

Media Censorship: Responsibility vs. Freedom

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Abstract: For ages, information sources have been foretold by the global phenomena of media control. The preservation of order is a popular justification for censorship, but the real goal is to prevent the people from knowing facts that can pose a danger to the government. Since information can now travel quickly across borders and inside countries thanks to global Internet access, more and more media consumers are turning to the Internet for a range of information. The press was tightly controlled by censorship in most of Europe in the 18th century, which progressively loosened by the 19th century as a result of popular demand. Historically, access to news has not always been thus simple. However, censorship is still used overtly or covertly by authoritarian and highly centralised regimes to muzzle political dissent. Tech-savvy journalists and independent reporters use social media, blogs, and news websites to disseminate information to counter information coup. Governments rely on strict Internet surveillance systems to function, which successfully block websites and covertly filter information. As a result, only specific news is permitted to pass through the firewall. To spread fear, intimidation, and persecution, the governments also go after individuals and journalists who use forbidden websites. Since the media's function in society goes beyond just disseminating information, it is vital that they refrain from making money off of sensationalised stories that can be harmful to individuals, sects, races, or faiths. The restriction of information by the media and the obligation placed on the media to promote tolerance and accountability among the general public will be the main topics of this paper.

Keywords: censorship, internet, money

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Media Censorship: Freedom Versus Responsibility:

Any expression that can imperil the state's order is formally controlled and suppressed through censorship. Censorship has historically been employed to keep tabs on public morality, to manage public perception, and to stifle resistance. One of the earliest examples of censorship was Socrates, who in 399 BC received a poisoning sentence for recognising unorthodox deities. The first censorship office was founded in Rome in 443 BC, marking the beginning of governmental censorship. China enacted its first censorship statute around 300 AD. Before they are released, government censors traditionally review newspapers, periodicals, books, newscasts, and movies to remove dubious material. Proponents of non-censorship shout slogans against restrictions on freedom of expression, free speech, and information tainting. Media censorship is used by dictatorships and faltering democracies to keep the public ignorant while disguising it as a tool for upholding law and order. The third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, advocated for a free and independent press.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in a letter to Thomas Seymour in 1807, "I have willingly lent myself as the subject of a great experiment which was to prove that an administration, conducting itself with integrity and common understanding, cannot be battered down, even by the falsehood of a licentious press, and consequently still less by the press, as restrained within the legal & wholesome limits of truth." This experiment was intended to disprove the fallacy of the claim that press freedom and effective governance cannot coexist.

A free government and a society that appreciates different points of view, intellectual and creative ferment, creativity, the development of a critical capacity, and an open mind on the part of its inhabitants are two things that Konvitz (2003) also supports as being important.

To shut down recalcitrant media outlets and exile, arrest, or even execute the journalists working there, dictatorships deploy brutal force. Autocratic governments limit information while claiming to be preserving law and order. As a

result, only a small portion of individuals in advanced democracies have access to a variety of independent information sources. The press is crucial to the global effort to eradicate illiteracy as well as to the democracy and transparency of society. The most severe violations of free speech are committed by nations that are weak democracies, nascent democracies, or non-democracies. Despite the fact that only half of the world's population has access to an independent press (Newth, 2010), according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (2015), the top 10 nations where press freedom is most restricted are Eritrea, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Azerbaijan, Vietnam, Iran, China, Myanmar, and Cuba. The newsletters that were distributed in various areas of India as early as the 16th century are where the historical roots of the press may be found (Newth, 2010). After that, in 1610, Switzerland took the initiative to start the first newspaper. Following in the footsteps of England (1621), France (1631), Denmark (1634), Italy (1636), Sweden (1645), and Poland, this commencement set off a chain reaction (1661). The authorities, however, did not like the fast expansion of informational channels and individuals' unrestricted access to all informational resources. The Licensing Act of 1662 was adopted in Britain to limit the spread of free knowledge, and it stayed in effect until after the Great Plague of 1664–1665. Additionally, in Germany, the press was effectively restrained by censorship as well as trade restrictions and a lack of printing paper. As the public's desire for a free press grew, a domino effect was seen in other European nations. The first country to abolish censorship rules and enact legislation guaranteeing press freedom was Sweden in 1766. Denmark and Norway followed suit in 1770. The United States Constitution's First Amendment established freedom of speech and expression in 1787. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789), introduced by France as a response, said that "The free expression of thought and opinion is one of the most valuable rights of man; every citizen may, therefore, talk, write, and print freely." The majority of western nations stopped regulating censorship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however in the nineteenth century, colonial rulers like Russia and Britain continued to impose strict censorship on their colonies. Additionally, the Soviet Union (USSR) imposed the broadest and longest period of censorship during the 20th century. Other methods of reaching the censorship goal were developed after the previous censorship was stopped. For instance, the right to free speech was once more curtailed by regulations pertaining to national security, blasphemy, libel laws, and criminal obscenity. The censorship legislation was replaced with libel statutes in particular, and because of their liberal interpretation, they roughly served the same purpose. These laws are still used to harass and persecute writers, journalists, and critics who questioned ideas about blasphemy, obscenity, and national security. According to Herman (n.d.), persecution of authors and critics has persisted even in advanced democracies for the past two thousand years. For instance, a 2006 paper co-written by Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer was harshly criticised, and the co-authors experienced consequences for expressing their knowledgeable opinions on a matter of significant national concern.

