

State-based internet censorship: attempts or delegated practices and their effects on the free flow and future of the internet.

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Abstract

Internet featuring a great deal of information dissemination and interactive usage, with an estimated 2 billion number of active users around the world, still manages to keep its “magic”, while creating an unparalleled sense of freedom and power of expression to its users. For how long though? It is the question imperatively raised.

An increasing number of states worldwide have already taken measures or have been considering in doing so by blocking Internet access, regulating content, or imposing digital filter, while the “Combating Online Infringements and Counterfeits Act” (COICA) is the most recent censor bill proposed in the United States (20.09.2010). However, delegated censorship in the net points out thorny topics like freedom of expression, international enforcement with direct and indirect control of the infrastructure of the web as well as less evident issues like perception of the public, i.e. how transparent is for individuals to understand and realize that censorship occurs, or how free do they feel to express their opinions or make any kind of action on the internet.

This paper critically examines the existing Internet censorship regimes in countries like Italy, Australia and Korea on one hand and China, Iran, Saudi Arabia on the other taking into account the concrete censor systems already operating, the type of content that is being censored as well as the problems or the effectiveness of those filtering technologies. On a more ambitious notice, it raises concerns about the motives underlying the censoring initiatives and poses the necessity of the education along with a democratic legislation opposed to a censorship rationale in producing and maintaining a democratic polity that is compatible with the principles of freedom of expression.

The ongoing tendency for internet censorship in contrast to the alluring idea that the users might have for an anarchic yet strangely protective Internet makes it eventually inevitable for us but to ask: Have we made any progress? Or do we have to reassess the matter of censorship all over again?