

# Censorship is the suppression of speech media essay

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## **Introduction**

Censorship is the suppression of speech or deletion of communicative material which may be considered objectionable, harmful or sensitive, as determined by a censor. The reason I chose this topic was because of its relevancy in our times when you have governments around the world heavily involved in regulating monitoring and censoring the internet. Recently we witnessed the Arab revolution also called the "twitter revolution" because people primarily used social media like Twitter & Facebook to organize rallies & stage protests. No other country has more strict internet laws like China, where there are more than 30,000 Internet police, and operating the Golden Shield Project, also known as the "Great Firewall of China" has led to much concern about people's right to be informed and the right to quality information. Internet censorship is also relevant to us living in Sri Lanka because of government restrictions on accessing anti government websites & sites with sexual content. By the end of this research paper I hope to achieve the following objectives, To, study the effects of internet censorship on freedom in accessing information and free expression of citizens and the right to be informed and the right to quality information study the effects of

internet censorship on social stability and democracy To study the effects on net neutrality due to censorship This study will take into account the legal and ethical factors in internet censorship and provide sound recommendations. This research paper is designed to achieve the objectives that were outlined in the scope of the research. Primary Research Strategy is qualitative

### **Ethical Issues : Analysis**

The research tackles multiple issues within the broad subject of internet censorship which include the government control and monopolization of the Internet and free expression. The literature reviews must be taken into account when defining the scope of this study. The research also covers legal, ethical and professional aspects of internet censorship. Censorship being a broad subject, the scope of the study focuses on the objectives of the research. The research paper relies more on previously written articles & statistics by reputed research centers & independent media organizations. Furthermore, the scope of the research is limited due to time constraints It would be wise to investigate and review previous researches done on internet censorship in regards to the scope in this research paper before embarking on a new research. Continuing from where other literature reviews have left off is a must for this research paper to progress. After conducting a thorough analytical research it was realized that there are countless number of articles written and researches & polls done on this precise topic. The literature is analyzed in three categories relevant to my research paper . The impact of social media on the Arab spring, Censorship by the Chinese Government and Net Neutrality. Although I've read some <https://assignbuster.com/censorship-is-the-suppression-of-speech-media-essay/>

articles & journals relative to my research objectives, I'm yet to come across a thoroughly written Literature that connects the dots and establish a correlation. An article published in the Miller-McCune magazine by Philip N. Howard written eloquently how important social media was for the Pro-democracy uprising in the Middle-East. (February 23, 2011)" Over the last few months, social unrest has cascaded across the major urban centers of North Africa and the Middle East. Journalists and communications media are often part of such moments of upheaval. Yet this recent wave of unrest is unlike other discrete periods of rapid political change. Through digital media, the stories of success in Tunisia and Egypt have spread over social networks to many other authoritarian regimes. Digital media has not only caused a cascade of civil disobedience to spread among populations living under the most unflappable dictators, it has made for unique new means of civic organizing" According to one activist in Cairo " We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world." According to the book published by the Oxford University Press, titled " The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy" by Philip N. Howard," Since 1995, the most consistent causal features of democratization include a wired civil society that uses digital media to undermine authoritarian rule in the course of national and global public opinion. Over the last decade, information and communication technologies have had consistent roles in the narrative for social mobilization:

- Coordinating and publicizing massive mobilizations and nonviolent resistance tactics against pseudo-democratic regimes after stolen elections
- Allowing foreign governments and diaspora communities to support local democratic movements through information, electronic

financial transfers, off-shore logistics and moral encouragement• Organizing radical student movements to use unconventional protest tactics at sensitive moments for regimes, particularly during (rigged) elections, elite power struggles or diplomatic visits to undermine the appearance of regime popularity• Uniting opposition movements through social-networking applications, shared media portals for creating and distributing digital content, and online forums for debating political strategy and public policy options• Attracting international news media attention and diplomatic pressure through digital content such as photos taken " on the ground" by citizens, leaking videos and documents to foreign journalists, or by diplomats raising flags over human rights abuses, environmental disasters, electoral fraud, and political corruption• Transporting mobilization strategies from one country to another, sharing stories of success and failure, and building a sense of transnational grievance with national solutions " Moving on to China, there was a fascinating article published on the New York Times recently as to why protests similar to the ones in the Middle East never took place . you can get a clue how far the Chinese have filtered internet access to its populace ." Censoring the Internet is not the only approach. The Chinese government has also tried to get out ahead of the discussion, framing the Egyptian protests in a few editorials and articles in state-controlled news publications as a chaotic affair that embodies the pitfalls of trying to plant democracy in countries that are not quite ready for it — a line China's leaders have long held the arbiters of speech sprang into action over the weekend. Sina. com and Netease. com — two of the nation's biggest online portals — blocked keyword searches of the word " Egypt," though the

