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Should the Internet be Censored or Controlled?

11 Chief Pros and Cons of Internet Censorship

 greengarageblog.org/11-chief-pros-and-cons-of-internet-censorship - September 4, 2015

One of the most popular yet controversial innovations of technology is the internet. It is a medium for self-expression and disseminating information across on a global scale. However, despite the benefits it offers millions of users, there are also setbacks that drive people and nations to push for and practice internet censorship.

What is Internet Censorship?

This is the act of banning or blocking some or all of content that can be published, viewed and accessed online. Sectors which implement this ban can include governments, private sectors and individuals with a common goal to control what people can read and post on the World Wide Web. Some countries impose direct censorship, others have stringent policies against unlawful posting online while there are countries who are somewhat lenient with videos going viral.

The contentious issue on how much information should be out there in the internet and whether there should be some sort of censorship remain to be divided between supporters and critics. Here is a look at the top pros and cons by these two opposing groups.

List of Pros of internet Censorship

1. It will keep children from being victims of sex trafficking and pornography.

Proponents of controlling content on the internet claim that innocent children who become preys of predators waiting to engage young kids in child pornography and other malicious acts that can be made possible via the internet are given protection. With this, violators will be punished and lesser children will be victims.

2. A free society should be able to set limits.

Some journalists who advocate for internet censorship maintain that even if there is freedom of speech and expression, there shouldn't be absolute freedom. If there is no censorship of any kind, some individuals can be victims of cyber bullying and racist speech which should not be the case. These practices should not be allowed in cyberspace.

3. Parents cannot be there always to watch out for their kids.

Proponents of internet censorship point out that parents have the responsibility to teach children about morality and guide them on what is good or bad but the truth is, they also have to earn a living to provide for their kids. They do not have the capacity to be on watch on most parts of the day.

4. It can control illegal activities.

Supporters claim that regulating content in the internet is an effective way to lessen if not totally deter illegal activities because it keeps people from promoting malicious content which can easily influence others, if no regulations are imposed.

5. It helps in strengthening national security.

By implementing laws against hacking and imposing hefty punishment to violators, national security can be preserved. Without any form of censorship, it will be impossible to keep bad elements and terrorists from accessing information that will pose a threat to the security of the nation.

6. It lessens the incidents of identity theft.

Advocates for internet censorship say that by limiting what information is accessed in the internet, personal information will not be easily accessed. By using anti-phishing software, which serves as a form of internet censorship since it warns the user that a kind of software is trying to get access, it gives the user the chance to keep hackers and companies from getting pertinent information.

List of Cons of Internet Censorship

1. It removes the freedom of expression and deprives people of learning the truth.

Opponents of internet censorship argue that by making this a law, freedom of the press, expression and speech is killed and is a violation of the First Amendment, which includes the prohibition of making a law that infringes freedom of the press and speech, among others. For them, censorship will be a violation of this amendment. Moreover, if people are not given the opportunity to learn the truth, this can lead to ignorance.

2. It can be used by the government to keep pertinent information from its citizens.

Critics also say that by implementing a law on internet censorship, abusive government officials will get away with their wrong practices such as abuse of power and corruption. A government leader, for example, can ban the release of videos and online content proving his or her illegal activities by imposing news blackout. They also claim that dictators can use this to only publish images and stories that will work for their personal gain and not of his or her constituents.

3. It is an added expense to the government.

People who are not in favor of censoring the internet argue that in order to implement censorship and ensure all areas are covered the government needs to invest in equipment, man power and other costs. Aside from upfront expenses, there are also added costs for maintenance and monitoring. And with the power of the internet and its coverage, it is impossible to be on monitor 24/7 and not spend for it.

4. It can harm businesses.

Critics of internet censorship say that there are businesses that rely on the internet to advertise their services and products. Banning their websites to be accessed by consumers of legal age will harm the sales and profit of these companies. If censorship is implemented, these businesses will not be able to reach its global market.

5. People can practice self-autonomy.

Some groups that oppose censorship argue that individuals can have control of what to see and read, making it irrelevant to have a law banning content online. They also add that parents should take the extra effort to monitor what their children are searching online and this is part of their responsibilities as parents.

To provoke discussion:

The Reason Why Censorship of the Internet is Necessary

-Xin Li (Christina) UAPC8 Darlene Fletcher - Thursday, November 21, 2013

(from https://www.academia.edu/8984657/The_Reason_Why_Censorship_of_the_Internet_is_Necessary)

The internet was first available in 1969 in the United States. At that time, the internet was utilized to protect the military system in the U.S.A. No one could have imaged how deeply the internet could change people's lives. In 2001, the International Telecommunication Union calculated that, approximately 2.3 billion people had internet access at the end of that year. Since then, the percentage of people using the internet around the world has continued to grow. "As its applications have multiplied, the internet is having enormous impacts across the

globe" (Warf, 2010). Even so, there are more than 20 countries that still surveil the internet, like China, Burma, North Korea and Cuba, the government maintains strict control of what citizens can access on the internet.

