

Review on the Association between Media Censorship and the Conflict Between Responsibility and Freedom

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Abstract: *Throughout history, the global phenomenon of media control has long determined the sources of knowledge. Censorship is often justified by the need to maintain order, but its true objective is to suppress information that could potentially threaten the government. With the advent of worldwide Internet connectivity, the rapid transmission of information across borders and between countries has led to an increasing number of media consumers relying on the Internet as a primary source of information. Censorship strictly regulated the press in most of Europe during the 18th century, but gradually relaxed in the 19th century due to increasing public demand. Traditionally, the ease of accessing news has not always been as straightforward. Nevertheless, authoritarian and highly centralized regimes continue to employ censorship, whether openly or secretly, as a means to suppress political opposition. Journalists and reporters with advanced knowledge of technology utilize social media, blogs, and news websites to distribute information in order to counteract an information coup. Governments depend on stringent Internet surveillance techniques to operate, effectively obstructing websites and clandestinely censoring information. Consequently, the firewall only allows specified news to pass. In order to instill fear, intimidate, and oppress, governments also target individuals and journalists who access prohibited websites. Given that the media's role in society extends beyond the mere transmission of information, it is crucial for them to abstain from profiting from sensationalized narratives that have the potential to cause harm to individuals, groups, ethnicities, or religious beliefs. This thesis will primarily focus on the media's information restriction and its responsibility to promote tolerance and accountability among the general public.*

Keywords: censorship, online platforms, financial transactions

I. INTRODUCTION

Censorship is used to formally restrict and repress any expression that can endanger the state's order. Censorship has always been utilized to monitor societal ethics, control public opinion, and suppress opposition. Socrates, an ancient philosopher, was one of the first individuals to experience censorship. In 399 BC, he was sentenced to death by poisoning for acknowledging unconventional gods. The establishment of the first censorship office in Rome in 443 BC marked the initiation of governmental censorship. The first censorship regulation in China was implemented around 300 AD. Prior to their release, newspapers, magazines, books, newscasts, and movies are historically subjected to scrutiny by government censors in order to eliminate questionable content. Advocates of non-censorship vociferously protest limitations on the freedom to express oneself, engage in free speech, and disseminate knowledge without distortion. Dictatorships and struggling democracies employ media censorship as a means to maintain public ignorance, while presenting it as a mechanism for preserving law and order. Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, supported the idea of a press that is free and autonomous.

In a letter to Thomas Seymour in 1807, Thomas Jefferson expressed his willingness to be the subject of an important experiment. The purpose of this experiment was to demonstrate that an administration that operates with honesty and a shared understanding cannot be undermined, even by the false information spread by a reckless and immoral press. Furthermore, Jefferson believed that a press that adheres to the legal and ethical boundaries of truth would have even

less power to damage such an administration. The purpose of this experiment was to refute the misconception that the presence of press freedom and effective governance is incompatible.

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.

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).

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.

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 "Valor por 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.

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.

II. CONCLUSION

Despite being a strong supporter of a free press, Thomas Jefferson also acknowledged that "the press is powerless when it indulges in falsehoods." Moreover, it is common for individuals to disseminate derogatory remarks with the intention of intimidating others. Recently, a group of women who were exploited in the United States filed a lawsuit against the owner of a website that promotes bullying. The owner was sentenced to 18 years in jail for allowing and encouraging individuals to seek revenge on their former partners by sharing personal images and videos. Although the First Amendment of the US Constitution ensures both freedom of speech and freedom of expression, the jury deduced from the victims' testimonies that one individual's improper exercise of their right to free speech resulted in others taking their own lives or experiencing the distress of unemployment, marital dissolution, and psychological suffering. Ad campaigns that seek to provoke hostility and promote biased attitudes towards specific religions can be considered a kind of bullying. In a statement issued in 2014, the Anti-Defamation League denounced discriminatory advertisements displayed on municipal buses as "highly offensive and inflammatory." Regrettably, several organizations recklessly exploit the safeguard granted by the First Amendment of the US Constitution to defame other organizations and religions, inciting prejudice and violence. Kazemek (2019) argues that society must actively foster an environment that not only permits but also explores divergent viewpoints. This measure aims to mitigate the risk of children and young people being raised in an environment characterized by religious or political divisions and personal biases in determining what is right or wrong.

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