so that the overlapping part was two and a half issues, a little more than 10 percent of the whole 120 issues. The overlapping issues were selected randomly.

The inter-coder reliability for coded categories relevant to the three research questions was a Cohen’s Kappa value of 0.941, which is considered an “almost perfect agreement” (Landis & Koch, 1977). Although the individual agreement on the category of the “overall valence” of reviews was a lower value of 0.61, it was still considered a “substantial agreement” (Landis & Koch, 1977).

To decide whether a review should be coded into a certain sub-category, a list was made in the pilot study which consisted of words that were regularly used in Photoplay’s reviews to help coders better understand the articles As they were published 80 years ago, the use of words back then might seem strange and hard to interpret for modern researchers. For example, the word “gay” didn’t have the meaning of suggesting homosexuality. Therefore, sentences like one picture “is the gayest picture of the month” or one actor “is the gayest man on screen” might be seen from time to time in positive reviews.
As coders worked, they were asked to pay attention to pick more key words used in the reviews to add to the list to help decide a review’s valence. In addition, they were also asked to search for key words relevant to the study for historical materials. The words included “Hays,” “censorship,” “Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America,” “MPPDA,” “studio,” etc. The search results were satisfactory, as explained further in the historical analysis.

One of the biggest challenges the coders faced during the coding process was the difficulty to decide a review’s “focus” and “valence of acting.” Although the coding book mentioned that a mere list of cast members without opinion should not count for how much a review was devoted to a subject or the valence of acting, the cast member lists usually took a large portion of reviews. This left the coder often going back and forth between these two categories. The listing of cast member names, although not counted as evidence for focus, still could be hard to tell because it usually went with some opinions in between. For instance, in “The Widow from Monte Carlo,” in the March 1936 issue, the reviewer wrote “Dolores Del Rio, Warren William, Louise Fazenda and Warren Hymer act their parts bravely in this tedious picture to try and lift it to acceptable screen fare” (“The Widow from Monte Carlo,” 1936).
Historical Analysis

Because *Photoplay* magazine issues selected for the study were published 70 to 80 years ago, the content analysis needed certain historical material to help understand and better analyze the reviews within the context of that time period. The above-mentioned list of words used by *Photoplay* writers was one example.

Just as presented in the literature review, other historical material examined included letters from the MPPDA to fan magazine editors which were obtained through an online archive of the MPPDA’s historical documents provided by Flinders University, sentences showing *Photoplay’s* attitudes toward the MPPDA’s censorship of the motion pictures as well as on certain fan magazine content (i.e. *Photoplay’s* editorial which mentioned that a series of photos published by some fan magazines got banned by the MPPDA), (Photoplay, April 1934) and *Photoplay’s* January 1939 article that enraged the studios, “Hollywood’s Unmarried Husbands and Wives” (Photoplay, January 1939) and *Photoplay’s* later apology to the studios, “A Heart-to-Heart Talk.” (Photoplay, February 1939)

Besides articles from *Photoplay*, historical materials were obtained from other sources as well. From an online archive site of the MPPDA called “MPPDA digital archive” offered by Flinders University, materials such as the letter from the MPPDA to *Modern Screen* editor, as shown in the literature review were found. Furthermore, articles reporting on the MPPDA’s 1934 censorship of fan magazines by other media,
such as *The Hollywood Reporter* and *The New York Times*, which were also mentioned in
the literature review.

Historical analysis did not only provide the researcher and coders more
understanding of the study object, but also allowed the researcher to better interpret the
results of the content analysis. Historical material will be further displayed and
interpreted in the discussion section to support the results of content analysis.
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

A total of 723 film reviews published in *Photoplay* magazine from 1930 to 1939 were coded, of which 400 were obtained from 12 *Photoplay* issues published from 1930 to 1935, and 323 were obtained from 12 issues published from 1935 to 1939. The results from cross-tabulation analysis of chi-square and percentiles indicated that the *Photoplay*’s film reviews experienced significant changes in studio selection and overall valence, as well as valence regarding big-studio films during the two time periods.

To be more specific, the results suggest that a larger portion of big-studio movies were selected in the five years after 1935 (the first editorial year after MPPDA’s announcement of fan magazine censorship) than the previous five years, and there were more positive reviews published during that time period than from 1930 to 1934 as well. Furthermore, more reviews on big-studio films tended to be positive from 1935 to 1939 than those from 1930 to 1934. In addition, the results also indicate that reviews published between 1935 and 1939 tended to focus more on acting. However, when it comes to the valence of acting, the results suggest there might not be significant differences before and after MPPDA’s censorship. The following paragraphs will present in detail what changes may have occurred in terms of *Photoplay* magazine’s film reviews’ overall valence, regarding studios, and other factors such as focus and valence for acting.

*RQ1: Are there significant changes in the portion of big-studio films reviewed in *Photoplay* magazine after the year of MPPDA’s pronouncement (1934)?*
Table 1.

**Distribution of Studios of Movies Before and After Censorship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Publication</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Studio</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Studio</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930-1934</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-1939</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>722</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<0.05

Table 2.

