By Rhian Hunt

Some countries around the world have Internet censorship, limiting the information people can see online. Some of these countries include China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and Cuba. In a very few cases, like North Korea, the country's Internet is not connected to the outside world at all. The government decides what content is found on the Web and runs all websites. Most countries with censorship do not go this far. Instead, they block certain websites or types of websites.

Almost all countries have a little censorship. Some programs also allow parents to censor what their children can see online. Parental controls are private censorship. They have existed almost since there was an Internet to begin with. Though censoring data can be a problem, in some cases, it can also help people. How much information should be censored is a major debate of modern times.

Censoring Private Information

One type of censorship that most people think is good is meant to protect private data. The government tries to take down sites that publish stolen data about people. If a person's bank or credit card information were put online, other people could easily steal from them. Making such information public is, in a way, revealing some of the truth. But limiting access to this data through censoring has much greater benefits than allowing it to be seen publicly. Anyone could use a credit card number listed online to buy things for themselves.

Phone numbers and addresses are also something that privacy laws try to protect. Online phone directories let people find other people's phone numbers, much like a regular phone book. But finding out everything about a person is still hard because the data is censored. Finding the cell phone number of a celebrity online is almost impossible. Only if the celebrity lists their number will it be available. Sites that publish their numbers will be taken down. This keeps famous people from being harassed or threatened. It also prevents them from being constantly called all day and all night by fans.

Sites publishing pictures stolen from celebrities and other people are also blocked or taken down. This censorship protects the rights of people to live their lives. If these photos are allowed to be put online without permission, people might as well be animals in a zoo.

Saving Lives

Censoring some kinds of information can save lives, too. Some criminals decide to help the police catch other criminals. Without the help of these people, catching even worse criminals would often be impossible. To keep them safe, these people are put in witness protection programs. Part of this protection involves keeping information about where they are off the public Internet. Censors will block and take down sites publishing witness locations. The people running those sites will be arrested and charged if they are caught.
Censoring data about protected witnesses helps keep them from being killed. In the same way, military people often go into danger. Every government needs to keep some secrets, because people will die if they do not. Exact data about soldiers and military operations is often censored. Many people agree this is good censorship. Without it, hostile people could find out where soldiers were going to be and ambush them.

**Values-Based Censorship**

Censorship based on politics and morals is some of the most hotly debated of all. Censoring in an effort to keep children from seeing violence or inappropriate content is often thought of as good censorship. Where to draw the line is a problem, though. Some people find almost everything offensive and would censor many things that other people have no problem with. The idea behind parental controls is that parents can adjust censorship levels to match their beliefs, rather than having the government tell them what their children should and should not see.

Some people think that censoring data that calls for harmful things is good. For example, some countries censor racist sites or those that say things against religion. Many European countries do not allow Holocaust denial. Blocking some sites can prevent people like extreme racists or terrorists from spreading their message. Without a platform like the Internet, they will get fewer recruits.

Almost all people agree that some kinds of sites should be blocked and taken down. These include sites that show crimes related to children. Society benefits when sites that sell stolen goods or stolen information are censored. Though these sites may appear anyway, censorship makes them harder to find. This means there is less profit in stealing and then selling the stolen goods on the Internet. Less profit means that less people will do it.

Censorship on the Internet is good, in the opinion of many or even most people, when it helps protect other people. Keeping private information safe, hiding data that could lead to soldiers being killed, and shutting down sites showing horrible crimes are all examples. Most people believe that at least some censorship is good, while a few think that sweeping censorship is even better.
Internet Access as Censorship: Limiting Information is Destructive

By Danielle Waters

Many people argue that Internet censorship is destructive. Some countries, like the United States, follow this rule closely. Though they censor some content, they allow far more than other countries like Iran or North Korea. A little censorship to protect people's private data is usually held to be good. Some activities are so criminal that they are also usually censored. There is a wide gray area where people find it difficult where to draw the line, however.

Those people against censorship think the line should be drawn in such a way as to allow as much free flow of information as possible. Only a handful think there should be no censorship at all. Most anti-censors think that online censorship should be used, but as rarely as possible.

