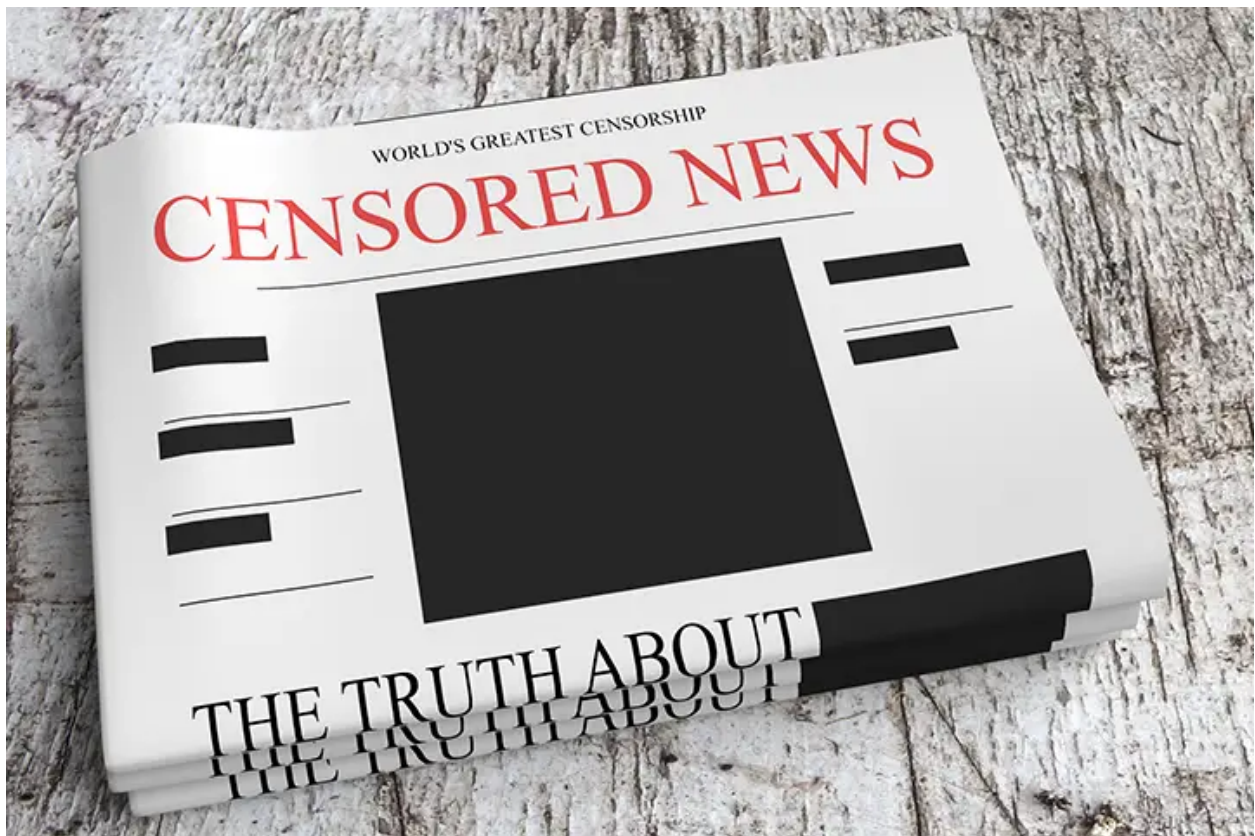


Forum: Human Rights Council (HRC)

Issue: Addressing the ethics of online censorship.

Written by: Amanda Haddad Amorim and Larissa Nery de Melo

Chairs: Amanda Haddad Amorim and Larissa Nery de Melo



Guiding Questions as you Read

How does online censorship specifically affect your nation?

Has your nation's government put out rules, bills, laws requiring censorship?

Does your nation allow the usage of VPN or other cross world wide internet views?

What are the thoughts of your nation's leader on the censorship for minors?

Introduction

Key Terms

Censorship
Assembly bill
Age range
Blocking software

Internet Censorship or Online censorship is the control of what can be accessed or viewed by the public, this includes articles, websites, blogs, apps or content media, there are ways media can be blocked and sectioned by age, country, district or gender. Many websites or apps ask for age or country before access and this is a type of internet censorship as to a selective age range or certain countries. Online censorship can be used to protect minors from aggressive, harmful or inappropriate content and more. There are many ways that websites can prevent the unwanted audience from seeing their content. Some wifi networks block off websites, websites may ask for the name, address, telephone number and email address of a person to make sure they match the description. Certain games, movies, websites and blogs add a tag saying "+18" or "watch under parental vision if under 18" to warn against or prevent their usage. Online censorship can also mean preventing the access of sites that include hate speech, sites that promote the usage of drugs, alcohol, etc. , gambling sites or sites that include child pornography. Many countries adopted assembly bills that require libraries and sites to have blocking software to prevent this issue. Some countries have gone further by having a computerized data machine that controls everyone's internet user. Some countries have their own form of "google"

which gives the government more access and control to everyone's data.