**Chi-Square Tests for Distribution of Studios of Movies Before and After Censorship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>12.089a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>722</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 shows, 269 out of 400 movies (67.3%) reviewed in *Photoplay* from 1930 to 1934 were big-studio movies or 67.3%, whereas 254 out of 322 (78.9%) (1 missing value) movies reviewed in *Photoplay* from 1935 to 1939 were made by big. With a Pearson chi-square value of 12.1 and a p-value of 0.001 (p<0.05), it is suggested that there is a significant relationship between whether a review was published after the censorship (after 1934) and whether it was about a movie produced by one of the eight big studios. Big studios, as mentioned in previous chapters, means the eight most powerful studios.
including MGM, RKO (Radio Pictures), Paramount, 20th Century-Fox (Fox), Warner Bros, Universal, Columbia and United Artists.

*RQ2: Are there significant changes in overall valence of film reviews published in Photoplay magazine after the year of MPPDA’s pronouncement (1934)?*

Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Publication</th>
<th>Overall Valence Before and After Censorship</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall Valence</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Mix or neutral</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-1934</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-1939</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>473</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05*

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chi-Square Tests for Overall Valence Before and After Censorship</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>7.169a</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>722</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis suggests that within the five years between 1935 and 1939, a larger portion of overall positive film reviews were published in *Photoplay*. As Table 3 shows, 70.6% (228 out of 323) of reviews published after MPPDA’s censorship are positive,
while the number of positive reviews from 1930 to 1934 is 61.4% (245 out of 399, with one missing value). At the same time, the percentage of negative reviews declined from 19.3% to 16.1%, and mixed or neutral reviews also dropped from 19.3% to 13.3%.

Considering the fact that the Pearson chi-square value is 7.17 with a p-value of 0.028 (p<0.05), as Table 4 shows, it can be concluded that the relationship between a review’s valence and whether it was published before or after MPPDA’s censorship is significant.

**RQ3: Are there significant changes in overall valence of big-studio films reviewed in *Photoplay* magazine after the year of MPPDA’s pronouncement (1934)?**

Table 5.

*Distribution of Overall Valence Between Big-studio and Independent-studio Film Reviews 1930-1934*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studio</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Overall Valence</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big studio</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>Positive 66.9%</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mix or Neutral 16.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative 17.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent studio</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Positive 50.0%</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mix or Neutral 26.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative 23.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>Positive 61.4%</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mix or Neutral 19.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative 19.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<0.05
Table 6.

*Chi-Square Tests for Distribution of Overall Valence Between Big-studio and Independent-studio Film Reviews 1930-1934*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>10.846&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>399</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.

*Distribution of Overall Valence Between Big-studio and Independent-studio Film Reviews 1935-1939*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studio</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Overall Valence</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Overall Valence</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Overall Valence</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big studio</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>Mix or Neutral</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>studio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<0.05

Table 8.

*Chi-Square Tests for Distribution of Overall Valence Between Big-studio and Independent-studio Film Reviews 1935-1939*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>9.653</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>322</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data from 1930 to 1934 and those from 1935 to 1939 were tested separately. As shown above, the cross-tabulation test of reviews published from 1930 to 1934 achieved
a p-value of 0.004, with a Pearson chi-square value of 10.85. Meanwhile, the test of reviews published from 1935 to 1939 got a p-value of 0.008 with a Pearson chi-square value of 9.65. Because the p-value in both tests were lower than 0.05, we can see the relationship the researcher detected from the results between a review’s overall valence and the film’s studio was significant in both time periods (from 1930 to 1934 and from 1935 to 1939), thus the following comparison is meaningful.

The results shown in Table 5 and Table 7 suggested that after MPPDA’s censorship, a larger proportion of big-studio films were reviewed “positive.” As Table 5 shows, from 1930 to 1934, 66.9% of a total of 269 big-studio films were reviewed “positive,” whereas from 1935 to 1939 74% of 254 big-studio films were reviewed “positive,” as shown in Table 7. Given that in both tests, the p-value was lower than 0.05 (0.004 for 1930-1934 and 0.008 for 1935-1939), it could be concluded that the relationship between a film’s studio and its review’s overall valence detected in both tests was statistically significant. This means that *Photoplay’s* film reviews may have become more positive toward big-studio movies after MPPDA’s censorship.
In addition to answering the three research questions, the results also indicate that there might be a significant relationship between a review’s focus and whether it was published before or after MPPDA’s pronouncement of censorship. Table 9 shows that the percentage of reviews that focused on acting increased from 25.1% to 32.9% after MPPDA’s censorship. Considering that the p-value was lower than 0.05, despite the fact that 117 of a total 723 reviews were missing (categorized as more than one focus or else), the detected differences were still considered significant.
As explained and illustrated with examples in the methods section, the coders sometimes found it difficult to decide a review’s focus as almost all the reviews would dedicate a large portion of the whole article to cover the cast members. The reason why a higher percentage of reviews were coded as content-focused rather than acting-focused in both time periods, might be because listings of cast members were written along with the plot description of the movie. For instance, in “Boy Meets Girl” the writer mixed the introduction and opinion on the cast members with the plot:

“It marks the return of Jimmy (Bad Boy) Cagney, this time as a screwball film writer; his companion scribbler is Pat O’Brien. Stuck on a story for a Western star, Dick Foran, the two guys find the answer in Marie Wilson, a dumb waitress. She's going to have a baby, and they decide to create a baby star with her offspring. Bruce Lester plays Marie's romantic interest; Ralph Bellamy, the affected producer; Frank McHugh, the typical Hollywood agent” (“Boy Meets Girl,” 1938, p. 57).