1.2 Media Censorship During War and Conflict:

The first line of defence against a direct danger to state authority, like a revolt or uprising, is information coup through censorship. Any combat involves the press, which is also the first casualty of war (Newth, 2010; Soengas, 2013). During a rebellion or war, the press is restrained through strategies including repressing reporters and shutting down or seizing control of news organisations. The Espionage Act of 1917 forbade the dissemination of information pertaining to national security during World War I (1914–1918). (Day, 2001). Later, the Act was expanded to cover any insulting, slanderous, vulgar, or abusive words directed towards the US government. During World War II, all combatant nations stifled the media. Additionally, during World War II (1939–1945), the troops fighting in the conflict edited letters sent by soldiers and destroyed any information that may have been useful to the enemy. Even conventional greetings like hugs and kisses were eliminated since they may be interpreted as a code (Day, 2001). The US and British media have willingly chosen to self-censor during times of conflict in contemporary times. However, during wartime, the US Office of War Information and the British Ministry of Information continue to fund and oversee official news. A rule of conduct for the American Press during times of war is also published by the US censorship body.

The 2011 Arab uprising serves as a case study for how tenacity and persistent work by journalists and independent reporters may get through an information ban on the Internet. Because the military and the state controlled the media during the Arab uprising, the public was exposed to tainted news from sources that were supported by the government. However, because the Internet had already connected people on a national and international level in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, the media could not be successfully controlled. The Arab rebellion was sparked by the persistent internet

demands for revolution, which drew large crowds like those in Egypt's Tahrir Square. Online social networking not only facilitated freedom of expression but also unrestricted access to information. Anonymous protesters posted photos and updates on social media after being refused entry to the protest places by journalists and reporters. Sometimes the only proof of the ongoing demonstrations that the public could see was the photos posted on social media (Soengas, 2013). Thus, the Internet was essential in uniting the populace during the early phases of the uprising and in facilitating the flow of information throughout the fight (Soengas, 2013).

1.3 Electronic Surveillance of the Media:

Without the requirement for identifying information that may be used for tracking, the Internet offers the quickest method for transmitting information and/or goods. In terms of material volume and accessibility to practically everyone with Internet connection, the Internet can exceed print media, radio, and television (Soengas, 2013). According to Bennett and Naim (2015), the development of the Internet portended the end of censorship.

Theoretically, the most recent technology developments make it difficult or perhaps impossible to limit the amount of information that Internet users have access to. However, digital censorship emerged with the development of journalism on the Internet and includes tactics like filtering, blocking, hacking, and redirection. The technologically adept campaigners discovered how to get around censorship by using the Internet to spread information. Nevertheless, governments developed cutting-edge technology that enabled them to control the flow of information and monitor internet content. The actions of the journalists are also observed, and troublemakers are identified for harassment, incarceration, and physical violence. Such reporters are frequently involved in legal disputes, and the possibility of a future government-sponsored litigation acts as a deterrent.

II. MEDIA CENSORSHIP: FREEDOM VERSUS RESPONSIBILITY:

Several nations, including China, Australia, Venezuela, Russia, and India, have made electronic monitoring lawful. North Korea, Burma, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Iran, China, Syria, Tunisia, Vietnam, and Turkmenistan are the 10 most heavily restricted nations online (USA today, 2014). These nations restrict press freedom, public information access, impose fines or taxes on media both owners and users, impose programme bans, and refuse to grant media licences. An editor from Venezuela skillfully described the methods of modern censorship. These strategies include purchasing the newspaper and utilising it as the government's spokesperson, suing journalists for defamation, listening in on their conversations, and finally publicising it on the national broadcaster. Evidently, media censorship is spreading, as evidenced by the fact that less developed democracies like Hungary, Ecuador, Turkey, and Kenya are observed to adopt the censorship practises of other authoritarian nations (Bennett &Naim, 2015).

Internet content is restricted in one of two ways: overtly or covertly. Governments that desire to project an image of democracy to the outside world use covert censorship techniques, which include outsourcing, withholding funds, purchasing obnoxious media, and arranging for the transfer of disruptive journalists (Bennett &Naim, 2015). There are reportedly three billion Internet users, 22% of whom reside in China and around 10% in the US. China is infamous for keeping a robust firewall in place to ban objectionable information and international news websites. The Chinese government employs covert surveillance methods and censoring techniques that have been successful in persuading the populace that they are not being watched. But in Hong Kong, it's said that China used conventional strategies to stifle the media, including assault against editors and reporters, cyberattacks, and the withdrawal of ads. Aside from dictatorships, several strong organisations also maintain control over the media. Drug cartels, for instance, intimidate the media, the government, and the general populace in Mexico. On social media, citizen journalists report on the actions of the drug cartel using fictional aliases. A prominent citizen journalism website named "Valorpor Tamaulipas" recently had its administrator, a doctor who had also become a reporter, tracked down and slain. She was abducted, killed, and her assailants uploaded an image of her dead body on her Twitter account to scare off potential followers. No matter if a country is a democracy or a dictatorship, anytime a monarchy is present, there doesn't appear to be any freedom of speech. For instance, Queen Elizabeth II serves as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England as well as the leader of 16 of the 53 Commonwealth nations. Journalists and the general public in the Commonwealth nations must use caution while expressing their opinions on the Queen, as is the case with totalitarian governments and regal