Comprehension Question(s): How has online censorship affected businesses, online shops, blogs, social media interactions and site reviews?

Definition of Key Terms

Censorship: Censorship is the prohibition and limitation of parts of film, news, books, media etc. These restrictions are due to obscene, harmful or threatening content.

Assembly bill: Within a legislative process, bills are considered and laws are enacted by the government. A legislation initiates with a certain idea, this process initiates when an Assembly Member or Senator produces a bill.

Age range: An age range is a selected age group considered appropriate for something specific.

Blocking software: Blocking softwares are downloaded on a device to restrict access to specific websites and servers.

Firewalls: A firewall is a network security device which filters and observes inbound as well as outbound traffic which could be deemed threatening.

Current Situation



General Overview

As online censorship focuses on the limitations of information transmission, debates revolving around freedom of expression have been arising. Many social media companies are protected by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which prohibits companies from accountability for content that is created by users. This gives them authority to restrict availability and access to materials that may be violent, harassing, obscene, filthy, objectionable etc. However, this legal protection is unique to U.S. law. Although European nations, Japan, Canada and many other countries have high levels of access to the internet, most of their online services are based in the United States.

Contributing Factors

Research proves that a major contributing factor to online censorship are crises, as people rely on the internet to gather information on events. A recent crisis is the Covid-19 pandemic, which has shown to have vastly increased the attention to the internet, leading to large changes in opinion or political polarization and a shifted focus on entertainment. This shift of attention to the media for entertainment and data, opens doors to many risky opportunities.

Current Issues

The main issues around the ethics of online censorship revolve around freedom of speech and how public opinion can be limited due to this. This also means that in countries where this is practiced, solely a social media post against an individual in power is sufficient to be arrested or taken into legal matter. The restriction of speech also limits many individuals from expressing and speaking against an act or practice in society that could be evil, brutal or put one at risk. The blockage of possible harmful information as a result of internet censorship, also limits real information which may empower local communities. This extensive lack of information, data and truth can easily make a population ignorant. The first amendment demands the protection of censorship from the government. As they are private companies, social media platforms have the right to censor what individuals post on their websites. This causes groups and individuals who are given the authority to restrict media and content to be questioned especially in their role in the first amendment. This causes much inquiry revolving around the chosen individuals and if they follow morals when restricting content and who witnesses the activities of these people.

Where and how it occurs

Internet censorship includes the restriction of any content but typically include: porn, torrenting, social media, news media and foreign websites. This does not solely occur at a government level, but also at home, at work and with one's internet service provider. At home parents may use keyword controls and blacklists to restrict and protect their child's online safety. This may also be viewed at work, as many businesses often censor

the internet to block inappropriate content and increase workers productivity. This includes firewalls to block full domains of specific websites. Lastly, the internet service provider one uses, is the source of the matter. These may also be referred to as "ISP's", which may block particular websites from view.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The United States

According to a study by the ACLU, 13 states in the U.S have passed censorship laws to approve the blocking of software. Bills in the United States include states asking for personal credentials before the access of media or blocking software for certain users.

- Californias Assembly Bill 1793 requires public libraries to prohibit minors from accessing harmful media content by separating shelves and blocking software in public computers.
- Illinois Assembly Bill 2568 includes felonies to prevent adult obscenity and child pornography, to prevent the publicity of CP before the submission it is required the name, address, telephone number, or email of every participant.
- Kansas Senate Bill 670, requires the use of blocking software by all users on the Internet terminals such as public libraries, schools, colleges, and universities.
- Kentucky Senate Bill 230 and Missouri Senate Bill 850 require blocking of media from public libraries and learning institutions.
- New York Assembly Bill 5395 criminalizes sexually explicit conversations with minors online and Assembly Bill 6453 requires all public libraries to establish policies to restrict minors from accessing harmful media and protect minors.

North Korea

North Korea is widely known for its restrictions on the public, its supreme leader Kim Jong-un has strict laws to maintain its citizens, this includes many online censors. North Korea has banned the usage of VPN which is an encrypted tunnel to access the internet across the world. The Kwangmyong is the chief of internet blocking in North Korea this apparatus is also known as a "walled garden" that blocks over 1,000 sites,

everything available site that mentions national politics, economy, culture, news, and science is all monitored by the state, this program also monitors emails, messages and social media.

