

CENSORSHIP AND HUMAN RIGHTS: SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

by

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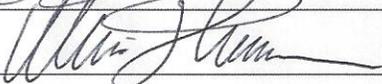
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Abstract

This report contains a brief summary overview of modern day censorship, with special emphasis on the internet and potential motivations, methods, and outcomes of censorship. The purpose is to provide the reader with a general knowledge of the current state of censorship by comparing and contrasting societies that are heavily censored (China) and those that are generally considered free (the United States). Naturally technology plays a huge role in either enabling or resisting censorship, and while technology continues to improve, it begs the question of “Where is censorship heading and how does technology affect heavily censored populations?”

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Introduction

More than ever before, individuals are constantly bombarded with a flood of information. From Facebook notifications to breaking headlines on the news, there is no end to the constant updates about what is going on in the world. At the same time, this idea of information immediacy has raised the question of whether or not free reign should be given to the general populace. While information technology has made it possible to immediately find the answer to questions ranging from "Where is the nearest Starbucks?" to "Which U.S. president was ambidextrous?", at what cost does this convenience come? Is it proper that every single person with internet access has the ability to damage another's reputation? Is complete freedom of information in the public good? How do we determine where to draw the line, or if a line should be drawn at all?

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, censorship is to "remove parts of something, such as a book, movie, or letter that you do not want someone to see or hear". Similarly, [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com) defines a censor as "an official who examines books, plays, news reports, motion pictures, radio and television programs, letters, cablegrams, etc., for the purpose of suppressing parts deemed objectionable on moral, political, military, or other grounds."

To some, censorship may seem like a foreign concept; some leftover idea from the days before the American Constitution and the Bill of Rights which endowed us freedom of speech and freedom of the press. However, while not as robust or blatant as the censorship in countries like China and Italy, censorship still exists in the United States, whether it be the practice of challenging and banning books at a school or library, or the government's regulation of explicit content on public media.

In the United States censorship is a particularly controversial topic. In the wake of the Edward Snowden leaks and the rise of organizations like Anonymous and WikiLeaks, many Americans are apprehensive and doubtful of the government's ability to judge good censorship and bad censorship. Some think censorship as an institution goes against our civil liberties and right to express ourselves. Others believe that in the right context censorship is permissible, even necessary for the well-being of society. It is clear however that this is a conversation and debate that will remain a huge topic of interest for years to come as technology and the statutes that govern technology continue to develop. The big question remains, will censorship survive in this era information immediacy?

Why Censor?

The question presented previously presents a legal and ethical dilemma. For the legal aspect, the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United State of America states that "The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law," ("First Amendment."). Examining this statement closely, we can see that while freedom of speech is a universal right in the eyes of the Founding Fathers, they too recognized the dangers of unfettered speech. The question is not 'Are we permitted to censor?', but 'Should we censor?', and 'When is it acceptable?'

The motivations for engaging in censorship depend on the party seeking to censor. For the purposes of this research, the focus will be limited to four main groups : governments, media outlets, institutions, and individuals.

For governments the main motivation is to control public opinion. Media, particularly the news, play a huge role in influencing popular opinion. By controlling the flow of information to

the general public, the government can elicit the reaction they want, whether it be the criticism or hatred of a dissident, or a general sense of nationalism. This can be accomplished in a wide variety of ways, ranging from simply withholding certain negative press to actively filtering internet searches. This will be referred to as political censorship. An example of political censorship would be the suppression of Galileo Galilei's Sidereus Nuncius. Galileo promoted the theory of heliocentricity (the earth revolves around the sun) which was contrary to the mainstream belief that the earth was the center of the universe which was supported by the extremely influential and politically active Catholic Church (Hellman).

Common media related to popular culture and entertainment on the other hand is censored for the purpose of protecting society (particularly children and adolescents from mature or obscene content, however this type of censorship is not limited to only these groups and can be applied to generally offensive material). Social Censorship is primarily enforced by the government through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for radio, broadcast, and internet media. With the exception of slander (which is an issue dealt with in the judicial system through court proceedings such as lawsuits), print media like newspapers and magazines remain the most unregulated form of communication with no U.S. government organization dedicated to supervising the industry.