As this took up most of the review, it would, in most cases, be considered content-focused.

Table 11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Publication</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Mix</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930-1934</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>85.9%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-1939</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>267</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p>0.05
As Table 11 shows, because the p-value 0.112 was higher than 0.05, the results suggested that there was no significant relationship between a *Photoplay* review’s valence for acting and whether it was published before or after MPPDA’s censorship. However, the findings from the historical research may partially explain why the valence for acting did not show significant differences. During the process of coding, as the coders read the reviews, they noticed that the valence for acting was almost always positive even when the review’s attitude towards the film itself was negative. For example, in “That Man is Here Again” published in the June 1937 issue, the writer wrote “dull fare despite splendid acting” (“That Man is Here Again,” 1937).
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Historical Value

From the results of content analysis and Pearson chi-square tests, it can be concluded that significant changes did occur in *Photoplay’s* film reviews in terms of studio and overall valence after MPPDA’s censorship: after the censorship, a larger portion of big-studio movies were covered and reviews became more positive. Meanwhile, a larger portion of big-studio films were reviewed positively after the censorship as well. In this chapter the results presented above will be further interpreted based both within the framework of newswork theory and based on historical findings.

According to *The New York Times* (August 11, 1934), after the censorship, writers’ access to stars under studio contracts became more exclusively controlled by the MPPDA, who demanded that “before a contract player at any of the studios affiliated with the Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America, Inc., will be permitted to give an interview, the writer must agree to submit the finished story before publication or be barred from the lot. The studio will insist that a third party be present at the interviews” (“Film Studios Censor Fan Story Writers,” 1934). As a result, more routinized interactions under the studios’ surveillance could be expected, which might have become a kind of routine-level influence (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

According to the theory of different levels of influence in the newsroom (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) and historical research results, even if film reviews were not
directly involved in the censorship process itself, it can still be suggested that there might have been influences of various levels on *Photoplay’s* writers after MPPDA’s censorship.

As mentioned in the literature review, during most of the 1930s, Ruth Waterbury, *Photoplay’s* editor in chief, was generally responsible for “The Shadow Stage.” As a writer who wrote a huge number of other articles herself including editorials, and who was in charge of the content of the entire magazine, Waterbury was certainly one of the people who had the most interactions with the big studios. Considering the fact that all fan magazine writers were required to obtain “Hays Cards” to get access to actors and actresses under contract with big studios, *Photoplay* writers who participated in both daily editorial work, including interviewing celebrities and film reviewing were under the influence of big studios on the extramedia and media routines level.

In addition, as the studios’ publicity departments became the exclusive resource for fan magazine writers, including access to studios’ contractors (stars) and publicity photos or access to take photos, the influence from the studio PR departments demonstrated extramedia level influences on newswork. The influence was especially prevalent in this situation because it “reporters have to rely on official sources” and “when ‘proprietary information’ ...is required, this kind of information is in many cases only available from PR releases” (Macnamara, 1993). According to Macnamara (1993), because fan magazine writers started to exclusively rely on the studios’ PR department for resources after the censorship, the influence from the studio publicity could have become more
prevalent. According to Slide (2010), after the censorship it became more and more
difficult for fan magazine writers to conduct “unauthorized interviews” outside of studios,
and the MPPDA came up with a “morality clause” which “forbade signees from granting
interviews not approved by the studios” (Slide, 2010, p. 90). This clause was also “more
ruthlessly applied than in other area dealing with more outrageous behavior” (Slide,
2010, p. 90).

Photoplay’s film criticism was widely considered to be of high quality, which added
even more meaning to the results. One example can be used to illustrate its criticism’s
influence through history. Photoplay’s annual film awards, the Photoplay Medal of
Honor, and later known as the Photoplay Gold Medal, were the first movie awards in
history. Starting in 1920, the magazine selected one “best picture” every year, and its
selection “proved to be influential on the Academy Awards” which started nine years
later (Movie/TV Memorabilia, 2009, p. 34). Although the winners were chosen by
readers’ votes, the list to a large extent reflected Quirk’s taste before he died because
readers were very influenced by his reviews (Slide, 2010). The award was so influential
in the film industry that films awarded were even re-screened in the Academy's “Summer
of Silents” in 2011 that screened all “the surviving winners of the medal of honor from
1920 to 1928,” according to Los Angeles Times (King, 2011).

Photoplay’s reviews, both before and after the 1934 censorship, reflected a standard
of taste and critical thinking. One typically positive review is “City Lights” in the March
1931 issue. It contains *Photoplay*’s usual praise that was common in the positive reviews in the 1930s: “You can't get away from the fact that ‘City Lights’ is another Chaplin master picture.” It also included some critical opinion that was quite often seen in “The Shadow Stage:” “As a silent epic of pantomime, ‘City Lights’ is a ninety-minute delight; as a talkie, it would have been just another talkie” (“City Lights,” p. 54). Another example of a positive review was “The Little Princess” published in May 1939, which wrote that the film was “not only the best of the Temple films, but it is also one of the most charming melodramas Hollywood has produced in months,” while at the same time pointed out, “There is a ball (while Shirley dreams) which has such a quality of pathological unreality you will want your breakfast coffee immediately afterward” (“The Little Princess,” 1939, p. 62).