China

China is deeply internet restricted and their restrictions monitor all internet access, the reason behind this is that they believe the internet means freedom of speech which could mean people promoting illegal devices, substances and this would give space for dissemination campaigns that would lead to protests against the government and the sensitive control to control information give about their government.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan has had individual internet access since 2008, the global internet has since then improved, Turkmenistan did not approved of the new ways people could use the internet so laws against it has increased. Turkmenistan has pervasive and repressive forms of blocking on the internet as they are a very closed country, the internet is only accessible to certain parts of the population, and it is deeply regulated, their censorship is extensive as they surveillance the citizens who use it, all human rights websites are immediately blocked and their citizens have no access to the World Wide Web, they can only use Turkmen. Common networks such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are blocked in Turmenet.

Iran

Iran has over 27% of its internet completely blocked, the Iranian government has blocked most social media networks to prevent people from promoting protests, platforms such as Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Blogger, Telegram, Snapchat, and Medium are blocked. Streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu and also off-limits. The government allows but restricts the usage of science nets, sports channels, news, pornography, and online shopping. The internet in Iran is controlled by the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Iran and the Supreme Council of Cyberspace of Iran, (GSAFI) and (SCCI). Ayatollah Khamenei the Leader of Iran claims that the internet is used by enemies of Iran who try to use it against its people. People in Iran who go against this

rule receive torture, abuse, and harassment punishments.

UN Involvement

The United Nations has combated this issue as the Human Rights council has adopted a resolution addressing human rights on the internet. This resolution was stated on Article 19, and declares "the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet". Brazil, Nigeria, Tunisia, the United States and Sweden led this resolution and 70 countries internationally co-sponsored it. This resolution was the fifth with the identical title and adopted in 2021, the first was in 2012. The focus is on bridging digital devices, which has become a more significant issue post COVID-19. The United Nations has also spoken upon and strongly promoted that Government Policy for the internet should be rights-based as well as user-centered. The UN publicly expresses the controversies regarding online Censorship as it has substantial repercussions for public debate and participation. In order to address their discontent with these laws in various countries, the UN has proposed five actions for companies and States to reflect upon. These actions include regulations being focused on improving the content moderation processes, restriction-based laws that are non-discriminatory and clear, transparency from companies, effective opportunities for all users, and lastly the contribution of experts and civil society when evaluating and composing regulations. The United Nations regularly promotes the ethicality of internet usage from both the users and producers perspective, this is further supported through the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. These principles demand that all companies carry responsibility in respecting human rights.

Timeline of Events

	Description of event	
Date		Online Censorship Effects:
1958	The internet was invented but only used for defending the government's communications from interceptions	This was the first time the internet was used

1989-1991	The internet was commonly used and became the World-Wide Web	This gave the chance for people to express their opinions which became the prime reason for internet censorship.
1995	The improvement of IP security began by creating the first version of VPN	Most countries had to access to VPN when it was created
1996	"Google was invented and soon The Communications Decency Act (DCA) was created and it stopped users from posting "offensive" content (ECT) Electronic Communications Transactional Records was created that saved information for a government entity for use of criminal investigation	The first censorship was created to stop indecency on the internet
1996	(CPPA) "Child Pornography Prevention Act" was created and it prohibited any underaged people from appearing in sexual material	Government obtained access of people internet uses
1996	The Child Online Protection Act (COPA) amended the first communications act from 1934 and prohibited "disturbing" and "indecent" content from being released in children's programs	First safety act
1998		This act stopped inappropriate contents such as sexual acts or sexual parts and displayed the "community guideline standards" which stopped this material from being seen
2002-2005	In between these years "MySpace", "Facebook", "Reddit", "Friendster" and "Blogspot" were created which gave the opportunity for people to interact with each other. During this time countries started blocking these apps/websites from the public for	With the new ways to interact minors were being lied to and catfished.

minor safety and since many of these websites became about peoples opinion some of them included political discussions that lead to arguments and groups that were against the government's rules which lead many governments to block of these medias

This gave people the chance to express their beliefs, rights, opinions and tags.

2011 During this time "Snapchat", "Instagram" , "Google" and "Wikipedia" were very popular and the Wikipedia began an initiative called the "WikiProject: Freedom of Speech"

These protests went against many government laws and many of them did require permits and the government did not allow them.

2012 "# like "#FreetheNipple" "#Gayrights" "#shelovesher" which led to many protests about people rights.