mass protests were being discussed on some Internet chat rooms on Monday. Searching for " Egypt" has also been blocked on Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter. " Despite being a communist dictatorship, the Chinese authorities have never been challenged by the recent wave of protests stretching from the Middle East to Africa. The Chinese government did however take measures to censor the internet even further. Do the Chinese people approve censorship? Will the Internet bring more democracy to this country? I will investigate in this paper. Even though the literature provides a solid foundation for my research, the information is inefficient to achieve my objectives and prove my hypothesis. Regarding Net Neutrality, there was a research done by Dr Christopher T. Marsden, from University of Essex - School of Law, titled " Network Neutrality : a research guide" emphasizing the complexity of the problem rather than trying to prove a one sided argument. I will be looking at recent polls, journals & articles to get a grasp of this much debated issue. expansion of internet censorship will increase drawbacks on freedom of informationGrowth in internet censorship through various regulations will uplift the drawbacks in freedom of information. This hypothesis will reveals that the government regulations will have unintended consequences on citizens right to be informed & the right to quality information. No matter how well intended those regulators are. Here I will provide a brief presentation of the methods to be used in this study. Questionnaires are from all over the world thereby gathering opinions of journalists from different cultures and backgrounds. After studying the responses and opinions, it was realized that almost all of them identify the same reasons, thereby validating the hypothesis.

## **Social Issues**

### **Arab Revolution :**

We already know the importance of social media in communication, marketing, PR, self promotion. ect. But social media now is playing a crucial role in spreading democracy and fight against tyranny. Twitter and Facebook has become an essential part of public relations. Social media has a new and growing role in the global flow of information . twitter can operate in any cheap mobile phone, therefore gives the users the ability to communicate and organize without having to meet together. Yahoo was accused of censoring e-mail messages about the Occupy Wall Street protests in New York, after Yahoo users took to youtube , posting videos to voice their frustration over censorship." Yahoo's earlier attempts to censor e-mails in China had met with heavy criticism from pro-democracy activists. In 2001, Chinese activists were arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison for using a Yahoo account to post anonymous writing to an Internet mailing list, which Yahoo, under pressure from the Chinese government, eventually blocked. With the help of the World Organization for Human Rights, two Internet activists sued Yahoo, accusing it of abetting the torture of pro-democracy writers by providing information that allowed the Chinese government to identify them." In Tunisia, " mohamed bouazizi", a twenty year old vegetable street vendor set himself on fire on December the 17th 2010. he was protesting against corrupt government and police authorities. Social media helped spread the images spread like wildfire. Protests grew following his death, all across the internet. Protestors uploaded and shared videos, pictures and information of the unrest while the authorities fought back with

censorship and hacking into websites & email accounts. But by January 14th, Tunisian president ben ali quit after 23 years in power. in Egypt, a Facebook page called for a protest on the 25th January 2011, over the death of a 28 year old man named " khaled saeed". Group of police officers have beaten him to death. Tens of thousands of people signed up for the protest in the Facebook page. Facebook helped flame the passions of these protesters in the first place. Twitter also helped spread the information the protesters neededThe protest continued in Egypt despite the mobile phone and internet being down for several days. On February 11th 2011, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak resigned.

The International Business Times adds:" Compared to 2010, in the first three months of 2011, Facebook grew in the Arab region at an even faster rate, growing 29% in the first three months as compared to 18% over the same period in 2010 (...) Interestingly the report also shows that English is the language of choice in seven Arab countries, while French is the language of choice in five Arab countries, with Arabic the language of choice in three Arab countries". As technology becomes more pervasive, it's become extremely difficult to control opinion, you will find a greater exchange of opinion. Social media allowed citizens to fill a gap left out by the mainstream media. Through social media people were able to get information out there teasing the mainstream media in a way that mainstream news organizations came in and amplified it. Mubarak, Ben Ali, both regimes tried to shut down & censor the internet. It didn't work in any of those cases. A lot of young people believe the freedom to connect as a fundamental human right. And when the government restricts that ability to connect with others and get

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access to information, then the government runs the risk of turning something into an issue for people that would have otherwise watched from the sidelines.