It was the same with purely negative reviews. *Photoplay* did have a lot of negative reviews. Some reviews even scolded the big studios, such as the review of an independent studio’s movie, “Corruption,” which praised the film as “perfectly acceptable entertainment; a lot worse pictures have been made by major studios at greater cost” (“Corruption,” 1933, p. 93). The magazine, however, didn’t stop criticizing pictures made by big studios after the censorship, and quite a few negative reviews were extremely harsh. For instance, in reviewing 20th Century-Fox’s “Here Comes Trouble,” a *Photoplay* writer wrote, “To have wasted the fine talents of Paul Kelly on such
unmitigated trash is nothing less than high treason. Bumbling around in unfunny slap-stick in an incredibly dull story...Skip it” (“Here Comes Trouble,” 1936, p. 119).

The only major difference the researcher noticed before conducting the content analysis was that the total number of reviews dropped in the five years after the 1934 censorship. One reason might have been that, as mentioned in the literature review section, later in 1930s the number of reviewers was down from six in James Quirk’s days to only the chief editor, Ruth Waterbury and another writer (Slide, 2010). The other reason, based on the research, might have been that more interviews conducted under the surveillance of the studios and feature stories to serve the promotion of studio contractors took more space in the magazine and more energy from the writers and editors. From MPPDA’s harsh attitude towards Modern Screen’s “bad taste” (McGrail, 1937) photos and Photoplay’s “Hollywood’s Unmarried Husbands and Wives,” the subsequent pressure from this kind of “mistakes” for the writers can be detected.

One interesting and noteworthy point was that fan magazine writers in general had not necessarily watched the movies (or at least the full version of them) they reviewed, according to reports from Daily Variety (September 8, 1933) and The Hollywood Reporter (December 9, 1936). The former stated that The New Movie Magazine’s October 1933 issue reviewed five films that “were still being edited, one completed production the previous day, one was still in production, and another had not even
finished shooting” (Slide, 2010, p. 128) The latter article implied that even Photoplay would regularly review movies that had not yet been previewed.

Besides Photoplay’s high-quality in criticism, another reason that Photoplay was chosen was that writers who wrote reviews for “The Shadow Stage” were also involved with the editorial work of the magazine. As mentioned above, both James Quirk and Ruth Waterbury, the two chief editors of Photoplay, hosted and wrote for “The Shadow Stage.” Within the framework of newswork theory about multiple level of influences on media content, as explained in detail later in this section, the fact that the same writers who were under the influence of the censorship while participating in other content of the magazine, which in the case of Photoplay chief editors clearly were, would make the reviewers fit the scenario of being influenced on the media routine’s level. After the studios became the exclusive supplier of material (such as access to stars) for fan magazine stories, they became a force that might influence the newswork on the media routines level at the stage of “sources of routines” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 108-109).

In discussing this significant change in Photoplay’s film criticism, the unique relationship between the magazine and the MPPDA, the organization behind the 1934 censorship must be considered.

In general, they both fought against government censorship and shared a hope for the morality and good taste of the film industry and both encouraged Hollywood to
“adopt a strong moral and ethical code” (Slide, 2010, p. 54). On the other hand, the magazine also expressed concern with how far the censorship should go over the years, and sometimes didn’t agree with the Hays Office. For example, quite a few editorials and letters published from the early 1920s to early 1930s expressed Photoplay’s support for Will Hays. In the April 1922 issue, James Quirk wrote “An Open Letter to Mr. Will Hays” to praise the newly selected chairman of MPPDA. He wrote:

You are the ideal man to occupy that position. Your traits of character and your proven ability, sanity, directness and fearlessness qualify you for this great responsibility … What motion pictures need at the present time, more than anything else, is a moral house-cleaning (Quirk, 1922, p. 52).

Nonetheless, later after Hays announced that no alcohol should be shown in films, Quirk expressed his disagreement in the September 1926 issue. “Another sop for the censor bird. Will Hays, the overlord of the movies, has just banned all licker from the films. Furthermore, he declares that all incidents that might be deemed to show encouragement or disrespect of the prohibition laws must be eliminated from all Photoplays,” he wrote in his editorial “Speaking of Pictures.” “We believe that the screen should have its freedom,” he continued. “True, we are not for indiscriminate showing of drunkenness. We doubt if the films have been at fault in this regard. But with all current printed matter, … discussing prohibition frankly, humorously or cynically, it seems hardly fair to muzzle the motion picture camera” (Quirk, 1926, p. 27).

