

Content regulation in the UAE: 'The Wolf of Wall Street'

Sana Saleem - Associate - Digital & Data
- Dubai International Financial Centre

February 2014

It has been reported that prior to screening in the UAE, approximately 45 minutes were cut from the film, including scenes depicting sexual activity and drug use. In addition, profanities were muted.

Many expressed frustration at the extent of the edits which recently brought this issue to the forefront. Moviegoers reportedly claimed that the cut version left the film, which is one of the most critically acclaimed motion pictures of the year, choppy and almost unintelligible.

In the UAE, traditional media content and digital media content, including television shows and film, is regulated. The key laws and regulations are:

1. National Media Council's Resolution No 20 of 2010 on the Criteria for Media Content ("NMC Content Guidelines"), which applies to all media, audio-visual and print institutions in the UAE. The NMC Content Guidelines require all media companies to comply with specific criteria including respect for the principles of Islamic beliefs and the cultural heritage of the UAE.
2. Federal Law No 15 for 1980 Concerning Publications and Publishing ("Publications Law"), which regulates publishing activities in the UAE. The Publications Law covers all forms of content, whether published digitally or via traditional media, and is arguably broad enough to cover art and films. The Publications Law sets out matters that should not be published, which include matters relating to religion and public morals.
3. Federal Law No 5 of 2012 Concerning Combating Information Technology Crimes ("Cyber Crime Law"), which is generally aimed at deterring cyber crimes and is relevant in the context of distribution of content via the internet. The Cyber Crime Law provides for a range of offences. Of most relevance in the context of 'The Wolf of Wall Street' is the prohibition on the transmission and publication of pornographic materials or any other material that may prejudice public morals.
4. twofour54 Media Zone Authority Content Code ("Content Code"), which sets out the editorial standards which must be maintained by entities established in the Abu Dhabi media free zone (twofour54) that intend to publish, broadcast and/or communicate content to the public. The Content Code requires compliance with generally accepted standards regarding the social, cultural, moral and religious values that apply in the UAE. It prohibits the transmission of offensive content, including sexually explicit and violent content, unless it is generally (i) appropriate due to its artistic or creative merit, (ii) beneficial to society, and (iii) factually accurate.
5. TECOM Codes of Guidance ("Codes of Guidance"), which apply to entities set up in the Dubai Internet & Media Free Zone (TECOM). Generally, the Codes of Guidance require publishers and broadcasters to be mindful of and to take into account the prevailing social and religious customs of the UAE and the Middle East and the Islamic religion generally.

It is standard practice for distributors, in conjunction with the relevant authorities, to preview and cut films in order to comply with local content regulations. The extent of edits will of course depend on the market and are generally subject to editing restrictions imposed by the producer.

In the UAE and other Gulf States, it is not uncommon to cut scenes and language that are contrary to

religious and commonly accepted social mores.

Al Tamimi & Company's Technology, Media & Telecommunications team regularly advises clients on various media sector matters, including content regulation and film distribution. For further information, please contact Sana Saleem (s.saleem@tamimi.com) or Rachael Hammond (r.hammond@tamimi.com).