Meanwhile, institutions may choose to exclude certain subjects or topics from a students' curriculum or ban them from libraries and collections as a result of a conflict with the institutions' ideals (for instance a devote Christian school banning the study of evolution for conflicting with religious beliefs) or in an effort to shield children from inappropriate material (preventing students from watching a mature educational documentary without the explicit consent of parents).

Another concept, which is closely related to political censorship is self-censorship. This is most common in countries where freedom of the press is not a protected civil right and authors of dissident opinions are subject to persecution for publishing their works without the explicit consent of the government. This type of censorship is born from the fear instilled in the general population where the government does not necessarily impose laws or regulations regarding certain speech, but the population self regulates so as to avoid legal or safety issues.

How is Censorship Accomplished?

In ancient times, censorship consisted of the physical destruction of materials. For instance, during the rule of the first Emperor of China and the establishment of the Qin Dynasty, in 219 BC Qin-Shi Huang ordered the destruction of the school of Confucius, resulting in the burning of hundreds of books on Confucian thought, and the slaughter of many of the followers of Confucius ("Shihuangdi."). In these cases it was necessary for officials or censors to manually evaluate texts, then destroy them or remove the controversial material.

Nowadays censorship is more sophisticated both in terms of the media that is censored, and the way in which censored material is evaluated. While the internet has made complete censorship almost impossible, censorship techniques have been developed to counteract this to an extent. Google is an incredibly useful tool for finding information from various sources, however it hinders the mission of the censor. In the case of China, we will see that they were able to leverage their economic power to pressure google into filtering search engine results or face being blocked in China completely. It is also possible for the government to monitor internet traffic, and possibly take legal action against those who engage in disagreeable behavior as way of enforcing self-censorship. The United States has also used internet tools like google, but rather than censor they have opted to request data about particular individuals, which rather than

challenging free speech, challenges an individual's right to privacy. This prompts individuals to consider censoring the information they share online and can also be considered a form of self-censorship.

Censorship in the United States

Recent Censorship Issues in the U.S.

Traditionally in the United States censorship has been viewed by the general population as an infringement on the basic rights endowed to all men (and women). However as the content of media has become more liberal in terms of what is permissible (like what is allowed to be shown on television or spoken about on the radio), the issue has arisen about censorship for the general welfare of society. This ranges from banning swear words on the radio, to the government withholding information in the interest of national security. Evidence and examples of the latter are few and far between, so for the purpose of this argument we will focus primarily on the former. The American public is generally concerned with censorship that is non-political in nature, with the motivations geared toward the supporting the public good by only censoring materials deemed harmful to the welfare of society.

The simplest example of censorship in the United States would be educational censorship, primarily for grade schools where a vast majority of students are still minors. The argument in favor of censorship is that parents and institutions have a right to filter the content of the child's curriculum if certain topics are deemed unfit, as well as ban books from school libraries. Although widely popular both the UK and the U.S, even now some schools ban Harry Potter because they believe the idea of magic may teach the celebration of witchcraft (Olukotun), prevent children from distinguishing between reality and fantasy (DailyMail.co.uk), or that

Harry's tendency to break the rules and be the hero shows a disrespect for authority (deLuzuriaga).

For issues between two citizens, the matter is often solved in a court of law. These libel laws fall under the domain of state governments, however it has been determined by the U.S. Supreme Court that the States are limited in the damages they can award a plaintiff in the event of a successful lawsuit. Plaintiffs are not required to provide proof of harm, but rather the publication itself is considered evidence of harm. It is also notable that malicious intent is not necessary for a plaintiff to be awarded damages. The Supreme Court also ruled that matters of public interest are not eligible for dispute under libel law, and given the nature of the content is by default protected by First Amendment rights. However, the exception to this rule was determined in *Gertz v Robert Welch, Inc.*, with the court stating that even in the event of a libel suit concerning matters of public interest, individual could indeed sue and be awarded damages, but it is up to the plaintiff to prove malicious intent ("Libel."). This may also contribute to self-censorship, especially for those who would not have the funds to defend themselves in court for the duration of a lengthy trial.

Other recent issues regarding freedom of speech include hate speech, anti-abortion protests, and pornography. Many would agree that the content of these types of speech are mature and at the very least unpleasant, so it is reasonable to argue that censoring these types of speech is potentially in the public interest.