systems. Self-censorship is practised to prevent penalty or concerns, and strict measures are used to ensure that the Queen is not the target of parody when her narrative is told.

2.1 Press Freedom and Responsibility:

According to Sturges (2015), there are two distinct sorts of newspapers: those who print and market worthless sensation and those that provide insightful news and helpful comments on important subjects. It may be challenging to discriminate between suitable and improper content since the media, as a whole, may overlap with both valuable and sensational information. The US Constitution's First Amendment forbids the "state" from limiting freedoms like freedom of speech and freedom of expression, among others. Regardless of whether it publishes innocent photographs or pornography, which is a large industry with the Internet as its primary method of distribution, the freedom of expression protects all forms of media. Children and the younger generation now have access to hazardous content thanks to a quick Internet that allows anonymous access to unsuitable websites. Children have additional opportunity to access pornographic material that is forbidden to minors because to the promise of anonymity. The Communications Decency Act (CDA), established by the US Congress in 1996 to prevent the availability of pornographic material to children, forbade the posting of indecent or obviously objectionable material on websites that kids may access. The perpetrators received a year in jail and penalties totalling \$250,000. The US Supreme Court, however, declared CDA to be unconstitutional and overturned it, arguing that parents have access to website blocking software that may be installed if they want to prevent kids from seeing potentially objectionable content. Unmoved, the US Congress once more introduced a law to safeguard kids from objectionable websites; as a consequence, the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) was passed in 2000. According to the CIPA, public schools and libraries that provide minors with Internet access must set up software to block offensive or hazardous information (Day, 2001). Only schools and libraries that obtain discounts from initiatives that make particular communication services and goods more accessible, such as E-rate initiatives, are subject to the CIPA.

In addition to providing revisions in 2011, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) released guidelines for the implementation of CIPA in 2000. (FCC, 2014). Funding for schools and libraries is contingent upon their receiving proof that their implementation of the required Internet safety policy has been successful. To successfully prevent or filter Internet access to images that are obscene, include child pornography, or are otherwise regarded detrimental to children, the policy calls for putting safeguarding software on computers used by kids. The Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act, an amendment to a part of the US Communications Act of 1934, was passed into law in 2008. This law mandates that colleges and universities covered by the CIPA "shall provide for educating adolescents about proper online behaviour, including engaging with others on social networking websites and in chat rooms and cyberbullying awareness and reaction." As a result, the CIPA now imposes two additional certification criteria, including observing minors' online activity and boosting their understanding of proper online conduct through education.

Worldwide media freedom is not universally guaranteed under the First Amendment of the US Constitution; some nations require accountability from the press and media. For instance, the Council of Europe states in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) that in democracies, the press and media are subject to obligations and responsibilities.

The following is the text of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (1950):

1 Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, according to law. This freedom must include the ability to express ideas freely across national boundaries, without intervention from the government, and to hold opinions. The licencing of radio, television, or movie theatre businesses is not prohibited by this article.

2. Since exercising these freedoms entails duties and responsibilities, it may be subject to the formalities, conditions, restrictions, or penalties set forth by law as necessary in a democratic society, for the purposes of national security, territorial integrity, or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the preservation of reputation or the rights of others, for the prevention of the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

III. CONCLUSION

Although he was a fervent advocate for a free press, Thomas Jefferson also noted that "the press is helpless when it

abandons itself to lies." (p. 368). Additionally, it happens frequently that people publish disparaging statements with the purpose to intimidate others. Recently, some exploited women in the US sued the owner of a bullying website who received an 18-year prison sentence for permitting and encouraging former partners to exact revenge by uploading personal photos and videos. Despite the fact that the First Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees both freedom of speech and freedom of expression, the jury was able to infer from the victims' testimonies that one person's inappropriate use of his right to free speech led to other people committing suicide or going through the agony of job loss, divorce, and mental trauma. Ad campaigns that aim to incite animosity and nativist prejudice toward certain religions are another kind of bullying. The Anti-Defamation League called discriminatory ads on municipal buses "extremely insulting and incendiary" in a 2014 statement. Sadly, some organisations carelessly abuse the protection provided by the First Amendment of the US Constitution to disparage other organisations and religions and to stir up bigotry and violence. According to Kazemek (1995), society as a whole has to promote an atmosphere in which diverse opinions are not only allowed but also investigated. This will prevent children and young people from growing up in a setting that is governed by sectarian segregation and subjective morality.

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