Photoplay’s connection with the Hays Office was not limited to the interaction and personal closeness between Quirk and Hays, who himself arranged Quirk’s funeral in August 1932. (Slide, 2010, p. 63). Before MPPDA’s 1934 censorship of fan magazines, quite a few Photoplay articles also showed their support for the organization’s efforts to
clean the industry, which even included the fan magazines. In the April 1934 issue, the editor at that time, Quirk’s former mistress Kathryn Dougherty (Slide, 2010, p. 64) wrote an editorial in support of MPPDA’s banning of certain fan magazine content. She wrote:

Certain motion picture publications have become more and more daringly offensive in the type of photographs they are printing ... The recent ban by the Hays office on this type of publicity picture has caused considerable alarm and consternation in editorial quarters where cheap sensationalism is mistaken for good publishing business ... Photoplay Magazine has never been guilty of these offenses and never will be. Motion picture magazines that overstep the bounds of decency deserve to fail. And they will. They must reform or go out of business (Dougherty, 1934, p. 27).

In the October 1934 issue, Dougherty in her editorial expressed her support for MPPDA’s enforcement of its Motion Picture Production Code, referring to the assistant of Hays and head of censorship, Joseph Breen as “a crusading, determined Irishman, who has been delegated by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America to make a thorough, non-compromising clean-up of the screen” and “is taking his mission with the grimmest seriousness. So is his superior, Will Hays.” She also wrote that without Hay’s guidance, “the industry would long ago have got into serious trouble” and that “If the system doesn't work it won't be the fault of Will Hays or Joe Breen” (Dougherty, 1934, p. 23).

Besides quite a few letters from readers who supported the Hays Code that Photoplay published in the middle and late 1930s, the magazine did once in a while express its disagreement with the censorship of movies, even in its film reviews. In a review on “Frankie and Johnnie” published in “The Shadow Stage” of the August 1935 issue (the first month Ruth Waterbury worked as the editor), the reviewer wrote in the first paragraph, “This American classic has suffered from the censor’s scissors.” (“Frankie and Johnnie,” 1935, p. 104)
On top of the magazine’s not-so-consistent attitude towards the Hays Code that targeted films, several years after Hays’ office started censoring fan magazines, *Photoplay* published an article titled “Hollywood’s Unmarried Husbands and Wives” in its January 1939 issue, which enraged the studios because it named several couples of stars such as Clark Gable and Carole Lombard and indicated that they were living together without getting married (Baskette, 1939). The studios “forced the featured stars to marry” and “demanded” *Photoplay* apologize (Petersen, 2013, p. 52). MGM even threatened to cancel all its advertising and cut the magazine’s access to its contracted stars (Madsen, 2001, p. 168). Fortunately, the cancellation didn’t happen. In the February 1939 issue, *Photoplay* published its apology titled “A Heart-to-Heart Talk” (as shown below) as required, but it was stated in the apology that “Hollywood’s Unmarried Husbands and Wives” was misinterpreted and all *Photoplay* wanted was to describe the friendship between some stars in the hope that they would “eventually culminate in happy marriages” (“A Heart-to-Heart Talk,” 1939, p. 47).

Whenever the magazine disagreed with MPPDA’s policies, it expressed its opinion as well. Although the magazine would see its film reviews become more positive, cover a higher percentage of big-studio movies, and give more positive assessments to big-studio films after its content came under the censorship of a powerful organization founded by the big studios, it remained a magazine willing to have its own opinions and would speak out when it considered the MPPDA’s behavior improper. *Photoplay* might not have done this on purpose to please the studios, as the negative reviews on big-studio films were still pretty harsh even years after the censorship. For example, the magazine negatively reviewed 20th Century-Fox’s “Here Comes Trouble,” and called the movie
“trash” and told the reader to “skip it” (“Here Comes Trouble,” 1936, p. 119). Another more recent example was the review of MGM’s “The Captain is a Lady” that was published in the September 1940 issue. The review called the movie “a kind of silly tale” and “as a whole, the picture seems to creak with old age” (“The Captain is a Lady,” 1940, p. 83).

Modern Implications

However, the significant differences shown in the results are still worth noting even in today’s world. As demonstrated with examples in the last part of the literature review, today’s film criticism, although free of direct censorship from the studios, is still under the influence of film companies, because today’s Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the successor of the MPPDA, still widely influences the studios in film production (Gomery, 2005).

The powerful influence of MPAA on today’s studios can be seen via its well-known film rating system. The modern studio system, (Gomery, 2005) includes the new big six: Disney, Paramount, Sony, 20th Century Fox, Universal, and Warner Bros. As in the old days, said Gomery (2005), “the MPAA of today deals with common concerns, from rating films to smoothing the way for international distribution.” According to previous studies, movies that got a rating of restricted (R) from the MPAA got lower box office revenues, (Sawhney & Eliashberg, 1996) and a rating of G or PG showed a positive influence on a film’s financial success (Litman, 1983). To get a rating that would allow the movie to gain a wider audience, studios usually have to cut scenes to pass the
MPAA’s rating test. In this way, the rating system committee is considered a kind of censorship (Corliss, 2006). Besides demonstrating that MPAA’s power still largely influences the studios, this example also suggests that studios today work hard to protect their financial benefits, which is a major reason why they want to get involved in modern film criticism.

Today’s film reviewers often accept benefits offered by the studios while attending pre-release screenings or press conferences. Studios are advised to treat critics with fancy food and drinks, arrange interviews with big stars, promise to quote the review to encourage writers to write positive reviews, and avoid inviting reviewers who they may consider uncooperative (Eliashberg & Shugan, 1997).