Hate speech is defined to be language that encourages prejudice against particular groups of people based on gender, race, sexual orientation, etc. (Egendorf). The goal of hate speech is twofold; first, to intimidate those whom the speech is direct at, and second, for those who hold such beliefs to confirm their beliefs by encouraging those who share the same negative views to

speaking out. The case for censoring hate speech is that by allowing these groups to spread their negative views, we are essentially telling them that society deems this action acceptable while at the same time telling the recipients of hate speech that their discomfort and mental health is irrelevant. Many argue that while hate speech can generally be perceived as bad, it represents a person's right to believe and express themselves how they see fit as a matter of free speech (McElwee). Similarly, if the government were to ban hate speech, who is to say that government does not take it one step further and ban negative speech about the President? Or Government Officials? If we rob one group of their free speech, what will stop the government from doing the same to the general population? While this may seem like an extreme view, the fact of the matter is free speech is a difficult area, and with an ever expanding array of communication techniques, this will remain a huge issue for years to come.

Anti-abortion protests are highly controversial because of the nature of the topic and also because of the graphic images that are often in plain view at such events. But beyond this lie individuals on both sides of the argument with valid concerns regarding the public's and government's stance on abortion. The argument in favor of censoring anti-abortion protests is that it is in the public interest to shield those who would not wish to see such graphic images. In the case of men and women who have suffered a trauma, it is possible that these graphic images could 'trigger' a negative mental or physical response. The solution to this would be to prevent graphic imagery such as those shown at anti-abortion protests to not be shown in direct public view. While this censorship could protect a few, it infringes on the free speech rights of those who are arguing what is at its core a political topic. The alternative to this is to continue to allow the protesters to demonstrate peacefully, while at the same time posting warning signs a fair distance away to ward off those who may be offended or injured (Allen).

Pornography is another industry which is often subject to censorship. In this case, the goal of censoring pornography is to prevent these materials from getting into the hands of minors. Secondary to that would be barring these kinds of inappropriate materials from the general public view as well as the workplace.

One subset of pornography that many argue should be censored is child pornography. While it is illegal to create, distribute, or possess child pornography in the United States, the internet has made it a very difficult area for the government to police. The primary concern with child pornography is that it depicts the sexual abuse of a minor, which in and of itself is a crime. By the government actively working to suppress these types of offensive material, it reinforces the laws surrounding the illegality of child abuse and is clearly in the public interest. This is further proved by the backing of the United Nations, which stipulates that member nations must also outlaw child pornography, from its production to its consumption ("USDOJ: CRM: Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section.").

In recent history there have also been several examples of government censorship aimed at the internet, most notably SOPA, PIPA, and CISPA. SOPA stands for the Stop Online Piracy Act, and the main goal was to protect the copyrights of media owners by not allowing access to websites where pirated material is available. It essentially proposed the use of a portal filter (which will be explained in more detail in the technical section of this paper). The reason why it would be necessary to use a filter as opposed to just removing the content outright is because many of the popular illegal download websites are often based in foreign countries, or stored on foreign servers (Pepeoni). Because the United States does not have the right to order these sites to be taken down, the best alternative is limit access to them (essentially censoring them from U.S. internet users). The issue that many have with this is the vague language of the act, which

could potentially allow the media companies to claim copyright infringement for even 'facilitating' piracy, even if the site does not participate in an act of copyright infringement itself. The act, while full of good intentions, has the potential do much more harm.

Along the lines of SOPA, PIPA (Protect IP or Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act), gives the government even more tools to fight against piracy. It essentially forces Domain Name services from preventing a Domain name from properly translating to an IP address, should the site in question be proven to have material on it that infringes on the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. A user could still in theory use the IP of the website to navigate to it, but any URLs would be rendered useless. This is yet again another form of direct government censorship, and although it has yet to pass, it should be expected that both SOPA and PIPA will emerge again in the near future.

CISPA stands for Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act, which would allow the government and private companies to collaborate voluntarily to stop and mitigate cyber-attacks. However this could potentially lead to unintended government spying on individuals if the companies that the government works with decides to voluntarily hand over user data and personal information. This potential to do harm may increase the risk of self-censorship, since citizens may be more wary of what they post on line for fear of government backlash.

Lastly, net neutrality remains to be a controversial issue. While it does not fall into one of the four traditional categories mentioned above, it remains to be a forms a censorship based on financial incentives. Under net neutrality, all internet service providers (ISPs like Cox, Comcast, Quest, etc.) would be required to treat all the data coming across their networks the same. The danger of allowing ISPs to discriminate when it comes to allocating bandwidth is that they may selectively choose not to allow Netflix streams, or Hulu, or access to Amazon, if they so choose.

