Free censorship of social networking websites essay example

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Social networking websites form a contemporary medium of communication whereby people from all over the world can interact, make friendship, share ideas and discuss some issues that affect the dynamics of the world we live today. These sites are referred to as social media. Such websites are, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and Google + among others. Various opinions are harbored by various individuals, organizations as well as governments on the importance, influence and impact of social networking websites on the contemporary society. Some find social media vital in the circulation of information while others frown on the great influence it has on various aspects of the society such as politics. This explains why governments such as Iran strive to regulate and restrict their citizens' participation in social media.

Therefore, this is an argumentative essay about the negative impact censorship on social media has on freedom of expression. The situation in Iran is an illustration of the infringement these restrictions have on the publics' freedom of expression and association. Governments in countries such as Iran, China, Cuba and Burma have tried to reinforce their tyranny over their people and against freedom of expression by taking social media censorship to a whole new level (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Washington, DC 2). I`m going to reveal how Iranians suffer from the censorship; in addition, I will show the role played by Social media in the Arab Spring. These illustrations will depict the negative effects of this censorship.

Why Social Media Censorship is Wrong

Social media is one channel by which the public can participate in reforming the society. This is by raising their concerns when the leaders employ tactics that have a negative impact on the citizens, for example, dictatorship. The public can also protest on the streets when such unfair leadership styles are adopted in their countries. This is what happened during the Arabic Spring in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Syria (Stepanova 1). The public has all these rights because they are fundamental human rights. In Egypt, the use of Facebook spurred the campaign against the unpopular rule of Hosni Mubarak.

Censoring social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter is in essence muzzling the public and an abuse of fundamental human rights. It restricts their freedom in such a way that their sentiments boil up causing heated protests. The young people who are the main users of social media will ultimately find other means such as short message texts to sensitize each other about the unfair treatment and at the end of it all their voice is heard (Mirak-Weissbach 4). The selfish ruler's habits of clinging to power can only be defeated by revolutionary tactics such as those applied in the Arab Spring. Young people have the right to safeguard a better future for themselves and their children. It is a reason why the use of their energy and technological skills in marshalling each other's energy towards emancipation from dictatorship is justified. This is what happened in Libya whereby protests erupted prompting Muammar Gaddafi's government to give orders that all the protesters be killed (Africa Research Bulletin 2).

Social media censorship in Iran puts the public in a very undesirable

condition of deprivation of the human right of expression. The right of association is also infringed by such tactics. The public can not arrange or even engage themselves in any social media forum like people do in other countries such as the USA. The Iranian government's censorship mechanism is a highly structured system (Aryan, Aryan and Halderman 1). Any Iranian who tries to demystify that system puts his personal life at risks such attempts are deemed treason. This makes Iran the leading country in internet censorship in the world.

The censorship may be a perfect case of ' cutting your nose to spite your face'. It denies the country possibilities like job creation and economic development. Iranians cannot do business freely over the internet and investors may not feel welcome to the country thus Iran's economic potential remains under-utilized. The ripple effect is defiance whereby the Iranians use software that helps them beat the system and access the internet secretively (Phys. org 1). This may make them feel like criminals which is an undesirable thing. While other countries such as the USA are striving to exploit the advantages of the internet and social media, Iran chooses to deny her citizens this instrumental asset for development in today's contemporary world.

Similar is the case with China. While in countries such as the US, the worldwide web is exploited to draw out citizen feedback and opinions on current political, economic and other government-related issues, in a communist nation like China, the same platforms are suppressed to prevent a collective action from people against the nation's administration.

Gary King, a professor at the Weatherbed University and the director for the

Institute for Quantitative Social Sciences and his team studied what he calls as the ' largest suppression of human expression in history' in China and obtained some interesting results. Through their well planned research work that looked into the censorship pattern in the Asian nation i. e. what posts the Chinese government was censoring, what keywords it was targeting and what sensitive topics received greater governmental attention, King and his fellow researchers found that the Chinese government was looking not to prevent public criticisms against the government, but was rather seeking to curb collective action. King's study observed that the Chinese government viewed social media posts of this kind as threats of mobilization against the administration, which it sought to nip in the bud (http://harvardmagazine. com 1).

Based on the results obtained, the authors of the above mentioned study suggested that this kind of blatant censorship by the Chinese or any other government for that matter cannot be justified. According to King and his colleagues, social media posts on political matters by people should instead be used by governments as a tool to learn what citizens want and to decipher how the administration could satisfy them (http://harvardmagazine. com 1). Indeed, if the social media messages are exploited in this fashion, the very online platforms that are being censored now can be turned into a government strategy that can help the regime maintain its strong hold in the country.

However, the reality today is quite different. In fact, nowadays, censorship is not confined to social media and the internet only. The publication of books is also under heavy censorship (Khalaji, Robertson and Aghdami 2).

Publishers who fail to follow the strict code established by the government are suffering helplessly. Prices of books and paper have hiked due to the strict rules. This shows the extent to which the freedom of expression and access to information has been curtailed in Iran. The effect of all this is that cultural growth is censored and restricted which makes the many citizens who do not support the censorship tactics feel enslaved in their own country.

The censorship, which also extends to use of email messaging, has extensive negative effects. Businesses such as insurance companies and banks in Iran were instructed only to use email services ending with the domain '. ir' (Phys. org 2). Use of email services such as Gmail and Yahoo was prohibited. The effect is that the public feels cornered. Students' research work also suffers. This makes the situation extremely complicated.

Some government think that censorship has many benefits; they argue that controlling access to online content preserves the stability of their society by protecting citizens from dangerous, unfounded ideas or lies aimed at defrauding them. In fact, internet censorship is not a good solution to protect society because it negatively affects people`s freedom, and there are many better way than controlling the internet to prevent harmful information from being disseminated. For example, governments can help protect their citizens against falsehoods by using the media to educate people about websites that are reliable sources of news and to respond to rumors. Furthermore, blocking websites will not solve the problem of Internet scams, since criminals who prey on Internet users will simply find another way to rob people. Given the criminals' resourcefulness, I think that the best way for

governments to minimize web-bases theft is to educate the citizenry about the tactics of Internet criminals so that they can be proactive about protecting themselves in the future. These are just some of the many different methods that governments should employ instead of controlling the Internet to protect society.

It can be argued that censorship on social media is an affront to a free culture. As Lessig states in his book Free Culture, all cultures should have some degree of freedom and in this regard internet use should be free (Lessig 7). However, the situation in a country such as Iran is one of a culture that is not free at all. It is restricted in so many ways ranging from internet use to publishing of books. A culture that is restricted in such ways cannot grow as a society would like.

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