The researcher was fortunate to experience this once during a press junket hosted by Sony. A whole week of luxury hotel, good food, partying with movie stars every night and watching long clips of movies that wouldn’t be released for months, was certainly quite press-friendly to even veteran entertainment journalists. The researcher worked with the CEO of a movie website, who said that he enjoyed this kind of far-from-home holiday more than anything else. Although the researcher was only responsible for interviews rather than film reviews, it was not hard to imagine that if I had been asked to review a medium-quality movie, I might need to try very hard to not to get influenced by at least the good mood this kind of hospitality offered. On the other hand, if the movie were terrible, it would be easier to keep my mind clear. It is not fair though, to assume
that reviewers would certainly write positively about a mediocre or poor film with this kind of press activities. Yet it is certainly worthy of studying. The new MPAA might stay away from today’s film criticism, but studios that are trying to involve themselves in film reviewing may still influence content on an extramedia level.

The influences from producers on reviewers do not always appear as temptations, nor do they only exist in film criticism. According to some video game reviewers on YouTube.com, game companies continuously try to convince them to give positive reviews to their products. Moreover, when negative reviews appear, some companies use their power to try to shut down the reviewer’s YouTube channel and even threaten the reviewer in emails. One typical example is an email from a game company, Fun Creators to a YouTube game reviewer known as TotalBiscuit. The company threatened to take down his channel after the reviewer, who has more than 1.6 million subscribers, gave a negative review on a game made by the company, “Guise of the Wolf.” The email is quoted as follows as shown in a screen shot taken by TotalBiscuit and illustrated by an online magazine, *The Escapist*:

> This is your last warning. Our company is a lot bigger then (than) your little youtube channel. We are not afraid of you. Remove all your tweets and delete your channel. Do not tweet this message or we will claim it is a fake. We will get our lawyers involved and sue you (Bogos, 2014).

As demonstrated above, the interference with modern reviewing from companies that rely on their product to make money not only still exists in film criticism, but also has gone beyond film criticism to the field of new media. As a result, the study on the
extramedia influence on reviewing is important because meddling with reviewing is not
a historical phenomenon that only existed under the circumstance of forced censorship,
but a phenomenon that will exist as long as the review can affect the company’s financial
benefit.

Just like fan magazine writers in the 1930s, today’s entertainment journalists also
have frequent interactions with the studio’s publicity departments. Although not all
interviews are arranged or under the surveillance of studios, the prevalence of large press
junkets offering fancy hospitality is a major source where reporters can get access to
stars and directors. Today’s studio system is still making efforts to interfere with media
content that might not benefit them. The only difference is that instead of straight
censorship, the studios are trying to “buy” the reviewers with attractive interests.

The findings of this study suggest that even when the film reviews might not have
been directly censored, they may still have experienced significant changes in a direction
that was beneficial to the studios after the reviewers started to be influenced by the
studios under extramedia and media routine levels. Viewing this from today’s
perspective, as journalists are also under studios’ influence while reviewing movies, the
possibility that this influence may still affect the valence and film selection of the
reviews cannot be ruled out.

In this way, even though the subject of this study was historical materials published
by a magazine that folded more than 30 years ago (1980), the findings, supplemented by
historical analysis to balance the “generation gap” between today’s world and the 1930s, may still provide insights into today’s situation.

A Bold Speculation and Further Suggestion for Reviewers

After investing more than one and half years in this study, especially in reading not only the 723 movie reviews in the sample, but also numerous reviews by *Photoplay* outside the sample, including those published before 1930 and after 1939, the researcher hereby propose a bold speculation: the film reviews in “The Shadow Stage” might not have been censored by the MPPDA even after its censorship pronouncement. There are several reasons behind this argument.

Firstly, simply based on the text in the MPPDA’s pronouncement, the range of articles required to be submitted for approval before publication was “all fan magazine interviews, stories or symposiums which involve studio contract players” (Slide, 2010, pp. 86-87). If interpreted literally, film reviews could have been considered as unqualified for this standard as they were clearly not “interviews, stories, or symposiums.” The reason that the researcher tended to assume it was unclear was because film reviews could also been considered as being involved with studio contract actors in some way. The fact that the range of censorship might have included all articles, according to some researchers, such as Barbas (2001), certainly added to this point as well. But based on the pronouncement, which is so far the most important official
document stating the censorship, reviews can be seen as out of reach of the MPPDA’s censorship.

Secondly, after the censorship, the quality of the reviews, at least within the five years understudy did not show any obvious decline. As quoted and analyzed earlier in this section, both positive and negative reviews maintained their style with concise yet quite often sharp and free writing, particularly considering reviews criticizing film censorship.

Thirdly, as mentioned before, the reviews’ attitude towards studio contract actors has almost always been quite positive regardless of whether they were published before or after the censorship. This can be seen as a result from the fact that fan magazines were created in a way to beautify the stars in the first place. That is also part of the reason why golden Hollywood stars always seem more glorious and god-like than modern celebrities. In this way, since the portrait of “studio contract players” (Slide, 2010, pp. 86-87) was already positive enough, there might not have been much necessity for the MPPDA to censor the reviews. Besides, given that reviews were a form of opinion that were not necessarily involved directly with the stars, the researcher believe that it is reasonable to speculate that film reviews were not directly censored by the MPPDA.