The choice would most likely be based on whether or not the web services chose to reimburse the ISP, and if they didn't, the ISPs could slow them down and make it almost impossible for the ISP customers to reach those sites, essentially censoring that content ("Guide Print Email"). However, under current FCC policy ISPs are prohibited from blocking any legal content, as well as acting in an unreasonable manner such that it harms the internet (which is inclusive of favoring traffic from a specific entity). It seems as though the FCC plans to continue upholding this rule, however it has remained open to discussion on this topic.

Over all in the United States, censorship is generally restricted that in the public interest. While other policies like SOPA, PIPA, and CISPA seem to be an effort to hinder freedom of speech and privacy, at their core they are meant to enforce laws that are already in place. Unlike other countries who heavily police the internet access of its citizens, the United States remains relatively unhindered in its ability to access controversial content, even if that content isn't necessarily legal.

Censorship in China (PRC)

Recent History of censorship in the PRC

The current government of China is a mix of Communist and Capitalist. While still operating under the Communist Party, in the 1970s Chinese President Deng Xiaoping implemented a series of economic reforms that bolstered the economy and began China's development into the economic giant it continues to be today. But the effects of this move carried with it social implications as well. Opening China's economy and allowing international trade inevitably allowed the Chinese to come into contact with western ideals and views on social rights, which if not checked would lead to a mixing of ideas and values that the Communist Party believed could potentially ruin China's current political climate (Latham).

While the Communist Party recognized the economic benefit of engaging in international trade, they were not ready to give the Chinese people the same social rights and freedoms that their international counterparts had been given, and as such maintained a tight control over the media, as well as enforcing harsh punishments on dissents. During the early years of the internet, the CCP realized that such a technology could have irreversible effects on the state of the Party by undermining its authority in the eyes of the public, and as such completely banned its use. It wasn't until 1987 that the first network in China was established (the China Academic Network or CANET), and even then it was only for academic purposes and not directly connected to the international networks (Choy and Cullen). However this policy proved to be a hindrance to China's ability to compete in science and technology industries, compared to countries like the United States where access was essentially open to anyone. Former President of China Jiang Zemin stated during his presidency that "Internet Technology is going to change the international situation, military combat, production, culture and economic aspects of our daily life significantly." He subsequently opened the internet for public use during the '90s with the establishment of CHINAPAC by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications.

In the early days of the Chinese Communist Party, the CCP used the media as a government 'mouthpiece'. For example, art and theater were restricted by guidelines determined by the party to follow certain principles which showed the superiority of socialism to the general masses (Latham, pg. 6). In addition, the government exercised direct control of printing and broadcasting organizations. Until recently all newspapers fell under the direct control of the government, with no private ownership of media organizations. Currently the party no longer dictates the exact content of the media, but rather enforces regulations on proper content. Most

media forms have taken on a more commercial aspect, using advertisements to generate revenue rather than government subsidies and funding.

China's Motivations for Censorship

The Chinese Government's motivation for keeping such a harsh policy comes down to political power. In their eyes, allowing citizens to have free reign over the media and internet would subject the government to a storm of criticism. Take for example Sina's social microblogging website Weibo, which is essentially the Chinese version Twitter. According to a study done by Jason Q. Ng from The University of Toronto and The China Digital Times, over 500 words and phrases are actively blocked on Weibo. Many terms like "Red Terror" (Pinyin: Hóngsè kǒngbù, Simplified Chinese: 红色恐怖) and "Constitutional Democracy" (Pinyin: Xiànzhèng mínmǔ, Simplified Chinese: 宪政民主) carry political meaning while others like "lesbian" (Pinyin: Nǚ tóng, Simplified Chinese: 女同) and "Marijuana" (Pinyin: Dàmá, Simplified Chinese: 大麻) allude to so called 'deviant behavior' and the social stigmas that still exist in China (Ng).