Past International Action

Middle East and North of Africa Protocol

This protocol included thorough searches of the people who actively posted on social media and censored media coming from other countries, this stopped and worldwide interventions to do with their countries which meant using the internet within these countries you would only see posts made by the users from this country.

UN Human Rights Online

The UN made a resolution about this in 2012 in the 19th article, this resolution recognized that " technical solutions to secure and protect the confidentiality of digital communications including measures for encryption and anonymity, are important to

reassure the enjoyment of all human rights offline and online" (article 19 UN Human Rights General Assembly)

Human Rights and Internet Protocols: Comparing Processes and Principles

This article advocates for the protection acts for children using the internet and specifies the dangers of the internet while advocating for the freedom of speech rights and how online censorship creates a wall stopping people from expressing their opinions on given topics.

The United Nations Human Rights Council's Resolution on Protection of Freedom of Expression on the Internet as a First Step in Protecting Human Rights Online

According to United Nations Special Rapporteur Frank LaRue, the Internet is a "key means" through which individuals may exercise their freedom of expression." The Internet not only enables individuals to "exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression," but it also acts as an "enabler of other fundamental human rights," "such as the right to education and freedom of association and assembly" the right to cast informed votes and to "hold governments and other public institutions accountable." (Frank LaRue, 11)

Possible Solutions

Online censorship is an international issue that is managed diversely within nations, countries continue persevering to encounter the best solution to treat this matter. One possible solution is to communicate openly upon freedom of speech and public opinion through social media. This solution however, must involve structure and state boundaries to avoid hate speech or cyberbullying. Considering a populations' opinion on matters allows for diversity and liberty, nevertheless, this can only be achieved effectively when topics such as hate speech are discussed and deemed unacceptable and possibly punished. It may be resourceful to further consider particular content that should be blocked or banned immediately, this however should be advised to all public, so they are informed.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

Online censorship can connect to the SDG 16, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. This SDG works towards a society where people are able to express their opinions while keeping peace, this SGD also strives for the ability for people to fight for their justice by advocating online. Online Censorship prohibits people from expressing their opinions and beliefs on platforms by being limited to certain medias, words and viewers. Freedom of speech is a Human Right stated in 'article 19' of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights where it states "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". The idea of online censorship completely goes against this article by blocking medias and punishing people who express their opinions just for going against its government.

Bibliography

- I. **Introduction:**
- II. "Online Censorship in the States." *American Civil Liberties Union*, 2022, <https://www.aclu.org/other/online-censorship-states>.
- III. "Internet Censorship." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 28 July 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_censorship.
- IV. Key terms:
- V. "Definitions Definition & Meaning." *Dictionary.com*, Dictionary.com, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/definitions>.
- VI. Ltnadmin. "Blocking Software Definition: The Interactive Glossary." *Website Builders.com*, WebsiteBuilders.com, 27 Sept. 2019, <https://websitebuilders.com/how-to/glossary/blocking-software/#:~:text=Blockin,g%20software%20are%20computer%20programs,violent%20or%20other%20object>

[ionable%20content.](#)

VII. "Censorship." *Cambridge Dictionary*,
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/censorship>.

VIII. *Overview of Legislative Process*, <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bil2lawx.html>.

IX. Major Parties involved:

X. "Online Censorship in the States." *American Civil Liberties Union*,
<https://www.aclu.org/other/online-censorship-states>.

XI. "Internet Censorship in North Korea." *Le VPN*, 26 Sept. 2017,
<https://www.le-vpn.com/internet-censorship-north-korea/>.

XII. News, Ranker. "All the Things China Has Banned in the Past 100 Years." *Ranker*,
Ranker, 21 July 2022,
<https://www.ranker.com/list/everything-banned-in-china/ranker-news>.

XIII. "Great Firewall." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 15 July 2022,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Firewall.

XIV. "Internet Censorship in Iran." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 17 July 2022,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_censorship_in_Iran#:~:text=Iran%20is%20not%20able%20for%20its,top%20500%20visited%20websites%20worldwide.

XV. [.](#)

XVI. General Overview:

XVII. Vigderman, Aliza. "Internet Censorship in 2022: The Impact of Internet Restrictions." *Security.org*, 8 June 2022,
<https://www.security.org/vpn/internet-censorship/>.

XVIII. "What Are the Different Types of Malware?" *Comtact*, 22 Nov. 2021,
<https://www.comtact.co.uk/blog/what-are-the-different-types-of-malware>.

XIX. *Reduced Global Fire Activity Due to Human Demography Slows Global ...*

<https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2101186119>.