**Net Neutrality: Preventing Corporate Censorship** The internet we have today exist because it's free and open because we have always had net neutrality throughout the existence of the internet. Opponents of net neutrality claim it is a form of censorship and government takeover of the internet which clearly is not. Net neutrality is the simple idea that all content whatever it is you are downloading/sharing can load onto your computer regardless of who owns or controls that content. net neutrality has been in place since the conception of the internet. The internet operated with the understanding that the network providers must treat all content the same, must interconnect the pipes they have to customer homes that are pipes owned by other operator. This was the fundamental design principle that was established by academics, engineers, and computer scientists who designed the earliest protocols for internet traffic. Network providers might decide to degrade your internet access to certain search engine and websites while increase bandwidth to websites or search engine companies whom they may have signed a contract with, therefore you will end up with a censored internet. Many countries have proposed regulations preventing this corporate control of the internet and promoting network neutrality. In America, Comcast, Viacom have been accused of web filtering & seriously slowing down bit torrent transfers. With the Wikileaks scandal, network providers in America have been blocking payments to Wikileaks and the cancelling of site hosting and of their web address. In June 2010,/Chile

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became the first country to enforce neutrality laws after vigorous social media campaign. Last month the Dutch parliament passes Europe's first net neutrality law. Neutrality laws should be enforced to preserve network neutrality so that the internet don't get corrupted and altered by a small number of multi-national corporations controlling the last free and open distribution in the world.

## **Legal Issues**

### **Censorship in China: The Great Firewall**

Even though china has embraced the internet as a tool for economic competitiveness, government does not allow the free flow of information that threaten the communist party's grip on power. Though many countries censor the net, by far china has the most impressive censorship program. employs more than 30, 00 internet police even exports cyber surveillance technologies to Cuba, Zimbabwe and Belarus . it's called the great fire wall of china. All the websites in the world are funneled through just 9 national gateways. Pass that and yet you come across, IP blocking = this is all about controlling what people upload, every IP address in monitored, and if they detect they don't like everything on that computer will be blocked. Keyword filtering = internet ages, search engines are constantly scanned by the internet police looking for certain keywords, if you type in filtered keywords no results are shown. There is a long list of subjects that would get you this reaction stretching from Chinese war crimes in Tibet, information about democracy, human rights, religious freedom, and Tiananmen Square revolution to pornography. But the most powerful brick in the firewall isn't a piece of technology at all. over the years , the Chinese have instituted a

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formidable culture called self censorship. If you are in a website hosting company, you're held responsible for the content. So every content provider hire a staff dubbed big mama's to find offending content on their sites and block the data. But it isn't just local companies that filter the net in china. For years Google, Yahoo voluntarily filtered search results in 2001. Yahoo passed the user details and emails of a Chinese journalist Wang Xiaoning to Chinese authorities, and was sentenced to 10 years in jail. But strong and powerful the great firewall is, it's not always insurmountable, everyday people scale over the wall using illegal software. With Google pulling out of China, it's thought of as a declaration of a " Cyber-Cold War". It's difficult to say exactly what percentage of people in China participates in acts of digital disobedience. But university students in China and Chinese activists around the world say the number has been growing ever since the government stepped up efforts to " cleanse" the Web during the Beijing Olympics and the Communist regime's 60th anniversary.

## **Chinese Twitter**

China, known for brutally cracking down on free expression over the internet, is looking for new ways to crack down on its citizen's online anonymity. The Chinese government recently took steps to force it's citizens to register of china's version of Twitter.(Twitter is banned in China) According to the government-owned press agency Xinhua, the National People's Congress (NPC), China's unicameral legislature, is currently drafting a law that will force Chinese citizens to register their real names with Internet service providers.

## **Conclusion**

After analyzing all the data I gathered I've come to the following conclusion. Whether censorship is implemented by governmental authority or by corporations, censorship almost always fails and often results in a backlash against those responsible. To maintain social stability government must ensure free flow of information without any discrimination. The data gathering has prompted two questions. Should the government be involved in censorship and should the government be involved in preventing censorship? I believe I have answered those questions. Although governments implement censorship claiming to maintain social stability, time and time again it has shown to have the exact opposite effect no matter how well intended those purposes are. Unlike previous examples where government is enforcing censorship, here, the corporations and ISP providers are held accountable for promoting censorship and only in this scenario there are legitimate & ethical reasons for the government to intervene to ensure net neutrality.

## **Recommendations**

The Recommendation of my research paper is that laws should be introduced on an international level that would effectively deal with government authorities as well as multi-national corporations from censoring the internet and allow free flow of information and opinion throughout the internet. I would also suggest we treat internet as a basic human right and not as a luxury.