THE DANGER OF POLITICAL CONTROL

Censoring sites that call for racism and other harmful ideas might seem like a good idea. But governments can use the excuse of something being harmful to censor all kinds of opposition. Allowing unpopular political views to be censored could eventually lead to tyranny. Once the idea that an opinion should be silenced is allowed, someone has to be given the power to decide what opinions are good and which are bad. This is an invitation to abuse.

The same is true of religious censorship. If people are not allowed to criticize a religion, that religion is on its way to controlling people's opinions and thoughts. The same is true of every belief. The more data people have on a topic, both for and against, the easier it is to make an informed choice. Good beliefs should stand on their own merit, not by silencing all others.

Censorship beyond a bare minimum stifles debate. Debate is at the core of freedom and democracy. People need to be able to question what powerful people are doing. They must be permitted to question and discuss the direction of society as a whole. Without debate and discussion, freedom dies. If the information available is limited to what is judged by some people to be "good," then the people as a whole will be making choices based on biased information. Even unpopular views should be heard publicly. The more people know about the world and other people's beliefs and arguments, the more complete their picture of reality is and the more mature their decisions become.

INTRUSION OF PERSONAL CONTROL

Another argument against censorship is that it sets up one person's judgment as better than another's. Some Middle Eastern dictatorships have censored rock music. This indicates in the first place that there is some
objective scale to tell if something should be listened to or not. It is also based on the idea that one person's opinion on rock music is more valid than, perhaps, that of millions of others. This idea is flatly against any kind of personal freedom or equality. It decides that a few people are "parents" and all other adults are "children" who are too stupid to make decisions for themselves. This is a recipe for tyranny and oppression.

People against censorship believe that the best situation is when people can decide, within very wide limits, what they read and watch. Those who dislike rock music can choose not to stream it online. Those who do not want to watch crime thrillers can watch cartoons or war movies or romances on their movie streaming service instead. Each person decides for himself or herself what Internet information they wish to consume. They are free to self-censor in some regards or to view everything.

Offering a mostly uncensored Internet to people, in this view, shows respect to the individual's rights. It also enables people to see as much or as little of the material online as they want. Those who want to go exploring will likely come away with a much deeper understanding of the world. They will also see what other people are actually like. A limited, highly censored Internet would offer only an "approved" view of everything and stunt peoples' mental growth.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

Making censorship too common and normal could be a slippery slope to even tighter controls. If censorship is widespread, those with the power to censor will do so easily. The people using the censored Internet come to accept the right of other people to tell them what to do. In this situation, censorship could get wider and wider as things near the "edge" of legality are blocked. This moves the "edge" of what is acceptable farther and farther.

Just as bad as this, using too much censorship can cause even necessary censorship to lose its good standing. A few things probably should be censored, like sites giving out stolen credit card numbers. But if censorship becomes excessive, then a backlash against it could cause some needed safeguards to be removed, too.

Censorship of the Internet is, in the end, about limiting information. Information gives understanding of the world. A small fraction of data can hurt other people, and probably should be controlled. But the rest gives many different views on the same issue, or allows fresh discoveries. Seeing the world from many angles thanks to the free flow of data surely cannot be a bad thing.
Directions: Using information and details from the articles “Internet Access as Censorship: Limiting Information has Benefits” and “Internet Access as Censorship: Limiting Information is Destructive” answer the questions below.

1. **Give an example of censorship that most agree is necessary. Use details from “Internet Access as Censorship: Limiting Information has Benefits” to support your answer.**

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2. **What are some of the fears associated with censoring the internet? Use details from Source #2 to support your answer.**

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3. **What are the central ideas in both articles? Use details from both articles to support your answer.**

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**Short Response Scoring Rubric**

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| **2**  | The response achieves the following:  
• demonstrates a thorough understanding of the question and text(s)  
• uses sufficient evidence and includes specific examples/details that make clear references to the text(s)  
• describes or explains adequately by using clearly relevant information based on the text(s) |
| **1**  | The response achieves the following:  
• demonstrates a basic understanding of the question and text(s)  
• uses limited evidence and includes vague/limited examples/details that make references to the text(s)  
• somewhat describes or explains by using vague/limited information based on the text(s) |
| **0**  | The response achieves the following:  
• demonstrates no understanding of the question and text(s)  
OR  
• uses limited or no evidence and may or may not include examples/details that may or may not make references to the text(s)  
OR  
• includes no explanation or no relevant information from the text(s) |