XX. "Free Expression on Social Media." *Freedom Forum Institute*, <https://www.freedomforuminstitute.org/first-amendment-center/primers/free-expression-on-social-media/>.

XXI. UN Involvement:

XXII. "UN: Human Rights Council Adopts Resolution on Human Rights on the Internet." *ARTICLE 19*, 19, 11 Aug. 2021, <https://www.article19.org/resources/un-human-rights-council-adopts-resolution-on-human-rights-on-the-internet/>.

XXIII. "Government Policy for the Internet Must Be Rights-Based and User-Centred." *United Nations*, *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/government-policy-internet-must-be-rights-based-and-user-centred>.

XXIV. "Moderating Online Content: Fighting Harm or Silencing Dissent?" *OHCHR*, 23 July 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2021/07/moderating-online-content-fighting-harm-or-silencing-dissent>.

XXV. Timeline:

XXVI. "Internet Free Expression Timeline." *National Coalition Against Censorship*, 6 Jan. 2020, <https://ncac.org/resource/a-selective-timeline-of-the-internet-and-censorship>.

XXVII. Past International Actions:

XXVIII. "The Shifting Landscape of Global Internet Censorship." *Research/2017 Global Internet Censorship* | *Internet Monitor*, <https://thenetmonitor.org/research/2017-global-internet-censorship#global>.

XXIX. "UN: Human Rights Council Adopts Resolution on Human Rights on the Internet." *ARTICLE 19*, 19, 11 Aug. 2021,

<https://www.article19.org/resources/un-human-rights-council-adopts-resolution-on-human-rights-on-the-internet/#:~:text=The%20resolution%20recognises%20that%20%E2%80%9Ctechnical,human%20rights%20offline%20and%20online%E2%80%9D>
[D.](#)

XXX. *The United Nations Human Rights Council's Resolution on ...* - Core.
<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/151516557.pdf>.

XXXI. **Links to SDG's**

XXXII. Universal Declaration of Human Rights 'Article 19' Freedom of speech
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/universal-declaration/translations/english>
[h](#)

Useful Links for Research

Timeline of events:

"Internet Free Expression Timeline." *National Coalition Against Censorship*, 6 Jan. 2020,
<https://ncac.org/resource/a-selective-timeline-of-the-internet-and-censorship>.

This website chronologically illustrates how access to online information developed and progressed over time and its modifications throughout history. It introduces the birth of the internet whilst comparing and contrasting its functions in the past and how that has adapted in the modern era. Amongst this, it mentions many acts regarding freedom of speech, online anonymity and overall digital communication which have opted to regulate censorship throughout diverse nations.

Major Parties involved:

"Online Censorship in the States." *American Civil Liberties Union*,
<https://www.aclu.org/other/online-censorship-states>.

"Internet Censorship in North Korea." *Le VPN*, 26 Sept. 2017,
<https://www.le-vpn.com/internet-censorship-north-korea/>.

The websites above may be resourceful for individual country research and stance upon this issue. This includes an overview of the laws within the selected nations as well as the policies incorporated, history and current approaches to the issue at hand. Information on the legislation of the selected nation as well as principles and contradicting perspectives upon this matter will be of substantial use.

UN Involvement:

"Government Policy for the Internet Must Be Rights-Based and User-Centred." *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/government-policy-internet-must-be-rights-based-and-user-centred>.

"Moderating Online Content: Fighting Harm or Silencing Dissent?" *OHCHR*, 23 July 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2021/07/moderating-online-content-fighting-harm-or-silencing-dissent>.

These websites speak from the direct perspective of the United Nations on the morality behind online censorship and how they believe it should be moderated, as well as their approaches in managing this matter. The first website speaks directly upon the legal matter and policies regarding online censorship, and how the United Nations wishes nations should approach and ethically handle this issue. Additionally, it speaks upon the importance of human rights when managing this as well as the consideration of the user of the internet. The second website touches more specifically on the contrasting perspectives of online censorship being either a fight against harm or a silence of oppression.

Past International Actions

"UN: Human Rights Council Adopts Resolution on Human Rights on the Internet." *ARTICLE 19*, 11 Aug. 2021, <https://www.article19.org/resources/un-human-rights-council-adopts-resolution-on-human-rights-on-the-internet/>.

This website mentions past actions internationally regarding online censorship as well as

the United Nations involvement within the topic. More specifically, it explains the perspective of the Human Rights Council and their adoption of a resolution which advocates for Human Rights on the Internet. The website includes all the countries which have further co-sponsored and adopted this resolution as well as a brief history on the resolution as well as key points regarding the matter.