One very prominent example of the government taking direct action against a citizen is the case of Liu Xiaobo, the 2010 Nobel Peace prize winner. A career advocate for the enforcement of basic human rights and freedom of speech, he was arrested and jailed several times before being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his public denunciations of the One Party System and appeals for a more democratic nation. His most famous work to date remains the Charta 08, which advocates China's gradual shift to a democracy. For his part in this co-authored work, he was sentenced to 11 years in prison, where he remains today, and denied the opportunity to accept the prize. Chinese censorship efforts have kept Mr. Liu a stranger to most

Chinese people, and the actions taken against him represent the risks and consequences of going against the CCP to those few who know of his exploits.

In contrast, the CCP has also used more subtle methods to censor a story or suppress public knowledge. Considered a perk of becoming a high ranking Chinese official, many prominent politicians and derogatory terms referring to them and their families are blocked as well. This in particular is a hot topic of debate, even among Chinese citizens. "Princelings" as they known, are in essence the sons of elite politicians and party members who have grown up with wealth and power, and as such have a sense of entitlement and superiority when it comes the rules. It essentially embodies the public disdain for the corruption and blatant transgressions that are thought to be common among the Chinese elite. The prime example of this what is now known as the "Li Gang Incident", in 2010 a student at Hebei University was spending the night skating with her friend when one of the students (Chen Xiaofeng) was struck head on by a car. The other student received a broken leg, while Ms. Chen was critically injured. Chen died within the next 24 hours. Nearby security officers attempted to apprehend the driver, who was visibly drunk, however rather than stopping his car and surrendering or seeking help for the two victims, he retaliated, answering "My father is Li Gang," (the local deputy police chief).

Initially the incident was covered up by the party and media officials, however netizens (internet colloquialism for "internet citizens") soon got ahold of the story and brought it to light. The backlash on the government was one that has been seen before, but never with such unforgiving consequences. While the government still tried to portray the Gang family in a more positive light (public apologies, media interviews on the state run CCTV channel), they had no choice but to arrest Li Gang's son a few days later. When interviews with the victim's angry family were banned from the media, netizens once again struck without forgiveness, using the

line "Li Gang is my father" and incorporating it into classical poetry which was then dispersed throughout the internet (Wines). The statement has now become a catchphrase associated with avoiding responsibility and even has its own page on the popular American 'Know Your Meme' website ("My Dad is Li Gang!"). The case was soon settled when Li Gang's son was sentenced to 6 years in prison and nearly 100,000 USD in restitution to the two victims and their families, however the first lawyer for Chen's family has stated he believes it's nowhere near enough (Schiller). Alright this incident did not end as fairly as one might have hoped, it illustrates the power of the internet and how the government control of the media and propaganda is waning in the face of technology.

Overall, media reporters are becoming more and more assertive in pushing the limits of censorship, but at the same time they must toe the line and refrain from going too far, lest they face criminal charges. This development has resulted in the practice of self-censorship; the act of people and organizations engaging in "Internet cooperation". Rather than the Chinese government actively hindering access to restricted material, the people themselves monitor what material they access for fear of legal ramifications (Latham).

Censorship in Taiwan (ROC)

While not considered a separate entity from China in a political context by the United States and UN, like Hong Kong, Taiwan is a completely different atmosphere than mainland China, having separated in the early years of Communist rule. Taiwan affords its citizens many of the same rights with regard to the internet and freedom of speech that are given to U.S. citizens. Like the U.S, Taiwan has a constitution which allows freedom of speech as well as freedom of the press. These rights are generally seen as being respected by the Taiwan government, as there are no official reports or evidence of censorship in the media, as well as no

evidence of internet monitoring without probable cause and judicial oversight ("Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012.").

In the past, the United States shared a particularly close relationship with Taiwan, even going so far as to arm and train the Taiwan military against the possibility of hostile takeover by the mainland. The primary motivation for this was supporting a nation that held similar democratic beliefs contrary to its communist counterpart. However, this relationship was short-lived as China's economic power proved too attractive for both the United States and the United Nations; Taiwan was stripped of its diplomatic privileges and replaced by mainland China in many international communities ("A Primer on U.S. Policy Toward the "One-China").

Censorship in Italy

In recent years Italy has been known as one of the least free nations in Europe regarding freedom of the press. This is due largely in part to the political connections many media outlets have, particularly television. Television in Italy is owned primarily by former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who often exercised his influence over the television stations to remove what he deemed unsuitable content, as well as further his own political agenda (Lyman). In general it seems that Italians are well aware of this fact, with only 24% of the population stating they trust what they see on the television (Pidd).