Although there are many opposing voices, the governments still implements censorship of the internet to protect young people who are easily influenced by negative information. A proportion of people believe that censorship of the internet reduces opportunities for people to communicate with the outside world. Without free communication and cooperation, the country's economy may not develop as well.

For example, in the 18th century, the Qing dynasty in China closed all its borders to prevent the Eight- Power Allied Forces from attacking the country. Unfortunately, the closed door policy not only did not cease the war, but also closed people's vision and their thoughts. This resulted in the Qing dynasty dying out eventually. Today the same situation exists with the closed door policy, where people are afraid of the internet censorship causing the country to lag behind. Being Chinese, I totally understand the attraction people have to the internet, but I also understand why the government implements the internet censorship.

Saunders (2003) pointed that "children need to be protected from some material, such as violent or sexual media content" (P.12-22). I believe that for children's personal safety and their bright future, it is very necessary for governments to control the internet. An official data report also showed that, Police reported over 3,800 incidents of sexual violations against children in 2001. The rate rose 3% between 2010 and 2011, making it one of the few categories of violent offenses to increase in 2011. Among the specific offences included in this category, the rate of invitation to sexual touching (+8%) and luring children via a computer (+10%) increased. (UCRS, 2012) The figure indicated clearly that the internet is a convenient way for criminals who want to approach and hurt those naive children.

The increasing incidents warned the society that the internet censorship is very important. If State stops the way that criminals can connect with children or adolescents, the rate of children abuse might be decreased in the future. Secondly, a portion of experts regard the censorship of communication as centralization of state power, such as the North Korea and the Burmese government. North Korea is one of the most isolated countries in the world and the government has very strict rules to limited people from communicating with the outside world. For instance, the North Korea government turned off the internet and television connection when their football team failed behind in the 2010 world cup competition. The people in that country even did not know the result of the game, because their leader thought losing was very humiliating. Indeed, this level of control of the internet by the government is very horrible, but the society would be more terrifying without censorship.

Like child pornography rocketed steeply in recent years." Despite the advances in internet security technology, the problem of criminal activity on the internet has only become worse" (Baker, 2007). Teenagers watch the pornographic and violent videos, and then follow the example of those videos. For example, two American teenagers shot an Australian baseball player because they were bored; or the adolescent from Pittsburgh high school shot three classmates because it is cool in some violent movies. The reason for these kinds of tragedies happening is the openness of the internet. Teenagers still do not have strong judgment to distinct good or bad, so they are easily influenced to follow improper activities from online sources. This proves again that government censorship of the internet is very necessary.

Finally, some people use "human rights" to contradict censorship of the internet. Human rights organizations pointed out that government censors mass internet mandatorily is a criminal action. Individual has rights to speech, choice and make own decision. Burmese proposition politician Aung San Suu Kyi who fights for human rights, her documentary was blocked in some countries by cleaned up on the internet. People are very disappointed about the government's action, and it is true that states should not deprive people's right to watch the movie. Nevertheless, governments have their own reasons to do that. For instance, The Chinese government censored the internet because some terrorists are trying to split their land by using internet to spread untrue information.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime indicated that " The use of the internet for terrorist purposes is a rapidly growing phenomenon" (2012, para.1), such as the Dalai Lama wants to separate Tibet from China, so he used the internet to spread widely many fake news about the Chinese government to shake the minority's views.

Because of his nasty action, there was a terrible riot that happened in Xinjiang province three years ago, and led to the deaths of over one hundred people.

In addition, the U.S.A lawmaker enhances law enforcement's power after September 11th 2001 (Szumski, 2005, P.103). To protect the country's land and the continuous of the happiness of lives of citizens, censorship of the internet is very needed. The internet has influenced both sides of the evolution of people since it was availed in 1969. It transformed the people had lived for thousands of years. Users of the internet have continuously increased. Scientists explore space by using the internet; Soldiers utilize the internet to protect the country; mass use of the internet to enrich their entertainment.

On the other hand, a portion of people also utilize the internet to do bad things. For example, criminals who want to hurt teenagers by using the internet to approach them; video makers who create violent or pornographic movies spread on the internet to affect young generation, and terrorists who try to spread fake information on internet to attack the country. When people cannot control their actions while utilizing the internet in a good way, I highly recommend that the governments from every country should implement the internet censorship to protect citizens from horrible, fake and unhealthy information.

For further reading:

Quick Guide to Internet Censorship - <https://court.laws.com/internet-censorship>

GOOGLE and the Internet - <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2016-06-22/google-is-the-worlds-biggest-censor-and-its-power-must-be-regulated>

A debate on the topic - <http://www.debate.org/opinions/does-the-internet-need-censorship>

<https://www.aclu.org/other/online-censorship-states> (20 years ago, but still relevant)