The speculation or the possibility that this speculation might be true makes this research more meaningful for today’s journalists and reviewers. The study suggested that, as long as extramedia or media routines level influence exists in journalists’ daily
working life, even when product reviews might not be under direct censorship, significant changes towards a direction that benefits the companies may still occur. As mentioned before, the researcher once attended a luxury press junket hosted by Sony, one of the new big-six in today’s studio system (Gomery, 2005). What was interesting was that it happened after I defended the proposal for this study. So it is reasonable to assume that I was well aware of possible influences the junket might have had on me as a journalist. Nevertheless, the relaxation and enjoyment the junket offered made me doubt if I could still keep the same standard as before if I was asked to write a review.

The way I see it, if a reviewer is under this kind of influence, it might still be easy to keep your standard if the product is bad from your perspective. However, if the journalist is faced with a mediocre-quality product, it would be easier to tend to let it get away with flaws which the journalist usually would not let it go. In this way, the researcher would like to give some advice to reviewers under luxury or even just comfortable hospitality from any extramedia parties: first, make sure everything is legal, which means no cash or extravagant gifts should be accepted; second, keep everything professional, which means enjoying conversations with stars, directors or producers should not be mixed with getting drunk at celebrity parties and promise that you would say something sweet about their movies; third, constantly remind yourself that you are not obliged to give positive reviews just because you are treated with a nice buffet. If you cannot help but feeling that
you need to do something to return the favor, just do your job. Only honest reviews can really help a film company in the long run.

As for those reviewers who face threat or even any form of censorship, the suggestion is to expose the potential censors with evidence just like YouTube video game reviewer TotalBiscuit did. This study aimed to dig something out from the history in order to warn people today about the consequences of extramedia influence. As a result, once a reviewer is aware of this kind of influence, he or she should be able to get ready to fight against, rather than take advantage of it or simply give in. After all, this is not the 1930s anymore.

From this study, it can also be concluded that influences on reviews might take place without the reviewers’ awareness. Merely reading the reviews, the researcher could not tell if the valence changed after the censorship. As illustrated with examples earlier, the reviewers kept their style through the 1930s of judging whether each movie was worth seeing, praising (criticizing too on some occasions) the main actors’ acting, and analyzing directing and music, as well as once in a while delivering one or two pieces of smart comments about the MPPDA’s film censorship. However, as much as it seemed that “The Shadow Stage” remained the same, it actually did not. *Photoplay* published a significantly larger portion of positive reviews of big-studio movies after the same writers started to be force to submit their interviews and feature stories to the MPPDA for censorship. This might have been coincidence, but it is more likely that it was not.
In comparison, today’s reviewers technically have their right to say whatever they want, but are still under different kinds of extramedia influences from straightforward threatening of censorship to friendly and luxury hospitality and priority. The world has changed a lot compared to 70 years ago, for example, we have new media. Yet in essence, it still is a world where “because maintaining the advertising dollars depends on keeping the clicks coming (for new media), it’s easy for even good editors to make their publication a tool of the studio publicists” and where “what a critic actually thinks about the movie is often drowned in the ongoing publicity deluge” (Taylor, 2011, pp. 81-82).

In conclusion, the findings of this research may qualify as a kind of reminding for reviewers who at least believe that their voice should be independent.
REFERENCES

A Heart-to-Heart Talk. (1939, February). Photoplay, 47.


The Captain is a Lady. (1940, September). Photoplay. 83.


That Man is Here Again. (1937, June). *Photoplay*, 57.


Film review, “Sunrise” published in “The Shadow Stage” in December 1927

THE sort of picture that fools high-brows into hollering “Art!” Swell trick photography and fancy effects, but, boiled down, no story interest and only stiffed, mannered acting.

F. W. Murnau can show Hollywood camera effects, but he could learn a lot about story-telling from local talent. The only American touch is a fine comedy sequence in a barber shop. The film has its moments. There is a love scene that smokes—literally. And there is a pathetic moment when the “hero” tries to drown his wife.

Janet Gaynor does good work but looks all wrong in a blonde wig which wouldn’t fool anybody. George O’Brien acts like the Golem’s little boy. Worth seeing for its technical excellence.
Photoplay’s Editorial criticizing other fan magazines April 1934

PHOTOPLAY

Close-Ups and Long-Shots

By Kathryn Dougherty

CERTAIN motion picture publications have become more and more cheaply offensive in the type of photographs they are printing. They cater to the worst in sex-seekers at its worst. They hope to maintain their circulation by appealing to the most vulgar of tastes. Pick up one of these sheets and you get the impression that the motion picture industry is a tangle of lies, divorce suits and scandal. The scientifically trained minds that purify the pages of these yellow books are often quite unknown. They are not even bit players. The trick is sometimes pulled of printing a photograph of some actress taken years ago when she was an artist’s model.

Publications guilty of this offense are extremely short-sighted. Such photographs disgust discriminating readers and advertisers. The appeal for the three after this type of publicity creates has caused considerable alarm and consternation in editorial quarters whose chief sensation is another for moral and ethical lapses.