In contrast, in terms of internet censorship, there is little to no evidence of political censorship. This is outweighed however by the fact that internet has relatively little penetration (about 50%) compared with other European nations, and that many Italians still get their news from television, radio, or print sources ("Italy's free expression hamstrung by lack of media plurality - Index on Censorship | Index on Censorship.").

Along the lines of censorship in the public interest, in 2007 Italy passed a law regarding the removal of child pornography. Similar to the United States and many other members of the UN, Italy has criminalized the possession and distribution of child pornography, creating a legal barrier for that kind of media in the interest of protecting the welfare of minors ("Italy enacts law to block child porn Web sites.").

Technological Aspect of Censorship

Moving on from general censorship, let us focus now on internet censorship. In censoring the internet, there are several key technologies that allow governments to do so. Examples of these include IP/URL blocking, firewalls, portal filtering, packet filtering, as well as disconnecting the internet all together. The following paragraphs will describe each of these in more detail.

IP/URL blocking

IP and URL banning consists of the government and ISPs preventing access to certain websites by restricting traffic based on IP addresses and domain names. In this case, the individual IPs and URLs must be evaluated and added to a block list. Usually, if the main page of a site is blocked, user typically cannot navigate to subpages within the site, although sometimes it is still possible. A major flaw in this method is that often when a webmaster purchases a domain, it is stored on a server with other sites from the same provider. If IP banning is used, the sites that are stored on the same server will have the same server IP address, and therefore a single offending site can render thousands of other innocent domain names inaccessible (Zittrain and Edelman).

DNS Filtering or DNS Redirection

When a site is blocked using DNS redirection, the user's computer sends out a request to the DNS server for the website's IP address as it normally would. However, instead of getting back the intended IP address, the computer is given an alternative address, directing the user to either an alternative site to promote an idea or concept of the government's choosing, or a site that has been blocked through other means, and the user is unable to see the website or its subpages. In either case, the server which the site is located on never receives the request because of an intentional mismatch of IP and domain name (Zittrain and Edelman).

Packet Filtering

Packet filtering essentially blocks packets from traveling through a network based on where the packet is going, and where it came from. When files are transmitted over the internet, they are broken down into smaller chunks called packets which are easier and faster to send. These packets have crucial destination and source data stored in what is called the packet header, and the filter then uses this data to determine if the packet should be forwarded on or not. In the basic sense, packet filtering can be used for security purposes to ensure no malicious content is allowed to enter a secure network, but in extreme cases, it can be used to censor websites and prevent communication between certain individuals ("packet filtering").

Portal Filtering

Portal filtering most likely utilizes packet or address filtering. This process involves a portal or some type of internet service and filters the content of that particular tool. The most prominent example of this is Google, and its deal to filter search results in China. Ultimately, China threatened to ban Google and other online search engines if they did not agree to allow filtering Chinese users in their services. Google eventually agreed, noting that it is better for the

Chinese to have access to Google, even if it is limited, than to not have access at all. Google was heavily criticized for taking stance, with many stating that although the people have access to a better search engine, they are no better off since Google set the precedent that as long as an entity is powerful enough or rich enough, it is acceptable to infringe on the rights of others (Halliday).

Disconnecting the internet

In some extreme cases, governments like China have been known to cut off access to the internet entirely when it is clear that they will not be able to contain certain restricted materials. For example, from 2009 to 2010, riots in Xinjiang province of China provoked the complete shutdown of the internet in that area for nearly ten months as the Chinese government worked to control the incident without allowing it to affect the Party's reputation. Other countries that practice censorship have been known to use this method as well (Ng).

Overcoming Censorship

In this age of the internet, it is nearly impossible for a government or organization to completely block access to unauthorized materials unless they are able to stop the information at its source. In the case of banning books in schools, there is nothing to stop a child (besides his or her parents and their own income) from going online and purchasing banned literature. For researching politically sensitive topics (such as those flagged in China), other countries have no such restrictions.

In the case of countries like China, several types of technology exist that would help users circumvent the "Great Firewall of China" which is the main instrument used by the CCP to block access to social networking sites like Facebook and dissent materials.

