
Internet Censorship: Advantages and Limitations

Internet censorship is the power to limit access to individual websites or digital content. It is placed with restrictions and limitations on what is to be put out and seen by the public. A censorship advantage is that it can be used to block copyrighted information and harmful or sensitive information. It prohibits kids and people in general, from accidentally viewing content that might be disturbing or detrimental to them, such as murder and pornography, or even decapitation posts that have made their way onto sites like Facebook and Twitter in the recent years. The internet is filled with dangerous information, that children should never have the freedom to access. The problem with these children is that they learn from example, and if they search, watch, or read something on the web that could be potentially dangerous, they could be influenced or curious to think that it would be alright to imitate one day. Now, this is all necessarily acceptable advantages of internet censorship because it is protecting the children and keeping the community free of unwanted content, but the topic becomes controversial when this censorship is used to deny people's thoughts and speech. Internet censorship limits the freedom of an individual to see the material they want to see when they want to see it.

The Web was originally regulated by the Internet community instead of by governments or public organizations. The purpose was to avoid government intrusion to encourage freedom of speech and the absence of bias. Although these initial ideas were noble in principle, governments and other institutions were progressively policing the Internet after realizing that self-monitoring was no longer enough to address developing issues. Some manifestations of these concerns included the rise in criminal activity on the Internet, the development of the Internet as a social constructor, the diversity of Internet users and the proliferation of different political ideologies on the Internet. It is widely understood that, given the unique features of the Internet, it provides real possibilities for democratization and political change, particularly in countries where freedom of speech and expression is limited by government controls. It allows for instantaneous communication with others around the world and not just person to person communication but mass communication. The Internet has become a popular medium since it incorporates characteristics of several other media and communication systems, for example; print, broadcast, and postal systems. Despite being such a powerful tool, the Internet is now affordable for most of the world's population. Internet cafes have sprung up in nations around the world, providing people with a quick, easy and cheap way to interact with the Internet, facilitating the flow of information. This ease to reach the internet and obtaining information quickly can give plenty of power to governments that they could abuse in authoritarian regimes.

In one authoritarian regime, China, most, if not all of those types of sites are or have been blocked. You cannot access any of these unless you found some way around the 'Great Firewall' that the Chinese government runs in their country. While China defends its practice of internet censorship, based on "protecting" the people, heavy internet censorship is a block to free speech and impedes economic and social development in the 21st century. China says it has its reasons for censoring its internet. Wang Chen, minister for the State Council Information Office, defends China's position, stating, "There is an ever-increasing need to 'guide public opinion' on the Chinese Internet." (McCabe) Government reasoning is the prevalence of porn, fraud, and "rumor-mongering." He also states that this is something that the Chinese people want, but that's because the Chinese people probably don't know any better. They were born

and raised into this idea that it is okay to have ridiculously biased internet censorship and now they have been brainwashed to believe that this is something they desire. In July of 2009, China cut internet and cell phone service in much of Xinjiang province in response to civil unrest that the government says was organized over the internet. Paul Mozur (a reporter for the International Herald Tribune) states, "To pull the plug on the internet for 20 million of its citizens is not simply bad policy, it's a violation of human rights." It acts like these that cause unrest and controversy around the world. To further that end, China has recently introduced new regulations. China has introduced new regulations that force anyone who wants to host a website must meet in person with government officials and provide personal identification. The "Great Firewall" is inhibiting China and thus curbing its innovation. Academic freedom is a First Amendment right that is recognized by the American government; however, China's academic freedom is "constrained by the Communist Party's monopoly on power, which is enshrined in the Constitution, and by the party's deep involvement in the operation of the Chinese universities (Hennock)." Internet censorship in China has fostered a lack of education and culture that allows its citizens to think creatively and speak up for themselves (Bao). According to an article by Rebecca MacKinnon, "While the Chinese government has supported the development of the Internet as a tool for business, entertainment, education, and information exchange, it has succeeded in preventing people from using the Internet to organize any kind of viable political opposition. Balancing openness with control has been the central challenge for the Chinese Communist Party since Deng Xiaoping began his policy of "reform and opening up" in 1979." The normal Chinese citizen would be afraid to just browse the Internet because of the filters and possible risks involved. "One student blogger in China, pen-named "Undersound" estimated that only about five percent of the people he knows to use proxy servers to access blocked websites. The revolution in Egypt in January 2011 became the headline for most of the news media in the world. On February 11 Egypt president Mubarak stepped down from president. Egypt people finally won the competition. The Internet played an important role in the Egyptian revolution. The first message was posted on twitter which says, "January 25 is the Police day of Egypt; let's get to Tahrir Square to express our ideas." Even though Egypt government shut down the Internet, it did not stop people. Western Companies provided services of posting Twitter through telephone. Maybe the Chinese communist party feels glad as it had already blocked the websites such as Facebook and Twitter years ago. Although most countries positively evaluated the Egypt revolution, countries such as Russia and China, are not happy with the failure of Mubarak. According to Fiona Hill, the director of the Brookings Institution's Center on the United States and Europe and senior fellow in its foreign-policy program, "China banned web searches of 'Egypt', and Russia's state media has tended to play up the idea of U.S. and other outside orchestration of the events in Cairo. (Hill)" China has proven to have the worst if not, one of the strictest and heavily censored internets in the world. Actually, they rate the highest score of 88/100, 100 being the least free, on the Freedom of the net and according to them, been the world's worst abuser of internet freedom for the fourth year in a row. This proves China as an exemplary example for what happens when a government takes full control and power over what is seen on the internet, disregarding the opinion of the people and then changing the ideology of generations to come convincing them that that is the correct way of being treated.

Then there is the United States who many would say has fair and just censorship regulations that are kept in check by the people. But this is because we acknowledge as a country that freedom of speech is a human right no matter the platform and we protect it with our First Amendment of the constitution.