Photoplay Magazine has never been guilty of these offenses and never will be. Motion picture magazines that maintain the traditions of decency deserve to fail. And they will. They must reform or go out of business.

The exploitation of the shady side of sex is no magic talisman that has proved a hit. It has brought only sporadic, never permanent, success. The greatest hits in pictures, from ‘The Birth of a Nation’ to ‘Little Women,’ prove the truth of this statement.

The scenario department of MGM has been standing by, ready and waiting. Lionel Barrymore, with the script to his next picture, ‘The Copperhead,’ under his arm, started for New York. Lionel was going to study his part on stage. Then came a frantic telegram from Salt Lake City. ‘Lost my script. Send me another. Lionel.’

So the studio had another copy made and rushed it air mail to Kansas City to catch Lionel’s train. From Cleveland came another message. ‘Resolved script. Thank you. But now I have lost the first sequence. Rush another. Lionel.’ Again the studio was in a fluster getting off another first sequence to catch Lionel when he reached New York.

‘Thanks a lot for sequence,’ he telegraphed a few days later, ‘but can’t seem to becite last sequence.’

The studio arranged to have Lionel a new entire script just automatically every few days and save a lot of trouble. But with parts of ‘The Copperhead’ scattered all over the floor, there seems to be a feeling that maybe the country knows enough about the play, so what’s the use of making it?
June 29, 1937.

Miss Regina Cameron,
Editor,
Modern Screen,
169 Madison Avenue,
New York, N. Y.

My dear Miss Cameron:

On page fifty-two and fifty-three of the August issue of your magazine there appears a layout of Joan Blondell in various stages of undress. In regard to these pictures as being in bad taste and I am informed that the layout is held by the studio where Miss Blondell is under contract.

It may be possible that you are not well acquainted with the history of these pictures and are unaware of the mechanical factors that make it possible for the newspapers to publish pictures in such a manner. I am informed that these pictures were taken by Mr. Frank Sato, your photographer with the understanding that they would be submitted to the publicity department before publication. An effort was made to comply with studio regulations which require submission of the pictures for approval before release.

I have a statement from Bernard Williams, in charge of the Publicity Picture Department, that both Mr. Sato and Mr. Cameron of your staff were asked to submit these pictures but did not do so.

Since your editorial policies favor Modern Screen, I am writing you to let you know that we shall take steps to prevent the recurrence of such an incident. If it is to be the policy of your magazine to publish such pictures, it will be impossible for us to continue to cooperate with either your writers or photographers.

As a member of this Association's advertising Advisory Council, I should like to hear from you as soon as possible regarding this matter and the editorial policy of Modern Screen.

Very truly yours,

John Rooswell
FILM STUDIOS CENSOR
FAN STORY WRITERS

Meeting Attended by Hays Aids
Votes to Insist on Passing
on Magazine Material.

Special to The New York Times.

LOS ANGELES, Aug. 10.—Fan magazine writers in Hollywood today were virtually under control of the motion picture industry's self-imposed censorship.

In a sweeping and far-reaching move, publicity directors of the major studios, in session with Joseph I. Breen, head of censorship under the Will's Hays organization, voted to curb the activities of the magazine writers by insisting on approving all material before it is published.

Muzzling of the writers was decided on, a spokesman declared, because of recent stories written on Mae West, Jean Harlow and other stars which were considered objectionable.

The writers were reported to be up in arms and it is believed that Pacific Coast representatives of some twenty-two fan magazines will meet on what action to take.

Before a contract player at any of the studios affiliated with the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., the Hays group, will be permitted to give an interview, the writer must agree to submit the finished story before publication or be barred from the lot. The studios will insist that a third party be present at all interviews.

Robert Montgomery, actor, announced today that at the next meeting of the Screen Actors' Guild the members will probably be asked to cooperate with the studios.

The action was taken, one publicity director said, to curb asserted inaccuracies, misrepresentations and exaggerations by "certain fan writers."

The New York Times
Published: August 11, 1934
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Photoplay's apology to MGM in the February 1939 issue

A HEART-TO-HEART TALK

WE REGRET that it is necessary for us to have this heart-to-heart talk with our readers and our friends in Hollywood.

For more than twenty-five years Photoplay has stood as a friend and champion of the motion-picture industry and has demonstrated consistently, we believe, its eagerness to play fair with our readers, the stars and the industry as a whole.

Unintentionally, we have been made to appear to step out of this character upon which we so pride ourselves.

Last month, we published in Photoplay a story in which we described friendships existing between prominent men and women in Hollywood, friendships which are well known to our readers and the public through articles that have appeared here and elsewhere for some time.

The purpose of our story was to show that these relationships in their companionable and mutually helpful aspects were so worth while that it was our hope that they could eventually culminate in happy marriages.

We regret that the purpose of this story was misinterpreted in certain newspapers. Excerpts were republished without permission and removed from the context, making these friendships appear in a light far from our original intentions.

Such an interpretation is unfair, not only to this magazine but to the stars involved. We must stand on our reputation of solid and constructive publishing history when we assure the stars mentioned in the story, as well as their studios, that we genuinely regret these unfortunate interpretations of our meaning and motive. This article was intended merely to portray some of the finest friendships we have ever known.