VPN is one particularly useful tool for overcoming censorship. It allows users to log into a secure connection that is encrypted using a client on a user's computer or device, and a server or service that has been set up in advance. The server then acts as a middle man in the network, allowing a user to bounce their requests through another source to disguise the true source of the blocked data. Based on what you want to do with the VPN, the location of the servers are key. For instance, those wanting to dodge the firewall in China will need to have a server available in another country. While this method is very effective, the downside is that it most likely will not be feasible for Chinese citizens because they will not have access to the appropriate servers, and even if they were able to find a service online, they would potentially face negative consequences (Henry).

Proxy Servers work in a similar manner to VPNs. They essentially are a third party in the information exchange process that allows users to navigate to sites they would otherwise be barred from by making it look like the user is requesting something completely unrelated. These proxies can exist on a local computer, but there are also websites that allow users to use the proxy without purchasing any hardware or downloading and software. Reliable and popular internet proxies are often blocked by governments once censors get wind of them, however they can be useful if the user is willing to search for them ("proxy server.").

Alternate URLs and alternate DNS can overcome IP or URL filtering. By using different Domain names or URLs to reference the same site, websites can sometimes sneak past DNS restrictions. Similarly, typing in a site's IP address using a different numbering system such as hexadecimal or dotted octal may bypass the restrictions, however this method is very hit or miss (Zittrain and Edelman).

Sneaker nets are a non-technical way to escape censorship. It is essentially using manual methods to pass along data, like through a portable hard drive that is physically handed from one person to the next. It is the one sure fire way to ensure that data has not been tampered with, and carries the benefit of not being connected to a network at all, so the contents of the drive would remain confidential so long as it was not physically intercepted. The downside however is the limitations of physical media.

It is useful to note that technology has proven to be a powerful social and political tool as well, and when used in this context it is known as "hacktivism". It is by definition "the practice of gaining unauthorized access to a computer system and carrying out various disruptive actions as a means of achieving political or social goals" ("hacktivism."). Organizations such as Anonymous use their technical skills to further what they believe to be just causes, such as fighting censorship, or championing cases of injustice. However the motivations and stances of such groups can vary significantly from one to the next, and a single group is not necessarily controlled by one individual, but rather a collection of thousands of individuals with similar interests form a network which makes tracking them down that much more difficult. While governments in no way condone what these groups do, they play a significant role in the technological atmosphere, and will likely not fade away anytime time.

Where is Censorship Going in the Future?

In recent history there have been dozens, if not hundreds or thousands of stories and cases where everyday citizens used the internet as a catalyst for their social and political endeavors, many of which would not have been possible due to government policies or oppression. Let's examine the issue of the Iranian protests in 2009.

The primary issue in Iran at the time was the recent presidential election. Many students and citizens protested the results of the elections, with all three competitor candidates claiming that the election was rigged. Police were ordered to suppress the protests, however this did not stop protestors from organizing. Rather than be silenced, they took to social media: Facebook, Twitter, anywhere they could spread their message and began giving the world live accounts of what was going on from the people's perspective. However, while the internet was able to empower them, the effect was limited. Iran itself does not have the capacity for higher level communication, like Skype for instance, and many in Iran do not trust email and other services for fear of being spied on (Worth).

In the western media, it seemed as though finally, western democracy and free speech was well on its way to establishing a foothold in a country the United States has struggled with politically for years (Pilkington). But this optimistic view of Iran and the ability of its people to facilitate change never materialized (Morozov). Contrary to what the media believed, this incident did not bring about groundbreaking change, however it did allow the Iranians to express their hope that one day their votes will mean something. Even if the results were not what many in the international community were hoping for, it shows that even when people are censored and oppressed, progress is being made.

Conclusion

Overall, from the many cases discussed in this paper, it is plain to see that censorship as a tool of oppression is not a viable way to control the population. In this day and age, technology makes it apparent to those who face censorship the basic rights which are being infringed upon, and as more countries continue to improve communication, censorship will become less and less acceptable.

Even in the case of countries with highly sophisticated censorship technology, the limit they put on their people is not impossible to overcome, and as long as there are those who are aware of the government's suppression and manipulation, there will always be those who are willing and able to circumvent these measures.

However, we can also see very clearly that censorship, in and of itself is not a bad thing. Censorship is what protects our children and ourselves from the dangers of instant access, whether it be from mature content, or socially unacceptable behavior. The important thing to remember is that motivations are the key to understanding the acceptability of censorship. Although the process of blocking politically sensitive material and pornography might be the same, the effect it has on society remains radically different.

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